



# POSITIONING LEISURE

This is the sixth book that I have written on the subject of leisure. Its predecessors are *Capitalism and Leisure Theory* (1985), *Ways of Escape* (1993), *Decentring Leisure* (1995), *Leisure and Culture* (2000) and *Leisure Theory* (2005). The books were neither planned nor written as a sextet; nor would I wish them to be read as such. Each can be read as a stand-alone volume. To a lesser or greater degree all six are concerned to connect leisure forms and practice with cultural and social theory. My purpose is not only to apply social and cultural theory to illuminate leisure forms and practice. I am also concerned to delve into leisure forms and practice, especially the notions of freedom, choice and self-determination, in order to clarify certain features of social and cultural theory that I take, and have found among my students, to be opaque or oblique. In this latter regard, the study of leisure forms and practices is especially pertinent.

This is because it is in leisure that we are considered, and culturally represented, to exist in a state of voluntarism. By voluntarism is meant the realm of free choice and action determined by, and commensurate with, private conscience. One of the attractions of studying leisure is that it addresses people's free-time behaviour. Or to alter the payload of the term in a manner that is more apposite for the central arguments in this book, it explores what people plan and do when they *believe* themselves to be free. Those who wish to seriously study leisure must begin with a proviso from which they should never abstain in all that they do: the analysis of free time practice always poses the subsidiary questions, freedom from what? And freedom from whom?

In the ideology of Western, and especially American culture, freedom is judged to have reached an absolute pinnacle. It is what distinguishes life in the West from conditions in every comparative social system, present and past. Any attempt to submit that freedom is factually conditional seems, by comparison, to be mealy-mouthed and ungrateful. This is moot for students of leisure, because for over two centuries, leisure has become almost irretrievably fused with the concept of freedom. So much is this so that one may hardly dare speak of leisure in anything other than celebratory or triumphalist tones. To wit: leisure is the reward for work; it is the

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key component in what we now call the work-life balance; it is an asset for the community; it reduces crime; it broadens mutual understanding; it is the secret of a healthy mind and body; it is all of this and many other things that ordinary and most educated people automatically connect with the good life. It is even legitimate to speak of a sense of inherent privilege about those involved in the analysis of free time forms and practices. It is as if we who study leisure in the West occupy the mansion on the hill where the toil and trouble endured by previous generations of mankind has created an enriching space in which individual freedom, choice and life-satisfaction flourish as they have never flourished before.

This is very understandable. As E.P. Thompson (1967) argued long ago, the rise of industrial society created the idea of leisure. It did so by sweeping away the complex, hyde-bound system of duties and rights supported by the *ancien regime*, and creating a new world of 'free labourers'. But there were tricky problems with this new world. As Thompson (1967) observes, it provided workers with mobility and leisure, but deprived them of traditional non-work rights and age-old systems of community support. It allowed people to spend their free time in whatever fashion they selected, so long as their non-work activities reinforce their competence as credible consumers and reliable workers. It encouraged workers to freely and fully develop their own capacities, subject to the caveat that these capacities tended to reinforce and extend competitive individualism and increase the profit margin.

This is a very strange idea of 'freedom' and comes with an even more peculiar idea of what 'leisure' means. In effect, 'free' choice and non-work activity is held to be inter-laced with principles of fitness to work and responsible citizenship. You can do whatever you like in your non-work time, providing that it affirms your competence as a trustworthy worker and a credible citizen. A whole complex network of controls was constructed to support this set of dispositions, this trajectory of so-called 'free choice'. It has burrowed so deeply into the Western cortex that it has colonized our world-view, supplying us with the whole vocabulary, *mentalité*, and set of discriminations which define leisure. It has made the concept of freedom so transparent and obvious that we only attend to it when our competence, relevance and credibility to act, and be accepted as free actors, is impaired.

