IMMACULATE CONCEPTS?

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What is 'leisure'? The debate has raged for some time, and shows no sign of abating. One of the main problems is that there is no consistency of definitional subject. One of the current authors has observed that leisure not only seems to mean different things to different people, but that it has also on occasion meant different things to the same person at different times (Long, 1982). This can apparently be said, too, of leisure scholars (including that same author and his various colleagues) in their research and writing. This paper is an attempt to make some progress in this definitional morass. One of its central claims will be that there is not as much disagreement around as at first seems.

Definitions of Leisure

Most writers on the concept of leisure are in fact writing about something else: either about some preferred focus or fraction of leisure concerns, or about the effects of functions of leisure, or about the determinants of leisure, or about some philosophical theory of leisure, or about some preferred conception of leisure. But before one can have a theory or a conception of X, or study the determinants, functions or effects of X, or consider some part of X, one must surely have <u>some</u> account of X. Although it will be true that further study or reflection will inevitably yield richer and fresher (or changing) conceptions of X, it is difficult to see how the research enterprise could get off the ground at all without <u>some</u> initial bite at the definitional cherry.

Let us begin by exploring some of the central concerns of leisure publications. Those referred to here are simply used in an illustrative manner, since there will be no attempt at a detailed critique of any single work.

1. Some writers have offered definitions of <u>leisure time</u>. This was the approach adopted by the Sports Council/SSRC Panel (1977):

We have viewed leisure as the time uncommitted to obligations of work, family or personal nature.

A similar account was also suggested by Wimbush (1986), and by Green et al (1987), both presenting definitions of leisure provided by the women they studied as 'time to myself'.

There is some dissatisfaction with the time criterion, mainly because it is seen as only a dimension upon which to map something, e.g., leisure defined in terms of non-work, or perhaps non-work plus time uncommitted to obligations of various kinds. The research tool classically associated with this is the time budget diary.

Perhaps we might suggest, at this early stage, that some temporal, residual concept of leisure may prove to be the best approach after all and propose the following possibility as something against which to try out alternatives as we work through them:

<u>Leisure is:</u> Free time i.e.—   Non-work
                                          Non-obligated
                                          Non-constrained.

Given these three criteria, the idea of choice inevitably appears; and, with that, all the psychological concomitants (see below).

2. Some are turning their attention to <u>leisure activities</u> (whether or not they are considered as occurring during 'leisure time'). This is the approach most commonly used in large-scale surveys of recreation. The major criticisms of it usually advanced are that no list can ever be exhaustive and (as Roberts reminds us) four of the most popular 'leisure activities' are normally left out of consideration: drinking, smoking, gambling and sex (Roberts, 1978).

Leisure researchers have rarely argued for a definition of leisure based purely on activities, although this is commonly how it is effectively dealt with. For example, at one stage in a study of rationales associated with leisure policy, Coalter et al. (1986, p. 162) suggested that "leisure is a collective term referring to a diverse set of sporting, recreational artistic and social activities which take place in a wide range of contexts".

Unfortunately, in our current exercise, this kind of definition is almost totally useless for, although it probably <u>applies</u> to most leisure activities, it gives us no criterion of demarcation for <u>identifying</u> them, i.e., for separating leisure activities from non-leisure activities. It is like defining a dog as a rather nice four-legged two-eared animal that comes in lots of different colours and sizes. This will <u>apply</u> to most dogs, but is practically unhelpful in differentiating dogs from, say cats.

Surely the point here is that the only way there is of defining leisure activities is to identify them as occurring within a given time period. Now, we may argue about precisely what time period is to count as operative for a particular study's purposes - there is plenty of room here for disagreement and alternative perspectives - but how else would an activity be identified as a leisure activity?

3. One answer to that question is that we should rather examine the psychological experience or effects of leisure, whether this is defined as per 1, 2 or both.

An example of this kind of approach is Stockdale's work on 'People's Conceptions of Leisure' (1985a). Her methodology involves trying to get respondents to say what psychological qualities they are willing to ascribe to their leisure. But how are respondents to identify their 'leisure'?

