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Emotions and leisure: new insights and perspectives

David S. Scott^a & Thomas Fletcher^b

^a School of Applied Sciences, Dundee, Abertay University, UK, d.scott@abertay.ac.uk; ^b School of Events, Tourism and Hospitality Management, Leeds, Leeds Beckett University, UK

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Introduction

The purpose of this collection is to draw attention to the social nature of emotions experienced within leisure, and encourage critical scholarship around the associated theoretical, methodological, and applied issues of emotions within contemporary leisure contexts. The emotions experienced within, and invested into, leisure are some of the main reasons for our engagement with leisure throughout our lives. Whether it is the relief and escapism of divulging in a hobby away from the pressures of everyday life, the irrational love and heartbreak involved with supporting a sports team, or the rollercoaster ride of thrill and shame when immersed in practices at the margins of what is socially and legally acceptable, the influence of emotions within leisure is inescapable, yet too frequently overlooked within leisure research. With an increasing acknowledgement and awareness regarding the social and political influences upon individuals' emotional experiences within sociological (e.g., Collins, 2019; Jacobsen, 2019), educational (e.g., Jackson, 2020; Seibert *et al*, 2017), and sporting (e.g., Scott, 2021; Spaaij & Schailée, 2021) contexts, casting a critical eye over the contemporary development of emotional theory within a leisure context, can provide fresh understandings regarding peoples' engagements with leisurely activities and leisure time in modern day society.

Where emotions have been directly referred to within the wide world of leisure research - most commonly in relation to sport - there has typically been an overreliance on psychological perspectives which over-privilege quantitative methodologies. While this is, in itself, not an issue, the proliferation of quantitative, scale-based attempts to 'measure' emotions are, we would argue, limiting as a 'tool' for understanding what emotions are and how they are felt. Indeed, as argued by Tamminen and Bennett (2017), such psychological and quantitative perspectives reduce emotions to categories, definitions, dichotomous 'positive' or 'negative' experiences, and individual or intrapersonal sensations. In essence, against this backdrop, emotions are reduced to generic terms, which are broadly applied across different populations. However, as we advocate in this collection, more sociological understandings of emotions have been developed by, and utilised in, a wide range of disciplines over the last century. This has facilitated much more nuanced conceptualisations and understandings of emotions as being embodied, relational, and culturally-specific, thus enabling scholars to position emotions as being as much about social experience(s) as they are about individuals (Hochschild, 1979). Of course, this is not to overlook the importance of the psychological, physiological, and historical influences of emotions. Previous critiques of sociological approaches to emotions, such as Elias and Dunning (1986) have done so admirably. However, this collection represents a further call to understand the relational qualities of emotions and how varying leisure contexts influence individual's perceptions of their own, and others', emotions.

While previous emotion research in leisure has considered areas such as consumer culture (e.g., Wearing et al., 2013), meaning making (e.g., Iwasaki, 2017), and resilience (e.g., Denovan & Macaskill, 2017), there remains a distinct lack of emotional focus which accounts for modern phenomena. Through centralising contexts as diverse as angling and running, to beauty salons and being in nature, this collection significantly advances our understanding of how emotions can be understood within and through leisure experiences.

In the next section we outline the different ways in which emotions have been portrayed in academia, both historically and in more contemporary contexts, with the aim of establishing a platform for greater critical, emotional scholarship within leisure research in the future. Following this, we summarise the contributions to this collection, before concluding by offering some thoughts on the direction of travel for emotion research in leisure studies.