Consider a fairly trivial example to substantiate the issues here: I am free to walk down the street with my shoe-laces undone. However, to do so will eventually prompt the disapproving attention of others. If I walk down the street with my shoe-laces undone every day, my neighbours will talk about me. Why do I go out like that? Why won't I listen to what people tell me? Is there something wrong with me? Should someone inform the authorities for my own protection and the safety of others?<sup>21</sup>

To repeat, this is a fairly trivial example. Nonetheless, it shows well enough that the meaning of freedom is conditional. What we call freedom depends upon being acknowledged as competent actors and credible citizens. But competence and credibility demand disciplined behaviour that is respected as proficient and judicious. Ordinarily, these qualities may be regarded as unexceptional and ubiquitous. In fact they are subject to quite precise pre-conditions. Competence requires *knowledge* of cultural and social mores; *monitoring* our feelings and actions to assess their impact upon others; and *discernment* to evaluate social situations accurately. Comprehension of the optimal management of the emotions, the facilitation of thought and the building blocks of credible 'people skills' is rooted in *emotional intelligence* (Goleman 1995). The regulation and presentation of competence involves *emotional labour* (Hoschild 1983). Building credibility and displaying competence in everyday life is learned behaviour and requires significant and continuous energy and effort. If this is true, what price leisure in a world in which emotional intelligence and emotional labour are ubiquitous?

## Speaking to Others About Who We Are

Emotional intelligence and emotional labour are, I think, core concepts for the analysis of leisure forms and practice. This is because the display of credibility, relevance and competence in our 'voluntarily' chosen 'free' time activities *speaks* to others about who we are, what we hold to be valuable and how we can make a difference. This encompasses issues of what food and drink we should consume, how we should dispose of our waste products in the home, the right clothes to wear in given social settings, the amount of time that we ought to devote to exercise every day, the correct way of addressing people from different ethnic and racial groups, how we should relate to heritage and nature, our familiarity with sport, film, art and literature, our stance on sexual inequality and racial oppression and many other topics that are covered in the *work-life balance*. The field of leisure is the focal point in everyday life where these matters are addressed, exchanged and refined. Over and above the institutionalized and tightly organized regulations of the work-place, leisure is where we get the *people knowledge* and coaching skills that enable us to be recognized as competent, credible and relevant actors in the plethora of social, cultural and economic situations that we encounter. The field therefore comes with a variety of tacitly stated standards of discernment and *coaching* responsibilities. Modern men and women, who see themselves, and wish to be acknowledged as competent, relevant and credible citizens, take it for granted that the field of leisure is about accumulating

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emotional intelligence and using emotional labour to teach themselves and to coach others into more practically successful, ethically relevant ways of living. It is where we assimilate and develop the big picture about what is *au courant*, socially respected and cool. These are central resources in enhancing our competence, relevance and credibility among our peer group and wider social encounters.

At this juncture in the discussion I will use the terms emotional intelligence and emotional labour in fairly unqualified ways. My purpose here is to propose for the sake of argument that the unrelenting nature of these undertakings presents serious challenges to orthodox concepts of leisure. I will come to them presently. Before doing so, it is necessary to comment upon another dimension of the topic.

The emerging trends in the world in which we in the West are located accentuates the significance of emotional intelligence and emotional labour. To be regarded by others as competent, relevant and credible is the pre-requisite for, among many other things, achieving success in limiting the interests of the police and the law in what we say and do; developing and maintaining strategically profitable friendship networks; being greeted in other countries as a welcome guest; and finding and keeping a mate. These issues also possess a powerful and increasing *economic* significance. The commercial value of surface acting and spray-on sincerity has been extensively documented in the sociology of service work (Hoschschild 1983; Bryson et al. 2004). Over the last forty years one of the signal trends in the economically advanced industrial countries of the West is for the manufacturing sector to shrink and the service sector to expand. In the UK, the service sector now produces over 70% of Gross National Product (Office of National Statistics 2000). In 1961, four out of ten workers based in the industrially advanced countries were employed in the service sector; in 1971 the figure increased to five out of ten; and currently the figure is seven out of ten. By 2005, in the UK more than seven times as many people (22 million) were employed in the service sector than the manufacturing centre (3 million) (Blyton and Jenkins 2007: 69–70).