They are given no guidance by the researcher, who simply allows them to mean what they like by the term, and then collects responses about whatever it is that the respondents have decided to report upon. In such circumstances how is the researcher to understand the status of all the responses, which could well be responses to quite different things in each case?

What happens, naturally enough, is that the respondents do the job for the researcher. It seems likely that they think about their leisure time, then they think of some leisure activity that they do in that time, and then they ascribe psychological predicates to the customary engagement in the activity.

A leisure experience can only be identified as an experience one has when undertaking a leisure activity - even if that is 'just hanging around doing nothing' - and this can only be identified with reference to what one does in leisure time. Now, since in leisure time we each have (within relatively constraining limits) a degree of choice as to what activities to engage in, it would be odd if we did not experience choice. And most people, given half a chance, would choose fun, pleasure, creativity, personal development, expressivity, self-direction, and a host of other good things.

We are therefore mind-bogglingly unsurprised to discover that these are just those psychological predicates which people routinely attach to their 'leisure experiences', according to the research. However, the point is that, although people do ascribe these predicates to leisure experiences, they do not do so because they are leisure experiences, but simply because they are choices.

We are now in a position to see clearly that, even if it is true that people perceive X, Y and Z, this will not help us to identify leisure experiences, for X, Y and Z are concomitants of leisure, not defining characteristics. If it is discovered, through empirical analysis, that my

doggy experiences are accompanied by toothy, four-legged, and furry qualities, it would not follow that all things which had those qualities were dogs. If it is discovered, through empirical analysis, that people's leisure experiences are pleasurable, etc., it would not follow that anything that was pleasurable, etc., would count as leisure.

It follows that Stockdale's work is not on people's conceptions of leisure. In fact, the concept of leisure adopted implicitly and without argued justification for the purpose of the study was quite clearly that of leisure time (see, for example, the work/leisure dichotomies presented to respondents in Stockdale, 1985a, pp. 90-91).

But the main point is that what this research is doing is collecting people's perceptions of leisure, and this is an impossible task for someone who has not already got a concept of leisure. Without a concept of leisure, how are people supposed to know what it is that the researcher wants perceptions of?

Analogous criticisms apply to Neulinger's (1974) attempt to define leisure according to the perceived freedom of the respondent and the attempts of Kelly (1978) and Havighurst (1961) to produce a definition in terms of multiple satisfactions: just because leisure activities make people feel free/satisfied, it does not mean that every time they so feel they can be said to be at leisure. The startling and highly suspicious conclusion (which is, indeed, sometimes embraced) would be that there are 'leisure elements' in work. But what does this circumlocution achieve? Why not just say that, although it is the antithesis of leisure, work can still sometimes be liberating and satisfying?

4. Others provide accounts of the social functions of leisure, however 'leisure' is defined. One of the studies undertaken for the Sports Council/ESRC Panel by TRRU/CLR on retirement examined the social function of leisure in the period around retirement by exploring the ways in which leisure secured continuity or facilitated change (Long and Wimbush, 1985). In part this grew out of earlier work by TRRU that observed "leisure as a social process" in the areas affected by oil-related development in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland (TRRU, 1977).

Again, though, this kind of work must presuppose some concept of leisure, for how else are the researchers to identify the appropriate social object whose functions they are to investigate?

Let us pursue this a little further. It is often thought that, since leisure has been defined in terms of not-work, retirement (being defined as not-work) must present an insuperable analytical problem. That is to say, the concept of leisure will not assist us in our search for the functions of leisure. For it looks as though, on the present account, there are only two possibilities: either the whole of retirement is to count as leisure or the concept of leisure does not apply to retirement.

But this is not so. We can still see leisure as a temporal and residual category, and easily cater for the notion of retirement. It is just that retirement is a different kettle of fish, and needs to be handled according to its particular character and context. So: what is to count as work for retired people? Just because their paid employment has ceased it does not mean that they do no 'work'. In addition, there are likely to be social, political, family or other obligations and other constraints operating for whatever reason during what might otherwise be free time.