Understanding emotions within society and leisure

The very idea of emotion(s) is typically taken for granted in society, popular culture, and even the academic literature at times. This has led to definitions of emotions being ill-defined and forming a 'common-sense' notion. Even the moral philosopher Thomas Brown (2010), widely credited as being the 'inventor of emotions', stated that "every person understands what is meant by an emotion" (p. 102). This statement alludes to the universality of emotions within human society. As human beings, we experience emotions from the moment we are born and then persistently throughout our lifetimes. As a result, there is general agreement over what 'happiness' or 'sadness' entails and indeed 'looks like', regardless of our own personal circumstances. However, such generalisations overlook the individualised and cultural interpretations that are involved in making sense of emotions, which has led to scholars overlooking the vast complexities associated with understanding emotions. Far from being universal and homogenous, the causes and meanings of emotions are not always understood by the individual experiencing them, let alone the wider social world. This has resulted in the emergence of misunderstandings around emotions, such as the false dichotomy of 'emotion' being in opposition to 'logic' or 'rationality', despite both being involved within decision making processes (Barbalet, 1996). Furthermore, the nuance between the notions of 'emotions', 'moods', and 'affect' has been conflated, with these terms often used interchangeably, despite there being subtleties amongst them. To offer a concise summary, emotions are short, intense bursts of feeling(s), moods are longer-term background states which influence our susceptibility to feeling particular emotions, while affects are considered as non-conscious experiences which also inform the emotions felt (see Evans, 2019 for a more detailed discussion). Of course, these definitions proffered here are not universally accepted, but are provided in an attempt to provide some necessary distinction between each term.

Rather than speaking about 'definitions', it is perhaps more appropriate (and interesting) to instead consider how emotions have been theorised; particularly from a more sociological perspective. A fitting starting point is the work of Hochschild (1979; 1983), whose theorisations of emotions, emotion work, and feeling rules (to name but a few) are still prevalent concepts within contemporary sociological discussion today. Hochschild drew inspiration from both Marxism and Symbolic Interactionism to position emotions as more than just a physiological or psychological response to a stimulus (Hochschild, 1979). Instead, Hochschild espouses the view that emotions are imbued with social and cultural rules, with individuals enacting or even 'performing' particular emotions that are conducive to the social and cultural norms of the situation they are in. This viewpoint was epitomised by the

'company smile' of airline stewardesses she observed during her ethnographic fieldwork (1983). While Hochschild's work provides an important foundation for the sociological theorisations of emotions, it does not come without issue. A pertinent critique of her work is that it brings about artificial emotional dichotomies between 'true' and 'false', 'public' and 'private', even 'leisure' and 'work' (see Wouters, 1989). Subsequent authors have developed Hochschild's initial conceptions further, with Ahmed's (2004; 2010) utilisation of phenomenology enabling a deeper understanding of emotions by adding in the concept of intentionality. This conceives of emotions as always being 'directed towards' something or someone, meaning that an individual's attachments and connections to the world they live in can be explored in greater emotional depth. However, emotions are also bound by language and cultural traditions, for as Ahmed argues, "even when we feel we have the same feeling, we don't necessarily have the same relationship to the feeling" (2004, p.10); a notion considered in greater depth in relation to asylum seeker communities (De Martini Ugolotti & Webster, 2023) and personal running biographies (Desjardins & Ketterling, 2023) within this collection. Furthermore, Collins (2019) draws upon Durkheimian influences to propose emotions and 'emotional energy' as a form of emotionally charged interaction rituals chain; a conceptualisation discussed and expanded upon by Kišjuhas (2023) within this collection.

However, the application of these, more sociological, approaches to emotions, within the field of leisure, is surprisingly limited. The majority of leisure research that has focused on emotions has generally done so through the lens of Elias and Dunning (1970; 1986), who developed their figurational approach to sociology via a substantial corpus of work which interlaced emotions with 'leisure spectacles'. Drawing upon their numerous studies and examples, which include the development of rugby football (Dunning & Sheard, 1979) and football hooliganism in the UK (Dunning et al., 1988), they argued that the 'civilizing process' that took place through the establishment of greater institutional structures throughout European history gave rise to the modern associations and relationships society has with various aspects of life, including sport and leisure. Dunning returned to this work through *Leisure Studies* (1996) in an attempt to further promote the conception of the 'civilizing process' in understanding how sociological emotions might be applied to leisure research.