At the heart of this switch from extractive, factory and office employment to work in the knowledge-information and communication sector is the economic importance of *people knowledge* and *people skills*. Being comfortable in your own skin, knowing how to handle people, sensing when to break the ice, demonstrating sincerity and smiling relations, have considerable economic value in the labour market. The core resources involved in this are emotional intelligence and emotional labour. People knowledge and people skills are pivotal in having a good life with your neighbours, enjoying high status and gaining a good job.

Yet if all this is allowed, it casts a troubling shadow over the orthodox meaning of leisure. Traditionally, leisure is twinned with voluntarism.

Freedom, choice and self-determination are regularly presented as primary characteristics of leisure (Parker 1981; Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Neulinger 1981a, 1981b). But what does it mean to have 'time off' or 'freedom' if the pre-conditions of emotional competence and credibility as an actor are holding relevant resources of emotional intelligence and being adept in practising emotional labour? Since emotional life is an unrelenting feature of being human, it seems reasonable to propose that the accumulation of emotional intelligence and the practice and refinement of emotional labour can occur at any time and in any place (Katz 1999). If this is so, the question is, where do freedom or time off reside? Everything we do and every place that we inhabit has emotional learning potential. Monitoring, discernment, internalizing and coaching, all require unpaid emotional labour. If we are engaging in labour, even if it is unpaid and pleasurable, we are doing something contrary to leisure as it is conventionally understood.

Given the colonization of all aspects of life by emotional intelligence and emotional labour, I see little point in trying to rescue orthodox associations between leisure and freedom, choice and self-determination. Indeed, it would be no bad thing to discard the notions of freedom and voluntarism from the field of Leisure Studies/Science on the grounds that they get the whole business of thinking about leisure off on the wrong foot.

Philosophically speaking, voluntarism means a realm of behaviour in which a field of zero or, at any rate, minimal constraints over subjective choice apply. However, this is nothing but a deluded state of mind since it is evident that every real life is played out in conditions of emotional labour, economic inequality, cultural difference and social context that condition choice, experience, our sense of imaginative possibility and much else besides. So when we say that we are 'free' or develop in a 'full' sense in our leisure, we are referring to something other than voluntarism. However, such is the force of the neo-liberal insistence upon personal freedom and choice as the hallmarks of Western democracy, that it is all too easy to slide into the taken-for-granted assumption that they are universally *realized* conditions of everyday life.

For students of leisure, therein lies the rub. You might have free time at your disposal at the end of the working day. But you are not at liberty to dispose of it just as you please. Leaving aside the questions of monitoring, reconnaissance, discernment, internalizing and coaching that relate to competence in emotional intelligence and credibility in emotional labour, there are the matters of inequality and scarcity to consider. At a basic level, time disposal relies upon income. Your capacity to dispose of non-work time is economically conditioned and culturally coded. It reflects distinctions of class, gender, ethnicity, education and bodily health. Of course, you are free to make choices. But the choices you

make are contextualized by how you are situated in relation to scarcity. By scarcity is meant, the unequal distribution of economic, cultural, social and political resources and your position in relation to them.

It follows that if it is right to maintain that leisure forms and practices are economically conditioned and culturally coded, and also, that emotional intelligence and emotional labour have colonized life, how can leisure practice be reconciled with the concept of freedom? This is a recurrent problem in every critical approach to the study of leisure. In a nutshell, how can we be said to be free and not free at one and the same time?