Assuming that retired people do have some time left over from all that, then we may have found their leisure time. The mistake lies in·assuming that 'work' means the same in all cases, and it does not. Feminist analyses do not, in general deny that leisure is a time-slice defined, in part, by the absence of work. What they do contest, quite rightly, is a one-dimensional and myopic definition of work. The same holds for retirement.

5. Still others look at the political and economic determinants of leisure. Clarke and Critcher (1985), in their critique of others, argue that leisure as a social category cannot be adequately understood unless the economic, political and ideological processes which have produced it are examined. Undoubtedly, a social product must be understood with reference to the social forces that produced it. But how is the 'it' to be identified here as the subject of study? I would prefer to say that what such analyses reveal, when successful, is the form which leisure takes within a given social structure. But it will not reveal the concept of leisure, which the study presupposes.

6. There is also the possibility of seeking to secure the advantages of more than one criterion by proposing a multi-dimensional definition. For example, Kaplan (1975) sees leisure as comprising activities or experiences that:

- are relatively self-determined
- occur in economically free time
- are seen as leisure by participants
- are psychologically pleasant
- provide opportunities for recreation, personal growth and service to others.

Unfortunately, this will also bring with it at least the individual disadvantages of each criterion. To take just one example, it has already been observed that the relationship between psychological variables and leisure activities is correlational, not logical, and so the fourth criterion is unsatisfactory.

However, in addition, there is now the added problem of conflict between the criteria. Consider all the criteria together: if it can be accepted that a person may choose badly what to do in his free time (i.e., the activity provided no opportunities for recreation, growth or service, he now says he did not enjoy it and would never choose the same again) does

that mean that, from the start, he was not engaged in 'leisure', even though he saw it as his leisure?

As can be seen, there is a conflict between the first three criteria, according to which this would count as leisure, and the last two, according to which it would not. On a multi-dimensional analysis, how is this conflict to be resolved?

Our thesis will be that it is possible to construct examples which call into question any criterion which is not part of a residual temporal definition. This means that, in Kaplan's account, only the first two will survive.

The Definitional Task

As we have seen, then, the first source of confusion is the lack of consistency of definitional subject. Each writer seeks to capture the term 'leisure', whether the present subject of study is activities, experiences, functions, determinants, or whatever. In a limited sense, leisure does refer to all of these - but it is none of them. The task of providing an account of leisure is difficult enough without confusing these separable projects. There are a number of ways in which we can be clearer about the definitional task, especially as applied to research practice.

1. It is not necessary to complete all of these projects in advance of empirical research (i.e., a researcher does not necessarily need an overall account of leisure activities, experiences, functions, determinants, etc). Much useful research may be undertaken under a simple and readily operationalisable stipulative definition. As Roberts (1978) says:

> Sociological definitions are normally stipulative, simply
> stating how a given author intends to use a term ... (this)
> cannot be proved right or wrong, just more or less useful
> (p. 2).

Of course, such a definition would have its limitations, but at least everyone would be clear about it. If the study itself realises issues which cannot be resolved under the stipulation, or if the stipulation raises difficulties for study, then that is at least one good outcome of the study. It has indicated precisely the place where conceptual analysis has a practical job to do.

2. It is, however, necessary to put your cards on the table and acknowledge ideological commitments. Too often in the past leisure researchers have operated with presupposed or concealed evaluations which

conditioned their methodologies, their data and their conclusions. No wonder, then, that the exposing of such features of the work is seen as an ideological triumph and as a refutation of the conclusions. This would not be possible if researchers had been aware of their own ideological position and had entered it as part of the structure of the study. At least then it is clear which paradigm the study inhabits, what the study is claiming, and how the study and results are to be read.

3. If research involves overtly contentious ideological issues, then this is obviously a potential growth point for conceptual enquiry. This is illustrated, for example, by the work of Meillassoux (1981) and others on domestic labour in the Third World and its contribution to advanced industrial economies through immigrant labour. It is not now possible without tendentiousness to use the phrase 'reproduction of labour power' within the discourse of Marxist political economy without acknowledging the extended sense of 'reproduction' that this kind of work first suggested. A successful research project here has implications for our educated conceptions. The same is proving true of work on gender in the leisure field.