There has been additional expansion upon Elias and Dunning's initial postulations, most notably by Maguire (1990; 2011), who extolls the virtues of the figurational approach in being able to provide a robust theoretical framework for discussing emotions in leisure. Maguire expounded these ideas through his discussions of the 'pleasure dome' in relation to emotions, leisure, and consumer culture, and argues that a socio-cultural perspective on emotions, within society and leisure, must consider each element interdependently, therefore enabling, not just social, but also psychological, historical, and biological understandings of emotions. However, while helpful as a starting point, as has been noted elsewhere, a reliance on figurational and process-sociological perspectives overlooks numerous issues, such as the role of colonisation within the wider civilization process, and the resultant racialised depictions of emotions (Fanon, 2001). Additionally, a figurational or process-sociological approach promotes an adherence to a methodology of 'detachment' from the object of study, which seemingly disregards the importance of researchers' own emotions during the research process; an approach to researching emotions which this collection challenges (see Condie, 2023; Schmidt & Schultz, 2023). Despite Maguire's (1990) call for a more 'rounded picture' of emotions in leisure, the figurational approach alone cannot provide this, with broader perspectives and theorisations needed to enable a more 'emotional' view of emotion to emerge. Furthermore, there is an irony attached to any argument from figurational

sociologists about the need for a 'fuller picture' of emotions research when the proponents of a figurational approach to emotions and sociology have largely focused on 'sport' rather than leisure as a whole. While there are some, rather fleeting, links made to leisure activities, the majority of Elias', Dunning's, Maguire's, and others' work centres around sport and associated sporting activities. Therefore, despite their advocations, there is little existing work that accounts for broader leisure pursuits, such as visiting a museum (Steinbeck & Munar, 2023), gardening (Ridgway, 2022), or listening to music (Kumm & Pate, 2023), all of which are topics covered within this collection.

Since these initial academic debates, much of the emotional focus in subsequent *Leisure Studies* contributions have centred around concepts such as 'emotional geographies' (e.g., Dunlap *et al*, 2021; O'Brien *et al*, 2017), 'belonging' within certain communities (e.g., Atherton, 2009), and 'nostalgia' (e.g., Connell, 2017). Although these discussions provide plenty of insight into aspects of emotions within their own disciplinary boundaries, the concepts themselves do little to contribute to a substantive theorisation or understanding emotions sociologically, within the leisure field. Interestingly, the broader field of the sociology of emotions does include discussions of leisure, with Punch and Russell (2022) and Maclean (2021) engaging in pertinent discussions on how focusing on participants' emotions enabled deeper reflections on their associations between identity, society, and leisure activities. However, the focus of these studies, again, tends to be on 'sport' rather than leisure as a whole. There remains the sense that the contribution of leisure to these sociological discussions is yet to be fully appreciated by a wider sociological audience. In essence, a 'rounded picture' of emotions has yet to be fully appreciated within the sociology of emotions in leisure. To paraphrase Maguire (1990), emotions are neither something that is entirely abstract and specific to the individual, nor are they a universal sensation felt in a uniform manner. They are not only individual, nor only social, but are a meeting point of the personal, societal, cultural, physiological, psychological, anthropological, educational, geographical, and so on. Through this collection, it is our contention that a focus on emotions within the pursuit of leisure offers a rich and diverse world within which scholars would benefit from drawing upon more.

This collection

This collection is made up of twelve original contributions, all of which engage in critical investigations of the emotions-leisure nexus from various disciplinary and methodological perspectives. Contributions reflect the original intentions outlined above by viewing emotions as a fundamental part of society and leisure, with each contribution placing a critical focus on how emotions can be experienced and understood by both the individual and society through acts of leisure. There are conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and practical discussions of emotions and leisure within themes including identity, nature, disability, migration, representations, and the politics of emotions. Ten research articles provide a diverse selection of empirical studies in the investigation of emotions throughout a wide range of leisure settings, while two research notes provide shorter, critical reflections on methodological approaches to studying emotions within leisure contexts.