## Intentionality

I hold that the most satisfactory way of dealing with this apparent conundrum is to focus upon the topic of intentionality. To wit: adult, human subjects depend upon competence in emotional intelligence and credibility in emotional labour to be successfully present themselves as relevant actors and they are situated variously in relation to scarcity; but they are also usually intentional actors, who have the capacity to be cognizant about the consequences of their actions. If it is my intention to spend Friday night at the pub drinking with my friends, this is a self-selected leisure choice. To elaborate: it may be the case that the aetiology of my choice is a combination of my class background, gender, age and occupation. Perhaps one might submit that these mechanisms *position* me to be more likely to want to spend Friday night in the pub. However the decisive issue is the choice that I make to spend my time on Friday night thus, rather than attending, for example, a night-school course on the architecture of Frank Geary, or watering my house-plants. I might have a number of reasons to make this choice. It might be that I want to bring the week to satisfactory closure in the company of congenial colleagues by signing off with work colleagues in a leisurely social setting, or I might want to let off steam after the rigours of the week. What is crucial is that what I do is the result of *my* choice, and that I acknowledge it as such, rather than, for example, rationalizing it as a by-product of my background over which I have no influence. Since this is a choice that ultimately I make, with respect to the disposal of my non-work time, it must be right to describe the concrete process of choice as the intentional exercise of a leisure option.

Several provisos need to be entered here. It is one thing to propose that choosing to spend Friday night in the pub is *my* choice. But what if I act on the basis of subconscious or unconscious considerations? Such as, being in the pub on Friday night is what I have internalized as a desirable outcome, from the manufacturers of the liquor that I favour having presented this in their advertising campaigns as the appropriate time-use of a male consumer of my age, race, occupation and background. Or, being in the

pub could be a way of *avoiding* family responsibilities that I find to be arduous and burdensome? Or, because my mother or father are unremitting teetotallers, who avidly disapprove of pub culture, perhaps I may have reacted against my childhood experience by favouring alcoholic sustenance in leisure as a way of demonstrating my independence from the parental rod?

An important methodological principle in Leisure Studies follows. It is that *the locus of leisure forms and practices is subjective intentionality*. By insisting on this, we have a defence against those who wish to submit that leisure is determined by our relationships to class inequality, racial difference or gender division. Leisure forms and practices are coded, and our potential to engage in them is influenced by many triggers that can be ultimately traced back to structural divisions. However, to insist upon the ultimate relevance of subjective intentionality, we nail our colours to the mast of the proposition that what individuals intentionally decide to do in non-work time is fundamental. We may be positioned in relation to unequal resources. Aspects of our behaviour may be constructed by this or that influence. But if we do not live on the principle that we have a mind of our own, in what sense can we be said to 'live' at all?

The focus on intentionality shows something of the complexity involved in something as apparently simple as deciding how to spend my leisure on a Friday night. But it is not enough. There are related issues of emotional intelligence having to do with the consequences of my actions that must be brought into play. Consider: my choice of going to the pub on Friday night may involve a calculation of the relation between drinking and health. Harmful drinking is a weekly intake of alcohol that leads to significant physical and mental impairment that harms the self and may cause substantial harm to others. In the UK, the standard of harmful drinking is 50+ units per week for men and 35+ units for women. Hazardous drinking means regular drinking above recognized levels at which alcohol is likely to damage health. For men this level is 22–50 units per week and for women it is 15–35 units. Ordinarily, awareness of the risks to my health and the well being of others may limit the amount I drink on Friday nights. If this is the case, this awareness should be regarded as a constraint on my behaviour. If I recognize constraints to my behaviour in choosing to spend Friday night in the pub, in what sense can I be said to make choices freely? Rather, my freedom of choice is made in relation to the knowledge that I possess apropos of issues of how the pursuit of my pleasure bears upon others. This knowledge is conditioned by cultural and social factors. My exposure to it is a result of the position I occupy with regard to the distribution of knowledge. Knowledge is a scarce resource. Access to it differs according to various factors such as gender, education, age, income, race and occupation. So my decision about how to spend Friday nights and the length of time I should spend in the pub is directly related to social and economic factors which I may be aware of, but which I cannot control.