4. We must be very careful to separate out different kinds of question. In particular, we should not confuse conceptual questions with questions of fact and questions of value. An enquiry into the meaning of 'leisure' is quite different from an empirical investigation of what people do in their free time, and again from a consideration of the benefits of leisure. One way in which these questions are easily confused is when two different senses of 'meaning' are employed without distinction. Thus, the phrase 'the meaning of leisure' might refer to the concept of leisure (what the word 'leisure' means) or it might refer to subjective connotations which individuals themselves might associate with their leisure time, activities or experiences (what they signify to them). I know what the word 'snake' means, although when I think of snakes I get a funny feeling along my upper spine and think of shiny, slimy death. My connotative associations may be 'meaningful' to me, but they are not part of what we mean by the word 'snake'. If they were, we would all be using words differently from each other all the time, and the possibility of communication would cease.

When Stockdale looks at "people's conceptions of leisure" she is really asking for their connotations. The study is therefore not about the concept of leisure at all, but rather about people's psychological experience of leisure activities, which is a quite different thing. In a later paper (1985b, pp. 109-112) Stockdale appears to realise that the collection of impressionistic connotations leaves the researcher, even after much fun with statistical techniques, with nothing much to go on:

> At the conceptual level of analysis, leisure appears to be highly individual. (p 111)

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This really is an unspeakably weak conclusion. It asserts that leisure means anything that anyone wants it to mean. How can such a thing form the subject of research? It is only to be expected, though, since it is individual introspective data which have been solicited from respondents. However, Stockdale remarks upon the need for a 'conceptual' level of analysis, too. Unfortunately, she does not explain what this level is, except to say that it tends to be 'holistic'. If we follow the examples she gives, where 'relaxation' is offered as a criterion, I am afraid that we are just going to find psychological predicates at this level, too, with all the weaknesses and difficulties they bring with them. There is nothing here yet which will support the claim to a different (conceptual) level of enquiry.

Because she does not explicitly acknowledge that she has two tasks here, we find that what we call the conceptual task (namely the suggestion of logically necessary conditions) is performed implicitly. Leisure is presented to respondents as a temporal, non-work concept.

There is little wrong with such an embryonic definition except that it has here not been made explicit. For one thing it seems quite close to the truth of the matter, and for another it seems to be roughly the same concept as is used (again, usually implicitly) by just about everyone else.

Since we have already offered a stipulation along these lines at the beginning of the paper, let us now christen the following as the Minimal Definition: leisure is free time, i.e., non-working, non-obligated, non-constrained time. And let us now take some recent examples from the First International LSA Conference to illustrate the extent of its adoption, either explicitly or implicitly, by leisure researchers.

1. Roberts and Baker (1985) want to look at 'Leisure and Work'. Their opening paragraph emphasises how difficult these two words are to define, and how radical is disagreement. However, in what follows they seem to experience no difficulty whatsoever in pursuing their enquiry into workplace sport and workplace leisure. This is for two reasons. Firstly, insofar as the research topic is workplace sport, there is no need to introduce the concept of leisure as an analytical tool at all. There is no "curious blend of the concepts of 'work'and 'leisure'", as they allege. There is no confusion at all possible. 'Workplace sport' is sport carried on at or near the workplace, or under the aegis of the employer, at non-work times. There is no need to worry about conceptual problems relating to the use of the word 'leisure' - and (secondly) even if there were, Roberts and Baker have already solved the problem by implicitly accepting that 'leisure' here means (quite unproblematically) non-work time. They refer to "... use at lunchtime or immediately after work" (p. 59) and repeat this form of words in the section called 'Workplace Leisure'. Additionally in this section they refer to the employee's use of flexible working hours to "... create his own mix of work and leisure" (p. 61) and it is clear that this means that the employee is thus enabled to juggle his work and non-work time a little.

Conclusions: (a)   Roberts and Baker adhere to the Minimal Definition
               (b)   there is no operationalisation problem for the study.