Kišjuhas (2023) initiates the critical discussions within this collection by proposing the concept of 'leisure interaction rituals' in generating greater sociological discussions of emotions within leisure. He builds predominantly upon the work of Durkheim, Goffman, and Collins to position the social rituals of the everyday as generating the emotional processes

and investments which provides the foundation for orderly human societies. There are calls for greater debates about the use of 'rituals' in leisure research more widely, as well as further focus upon the importance of emotions within these leisure interaction rituals within the everyday occurrences of daily lives. These calls are echoed by Steinbeck and Munar (2023), who present and apply the concept of 'affective atmospheres' to children's experiences of visiting a museum to enhance critical discussions of children's emotional experiences and their influences on familial decision making in leisure pursuits. The focus on young people's emotions within leisure provides a unique insight into the complex relationalities between interactions with human and non-human entities, embodiment, and the sensorial elements generated by the physical spaces they inhabit. The 'affective atmospheres' of these young museum visitors provoke questions around the role of curation and the meaning-making of materiality within leisure contexts. Further conceptualisations of emotions and affectivities are proposed by Kumm and Pate (2023), who artfully expound the notion of "joy is an act of resistance" (p.2). By drawing chiefly from the world of punk music, but also poetry, art, and leisure more widely, they 'feel' their way through the affectivities involved in resisting authoritarian political and fascist social movements. Through the application of Deleuze and Guattari's (2011) rhizomes, their paper presents what might be termed a manifesto for punk understandings within leisure research and urges us to assemble our own 'machines of joy'.

Three papers explicitly address issues pertaining to the role of leisure within migrants' lived experiences, albeit through very different guises. Dutta (2023) uses the site of a beauty salon in the UK to investigate the intersecting worlds of leisure, labour, and affect within first generation migrant women from South Asia. She argues that the 'feeling' of leisure is not guaranteed through the service economy of the 'self-care' sector, but instead relies upon the emotional investments from the workers. As such, the social impingement and co-production of emotions within intersectional and spatial boundaries that manifest in the leisure-labour and client-worker nexus of the beauty salon are expertly brought to light. The boundaries imposed upon emotions felt within leisure experiences are also explored by De Martini Ugolotti and Webster (2023), albeit on this occasion, these boundaries are those being imposed by the British asylum system. As such, the 'affective politics of asylum' within refugees' experiences of leisure, while simultaneously being subjected to the necropolitics of asylum, provides a 'site of intensity' within which the cruelty of immigration and asylum systems can be contrasted with the empowered negotiations of these systems by such individuals. Ridgway (2022) also explores migrant's negotiations of socio-political systems within her study on the role of leisure within green and blue spaces in migrant women's experiences of divorce in Hong Kong. Through the use of five case studies, Ridgway argues that nature-based leisure offered the chance for new embodied meanings, forms of connection, and representational selves within these women who had undergone a form of loss, thus positioning nature-based leisure as potentially transformative.

The links made to nature in the lattermost paper resonate with two further papers which address the connections that are possible between emotions and outdoor leisure. Douglas, Borrie and Bosak (2023) consider the relationships between humans and wilderness through innovative diary-photograph, diary-interview, and anecdotal methods. The affective impacts of visits to wild nature locations are explored within participants' everyday lives to further understand how meaning-making and attachments are made. Non-representational theory is utilised to understand participants' experiences as 'wilderness affect', a way of appreciating the different relationships from human-wilderness encounters. Mordue and Moss (2023) take a representational approach to investigating the affectivities produced by a

game-angling magazine. Such an approach is taken to examine the role angling brands play in establishing the emotional and affective states of what 'being' and 'becoming' an angler involves. Through a visual-textual analysis, they argue that the companies which produce the equipment to enable fly-fishing to take place physically also play an influential role in establishing the cultural and emotional context within which this nature-based leisure activity takes place within.