These factors *position* me and directly influence the intentions that I formulate and my trajectory of leisure behaviour.

Nor is this all. If I spend *every* Friday in the pub, it might be said to be evidence of compulsive behaviour. Friends might say that I choose to spend time in this way because I have an addictive personality. In that case, going to the pub on Friday is not a question of my freely seeking pleasure. Rather, it comes closer to what may be termed obsessive behaviour. If this is the case, my leisure choice turns out not to be about the exercise of freedom. Rather, it is about acting repetitively, without control over my trajectory of behaviour. As such, it may fall to my friends to ask me to reflect upon my choice of behaviour or seek help from a qualified person.

Classical liberal thought analyzes leisure practice as the outcome and responsibility of the intentional choice of actors. Put simply, if I choose to smoke in my leisure time despite being aware of the medical risks that derive from so doing, it is my affair. Over the last fifty years the limitations in this position have been exposed. However, as a result of medical education and state/media proselytizing we have gradually become aware that many of the activities that we participate in for pleasure carry health risks for ourselves and others. In many areas, leisure forms have been colonized by a psychology of risk culture that focuses on the self-harm or harm to others that follow some form of voluntary behaviour.

Many of the leisure practices that were developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as good for you or harmless are today castigated or demonized (Hughes 2003). The leisure industries associated with them have been forced to readjust. Tobacco, alcohol and food companies have introduced the concept of 'responsible practice' with respect to tobacco use, alcohol consumption and dietary intake. Responsibility is not simply defined as a matter for the individual self, it is also a question of the consequences of one's behaviour for others. Thus, secondary smoking threatens non-smokers with cancer; excessive consumption of alcohol increases the risk of causing an accident which might involve innocent parties; and obesity is not only a threat to individual mortality, it confronts the tax-payer with higher bills of medical provision. We have moved from an extreme liberal position in which it is an individual's to do what they damn well please right in their leisure and recreation, into something more circumspect.

You might argue that it was ever thus in Christian societies. For did not Jesus preach that you should 'love thy neighbour as you love yourself'? However, in practice, until quite recently, observance of this doctrine was discretionary. Only with the arrival of the modern welfare state in the early twentieth century, might it be said that elements of this doctrine were formalized and incorporated into the suite of civil rights and obligations. Even here, as principles of popular governance and resource distribution, they were quite limited. Namely, they were chiefly concentrated in relation to workplace practice, education entitlements, behaviour in public space, and



care for children, the disabled and the elderly. What has happened in the last twenty-five years is that Western states have become more sensitive to the question of how leisure forms and practice imperil the well being of Others.

A subtle shift in the meaning of intentionality in leisure forms and practice has occurred. It is no longer a question of considering the validity of leisure practice from the liberal perspective of the intentions of the self or his/her dependents and friendship networks. The issue has moved on to encompass this dimension and also address the consequences of intentional action in leisure forms and practice for others. Hence, legislation banning smoking in public places throughout North America and much of the EU, was prompted by health fears surrounding the effects of secondary smoking. The campaign against dangerous alcohol consumption exploited and amplified public fears about alcohol-related teenage homicide and traffic deaths. Similarly, the recent gun massacres at Virginia Tech (2007), Tuusula High School (2007), Omaha Mall (2007) and the University of Northern Illinois (2008) elicited pleas to tighten laws on the sale of hand-arms, rifles and ammunition for hunters and sportsmen. Arguably, currently the biggest numerical front of resistance in leisure practice is against the environmental pollution and threat to climate change posed by the carbon footprint left by air travellers, Sports Utility Vehicles and other auto polluters. The attempt of states to manage this risk by imposing environmental taxes on air travel or car engines that contribute dangerous levels of pollution is a *cause célèbre* for those who insist upon the centrality of freedom of choice in leisure practice. But it is clear that the tide has remorselessly turned against them.