2. Seabrook (1985) thinks that what we need is 'Not Leisure, but Work', and he seeks to persuade us that:

(i)   there is "nothing glorious about (the) burden of work" under capitalism, but
(ii) even so there is something fishy about the idea of "leisure as deliverance" from it (p. 68).

He argues that the current enthusiasm for mass leisure and education for leisure should be viewed with suspicion, since it should be seen as part of the effects of the reconstitution of capital and of the working-class which Thatcherism has taken as its task. Our consumption of what 'leisure' has now become will then entrap us in the hegemonic projects of the new aristocracy, thus implicating us in our own subordination.

Now, anyone who shares Seabrook's political position might find sympathy with this analysis of the form taken by leisure under such political circumstances. But it is the form which changes, not the concept of leisure. Despite what looks like a completely different concept of leisure, Seabrook is still analysing the form taken by activities we engage in during the time when we are not working. He criticises the social cost of that, both at home in the creation of a new underclass with less opportunity for resistance, and abroad in the distortion of Third World economies to meet our 'needs'. But he does not argue with the Minimal Definition.

Conclusions:
(a)   Seabrook adheres to the Minimal Definition
(b)   There is no operationalisation problem, since an understanding of the political argument advanced is a prerequisite for understanding the critique of leisure activities, structures and practices.

3. The same is true of Gruneau's paper (1985). He characterises previous research as having:

(i)   transformed 'leisure' into an almost exclusively voluntaristic concept
(ii)   adopted a psychological/idealist account of activity choice whilst 'at leisure'
(iii) fitted this into a consensualist account of the 'function' of leisure.

He argues that, since the consensus is breaking down before our very eyes, what we need is a "... reconceptualisation of the concept of leisure..." (p. 126), and he identifies two tendencies in this regard:
(i)   towards a consideration of political context
(ii) towards establishing new categories of analysis (p. 127).

Now, someone who shares the political project here would obviously share the criticism of 'ahistorical' and 'apolitical' analyses which were usually nothing of the sort, but simply disguised their implicit prescriptions as to how leisure time was described and whose leisure resources and activities were worthy of study. But the important point is that we cannot even begin to understand the political project here unless we share a prior understanding about the concept of leisure: namely, that it refers to a certain time (let's argue about whose time and when!) which leads us to consider certain activities (which, whose?) and the resources required for their support and development (how much, when, where, for whom, who pays? etc).

Gruneau thinks that his reflections demonstrate that "... leisure is an inherently political concept" (p. 130). But is that really so? What they show is that we can expect there to be political argument about what people do in their leisure time, what is provided for them, and so on. But they do nothing to disprove the suggestion that leisure is that time. In fact they presuppose it. The political argument is one thing; the conceptual argument another.

This can be illustrated with reference to a short passage in which Gruneau argues that factory work conditions required as strong a leisure discipline as a work discipline, i.e., that technology generates a new concept of leisure. But in the same paragraph he refers to 'free time' and in the next paragraph he refers to 'leisure time' (p. 130).

Similarly, the discussion of feminist research (pp. 131-2) makes it clear that, inter alia, points at issue for women are what is to count as leisure time for them, and the amount and availability of it. What does not seem to be at issue is that 'leisure' is about time.

Conclusions:
(a)   Gruneau adheres to the Minimal Definition
(b)   a political agenda has to be constructed around something, the qualities of which it seeks to transform. Gruneau is arguing for a political position which would entail different ways of seeing our leisure time and activities. But he doesn't disagree with the view that the concept of leisure refers to our leisure time and activities (whatever account of them is to be given).

4. In 'Leisure and the Future ...' Veal (1985) discusses the future of unemployment and reviews alternatives to the 'work ethic'. Although the paper has very little to say about leisure, it is clear what it means when it appears:

- "... so that the average worker spends less time in work and has more leisure ..." (p. 87)
- "... sabbaticals for all ... pure leisure ..." (p. 88).

Conclusions:
(a)   Veal adheres to the Minimal Definition
(b)   Veal sees unemployment and alternatives to the work ethic, at least in part, as 'leisure time' problems.