The production of emotion through leisure is considered by Desjardins and Ketterling (2023). They critique the typical articulation of running as a way of modulating emotions, and instead, reposition the act of running and the 'running body' as the cause of emotions. The way in which leisure actively produces emotions, rather than merely providing a site to release or regulate emotions, is an important notion expounded here. A similar approach is taken by Yuen and Reilly (2023), who explore the use of trauma-informed practice as part of a decolonising process in leisure service provision with Indigenous women in Canada. Using poetic-representation – a method purposefully used to evoke and awaken emotions – they highlight experiences of challenge, discovery and release, and collective responsibility. They go on to emphasise how engaging in a conscious and deliberate process that incorporates arts-based leisure and aims to address colonisation (e.g., trauma and oppressive systemic structures) is valuable in our pursuit of social justice.

The collection concludes by showcasing two innovative research notes, which are centred around methodological approaches to researching emotions within leisure. Schmidt and Schultz (2023) challenge the appropriateness of traditional research conventions in adequately conveying and representing emotions within leisure research. Instead, they posit how researchers (and research) would look like if they considered themselves as 'curators' of data analysis and presentation. Such a view reframes the typical power balance inherent in classical qualitative strategies of the researcher as being the expert, and instead encourages dialogue between researcher-curator, participants, the public, and theorists to further active understandings of emotions felt within leisure. Finally, Condie (2023) closes with an autoethnographic investigation of his own embodied emotions of researching a phenomenon he experiences himself. As both a researcher of, and participant in, leisure, while living with a disability, Condie reflects on the interconnectedness of his own leisure experiences within his research and the writing of others' experiences of leisure and disabilities. While being sensitive to the uniqueness of others' individualised circumstances, he evocatively portrays why he both 'feels what he writes' and 'writes what he feels' as a result of his own lived leisure experiences. He provokes leisure researchers to reflect on their own experiences within, and accept their own emotional attachments to, leisure.

Future directions for emotions and leisure

Within this collection on emotions and leisure, there is vast diversity in the theoretical, contextual, methodological, and representational qualities of each contribution. Questions range from asking what emotions are, to how they are experienced within leisure, and even include how we, as leisure scholars, can enable and incorporate emotions within our own worlds. Contributions have reemphasised the role of affect, embodiment, and social contexts within the examination of leisure and its purpose in individuals' lives. Thus, we have produced new insights and understandings, from which we encourage greater, critical focus and reflection on the role of emotions within both leisure and wider society in the future. At the outset, we called for greater sociological perspectives into emotions and leisure. Having

summarised each contribution, it is safe to say that, herein, there is an array of social science approaches that have been employed to enable greater critical discussions pertaining to the role of emotions in understanding leisure within society. And while we are keen to celebrate the contribution of this collection and all the contributors, we must acknowledge that this collection does not provide all the answers concerning researching emotions and leisure. We finish by advocating the need for deeper, interdisciplinary investigations into the psychological, cultural, anthropological, and educational aspects of emotions. Others will undoubtedly have their own priorities. For us, we would like to see more focus on the proliferation of digital technologies and their role in spreading and challenging online hate, the rise of right-wing nationalist political movements, and debates regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion within physical activities. We look forward to continuing this work and hope this collection spurs readers on to carve out space for their own work on emotions in leisure.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

David Scott is a Lecturer in Sport Development at Abertay University. His research interests can be broadly situated within sport, sociology, and development studies and is the current membership officer for the Leisure Studies Association.

Thomas Fletcher is a Reader within the School of Events, Tourism and Hospitality Management at Leeds Beckett University. He is author of *Negotiating Fatherhood: Sport and Family Practices* (Palgrave, 2021) and is a current Managing Editor of *Leisure Studies*.

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