The two genies that have driven our understanding of the responsibilities of intentional conduct are emotional intelligence and emotional labour. It is the knowledge that some types of practice are harmful for us and others that has precipitated changes in social standards, qualities of discernment and legal imperatives. Telling others that we are comfortable with these changes and support them requires emotional labour. It is not enough to know that some types of practice are wrong for us and others. We must also sound a series of bells and whistles that signal social ease, sincerity and openness. We have all been touched by deep social forces that accentuate the importance of surface acting and spray-on sincerity in the labour market and the conduct of personal life. However, in this respect we are far from being equal.

## Situated Action and Leisure

Given the current ascent of neo-liberalism, which holds that we are all ultimately *masters of our own destiny*, potential commanders of a 'can do' approach that will fix every misfortune, it behoves us to remind ourselves

of an old, unfashionable countervailing proposition: namely, we must think of ourselves in leisure and recreation activity as *positioned* actors. To clarify, each of us is made by history and each has unequal access to scarce resources. History and scarcity condition our ability to act upon the world. The relation that we have to scarcity is heavily conditioned by the wealth of our families of origin. Our freedoms and the rationales that we invoke to justify them, are *positioned*.

It is natural to think of equality and inequality in terms of the family, since this is the immediate emotional context in which we are nurtured into, what some neo-liberals call, autonomous personhood. However, just as personhood can only be satisfactorily explained in relation to the family, an adequate account of the family must locate it in the context of the allocative mechanisms that regulate scarcity. Every society develops allocative mechanisms to handle the distribution of scarce resources. In Leisure Studies allocative mechanisms have been investigated in a number of ways. There have been interesting studies of how class distributes economic resources unequally, how scripts of behaviour in leisure are conditioned by class positioning and how the state interacts with class inequality to manage legitimation (Clarke and Critcher 1985; Blackshaw 2003). They have been joined by studies on gender and leisure which reveal the economic inequalities between men and women, the construction of personal identity in leisure practice through gender difference and the uses of gender representation to legitimate scarcity (Wearing 1998; Henderson et al. 1996; Aitchison 2003). There are fewer studies of leisure that reveal the work of the hands of colour and race in managing scarcity. However, studies in the sociology of sport have provided many pointers for students of Leisure Studies to follow. They have clarified how the allocative mechanism of race bestows advantages in respect of success in the labour market and political influence.

Allocative mechanisms are social devices to distribute scarce resources and legitimate the system. Legitimation is crucial. For the problem of scarcity raises questions of justice with respect to who gets what. Think of it in terms of a game model. In one team, one player commands more resources than the other players. This may reflect his/her superior skills, the authority he/she conveys, or mere precedent.

The distribution of power in society works on similar principles. One class has superior access to scarce resources in comparison with others. This superiority is justified by a variety of instruments. It might be that one class claims more resources because it claims to monopolize leadership skills over others. Or it might be that one class rules because it presents the case that it has always ruled and to break tradition would hazard the good of all.

The brute fact of inequality, and the consequences for emotional intelligence, emotional labour, personal confidence and social mobility that follow from it, is obscured by the neo-liberal emphasis upon individual freedom and personal responsibility for our actions. A neo-liberal might react to the proposition that inequality is universal by submitting that each of us has to deal with it in our own way. If fate has dealt us a bad hand it is up to us to use our brainpower and emotional intelligence to overcome adversity. However, there are problems with this sanguine view of things.

Personal drive and good fortune can go a long way in combating a difficult start in life. But the real issue is changing the playing field in which life chances are so heavily influenced by unequal access to scarce resources. It is not just a question of having this or that much money. It is a question of habitus. This raises difficult policy questions about the distribution of wealth and the role of restraint on personal freedom.

Habitus is a term used in the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. It means the collective frame of mind and patterns of behaviour into which one is born and which one embodies as a condition of family and community.