5. In 'Leisure versus Work' (1985), a title which Sherman himself challenges in his last paragraph, leisure is quite straightforwardly assumed to equal 'free time'. He believes that the industrial revolution is responsible for this usage, and that in some halcyon bygone day people did not apportion their time between work and leisure. He hopes that such times will return, and that work and leisure will once more become "... complementary, as they were in pre-industrial times" (p. 83).

Now, although it is true that the industrial revolution brought with it new kinds of work and new patterns of work organisation, the concept of leisure remained exactly the same as previously. A glance at·the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary will show that in Middle English (c1150-c1450 AD) 'leisure' meant 'free time' or 'opportunity afforded by occupied time', and its root is traced to Old French (pre-1150). No-one can blame industrial capitalism for that!

Conclusions:
(a)   Sherman adheres to the Minimal Definition, even when he disapproves of it
(b)   a change in the nature and pattern of people's use of leisure time does not constitute a change in the concept of leisure.

Concepts and Conceptions

Part of the thesis being advanced here is there is such a thing as the underlying concept of leisure. This kind of construction is taken from Steven Lukes' book on Power... (1974). In it he identifies three views of power, each arising from and operating within a particular moral and political perspective. Power, he claims, is an "essentially contested concept", one of those concepts which "inevitably involve endless

disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users" (Gallie, 1956, p. 169).

However, underlying all this disagreement there is an "absolutely basic common core to, or primitive notion lying behind, all talk of power" (p. 26). This is the concept of power, which "yields one or more views of power". The three views of power that he has identified he sees as "alternative interpretations and applications of one and the same underlying concept of power" (p. 27).

Another way of expressing this insight is to use the terminology of John Rawls, who distinguished between concepts and conceptions of justice, so that "those who hold different conceptions of justice can, then, still agree" on basic criteria of the concept, which are then "left open for each to interpret according to the principles of justice that he accepts" (p. 5).

Converting this to the context of the study of leisure and its literature, then, we should look for an underlying concept of leisure (such as the one we have put forward) which is such that it yields a number of differing conceptions of leisure, depending on the moral and political positions of their proponents. The concept of leisure would be formal, and as such a level of generality that it would admit of contesting interpretation by groups which differed in their stance on particular issues or on overall evaluative position (or ideology).

Such a concept must be a matter for some debate, but to illustrate what such an analysis might look like, let us return to our earlier simplifying suggestion that the concept of leisure is a temporal concept - that it refers to
(i)   some time-slice defined in negative terms, i.e.,
(ii)   non-work
(iii) non-obligated time
(iv)   non-constrained time, etc.

We can leave this fairly vague for the moment, because the precise explication of the concept is not necessary to illustrate the method.

As we can see, even if everyone agreed on the validity of the foregoing analysis of the concept of leisure, there would still be endless possibilities for disagreement on the working-out of differing conceptions. What is to count as work, for example? Is it paid employment only, or would it include domestic labour? What is to be regarded as an obligation?

Perhaps most analyses would count in parental duties, but what if these (or other duties) are voluntarily accepted? Presumably the absence of constraint rules out such circumstances as imprisonment, but what about unemployment? It may be true, because there is no immediately contrasting 'work' element in the day of an unemployed person, that the day is to be seen either as more leisured (because there is more non-work time) or as

less leisured (because now all time is constrained by the lack of work). Even within retirement, which is defined in terms of non-work, there is plenty of room for constrained or obligated time which may be contrasted with leisure time, or the whole of retirement may be seen as leisure. It all depends on the conception of leisure adopted.

These are meant to indicate just a small sample of the huge range of disagreements possible. Everything depends on the conception of leisure adopted, for this will determine the account given in filling out the substance of each formal criterion. The only thing that is ruled out is the possibility that in talking about leisure we are all actually talking about different things, or that we are permitted to mean anything we want by the concept of leisure. The position here outlined holds that the very possibility of our disagreeing with each other over our conceptions of leisure involves our agreeing with each other on the concept of leisure.

Definitions and Operationalisation

Sometimes a particular definition or account fails to find favour with researchers because it is difficult to use for research purposes and is criticised for not being readily 'operationalisable'. However, it is clearly the responsibility of each researcher to adopt or, if necessary, to develop appropriate tools for the enquiry, and to live with the consequences of that choice.

Obviously, a researcher will have a propensity to choose what looks like the best tool for the particular task, but it is quite easy to misjudge the issue. When a department acquires a new piece of hardware it may have instant attraction, with everyone wanting to have a go with it. It may often be able to reach the parts that other equipment cannot reach, and prove very helpful.

However, this may not always be the case, for certain problems will not best be tackled by this piece of expensive hardware, for all that it may look like the best piece of equipment in the department. The truth is that there is no such thing as 'the best piece of equipment' because we can always ask 'best for what?' The best will be the one that best suits the purposes of the particular task, and this will vary according to the nature and demands of the task. Of course, what may turn out to look like a poor initial choice of instrument will not necessarily render the study worthless, for one good outcome of a study is discover and demonstrate the limitations of a chosen tool or methodology.

In one sense, it does not matter what equipment is used, so long as the purposes are made clear and the role that the equipment plays in the project is specified. We should remember that all equipment has strengths omitted or concealed precisely because of the nature of the constraints imposed by its use. A full account of any research will include a

justification of the use of particular methodologies and equipment chosen and a recognition of their expected strengths and acknowledged weaknesses.

Now, a conception adopted for the purposes of research bears an analogous relation to the task. The researcher will choose a conception of leisure as a tool of research for various reasons. There is no one conception of 'leisure' which will prove useful for all researchers within all paradigms pursuing all purposes. The researcher cannot leave it to some separate philosophical debate to provide a touchstone that will dispel all confusion.

The choice of conceptual tools is as much the responsibility of the researcher as the choice of statistical methods, and both will need a rationale for inclusion. And, importantly, in one way it really does not matter which conception is chosen or invented, so long as each researcher is prepared to defend it and live with the consequences of having adopted it. For one purpose, a crude and simple 'non-work' definition may do the job. Why waste time with conceptual niceties if they are irrelevant to the task? Of course, having chosen that crude tool, it is unreasonable to expect anything subtle from the data generated, and criticism is justified if claims are made that the data mean anything more than such a crude measure could possibly show.

Sometimes, perhaps, a 'conservative' review of leisure provision may ask people to respond to a list of leisure activities which includes only those already on offer. This might be criticised as a restrictive definition of leisure activities, but such a criticism is misplaced. There is no such thing as a restrictive definition separate from an account of the purposes of the study. If researchers were simply trying to determine the pattern of use of existing facilities, then there may be no point at all in developing a more sophisticated tool. In fact, it might only get in the way. What the critics are really complaining about is not the conception of leisure activities adopted, but the conservative purposes of those who adopt it. What they want to see is the adoption of a new purpose, an attempt to discover which activities people might engage in if they were available. Of course, this purpose will not be served by the use of the 'conservative' definition, and we would have to seek another tool, but it is important to note that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the first account. It depends on its appropriateness to the tasks for which it is to be used, or its appropriateness to the purposes regarded as politically acceptable.

People whose task is more subtle and complex, however, or who wish to render visible aspects of social reality which are confused or obscured by simplistic definition may, for example, opt for a concept of hegemony. They will perhaps find that much is now revealed which before was invisible, and will consider that this is a great advantage of using this tool. However, if the research fails to acknowledge the kind of ideological stance entailed by such a commitment, or fails to explore (or even allude to) the limitations of this approach which critics have

identified, then the research is compromised. It will be vitiated to the extent that it conceals or fails to take into account factors which, if considered, might have been important to the study's outcomes. 'You pay your money and take your choice'. Each researcher is accountable before the research community for the tools chosen, and this is often the place where critics begin.

Thus, the conception of leisure adopted is of enormous significance to the researcher and to the appropriateness of methodology and approach to hypotheses, purposes and outcomes. On the basis that there is no 'correct' version for all purposes it was suggested above that, in one sense, it does not matter which conception is chosen or invented. However, in another sense this choice is of the first importance, since it will determine the nature and quality of the work from the outset.

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