## Leisure, Health and Mortality

An inkling of what is involved here may be provided by considering the issue of leisure, health and mortality. Few would disagree that almost nothing influences personal choice in leisure more than health and longevity.

Increasing longevity is sadly not a global universal fact. The *World Health Organization Atlas* of life expectancy for 2005 showed that the life expectancy in Australia, Canada, Spain, France and Italy was over 80; in the USA, North Western Europe and Japan, 75–80; Mexico, North West Latin America, North Africa, the Middle East, Central Europe and Argentina, 70–75; Brazil, and most of the former USSR, 65–70; India, Pakistan, 60–65; Central, West and Eastern Africa, 55–60 (www.worldpolicy.org 2005). The figures at the lower end of life expectancy are very different. The *CIA World Fact Book* reports estimated life expectancy for 2006 of 32.62 in Swaziland; 33.74 in Botswana; 38.62 in Angola; 42.73 in South Africa; 43.34 in Afghanistan; and below 50 in most of West, East and Central Africa.

Health, mortality and leisure participation are directly influenced by the position of individuals and groups in relation to economic scarcity. The differences between social classes in this respect are profound. In the USA, the richest 1 per cent of households own 38 per cent of all

wealth. The top 5 per cent own over 50 per cent of all wealth. The top 20 per cent own over 80 per cent of all wealth. From the late 1920s to the mid 70s there was a more or less continuous downward trend. Since the mid 70s the trend has reversed. The level of wealth inequality in 2003 was almost double what it was in the mid 70s (*Multinational Monitor* and Edward Wolff 2003).

In countries with a more 'Welfarist' approach to resource distribution, such as Australia and the UK, wealth inequalities are still striking. In 2004, the top 10 per cent of Australians owned nearly 50 per cent of national wealth. The bottom 10 per cent have nothing but debt (Headey, Wooden and Marks 2004). In the UK, 2004 official statistics show that the top 1 per cent owned 23 per cent of national wealth, an increase of three per cent since 1997 when the first New Labour government was elected. The top 10 per cent own more than 50 per cent of national wealth, and the wealthiest 50 per cent own 94 per cent of national wealth. Over the same period the wealth of the poorest 50 per cent of the population contracted from 10 per cent in 1986 to 5 per cent in 2002. As with the US figures, the data suggests that the trend of decreasing wealth inequality is being reversed. In 1911 it is estimated that the share of the top 1 per cent of the population was 70 per cent of national wealth. By 1936–8 it had fallen to 56 per cent; by 1960 it stood at 42 per cent; and in 1991 it had more than halved to 17 per cent. However, since the mid 1990s the richest 1 per cent have gained a further 6 per cent of national wealth, despite New Labour's commitment to distributive justice ([www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)). The UK government defines poverty as an income that is 60 per cent of the median. On this basis, it is estimated that 21 per cent of children and pensioners and 14 per cent of all adults live below the poverty line. At the other end of the wealth ladder, it is estimated that the average annual income of a UK Chief Executive in the Finance, Business and Industry sectors of the economy was £600,000 ([www.esrc.ac.uk](http://www.esrc.ac.uk)).

Divisions of economic inequality extend much further than the question of what you can and cannot buy. Wealth brings access to social prestige and is positively associated with personal confidence, stability and security. Leaving aside the significant question of physical risk, which has partly been dealt with above, the absence of wealth is connected with higher levels of anxiety, stress and low personal esteem. Although Welfarist regimes have gone some way to correcting these divisions through policies of redistributive justice, Western societies still condone huge levels of economic inequality and major divisions in access and mobility. If we bear in mind the separate question of the wealth gap between the economically advanced and developing nations, it is clear that the subject of inequality is absolutely pivotal to understanding leisure forms and practice.

The implications for leisure and quality of life are profound. Within the economically advanced core countries, the over-60 population is growing rapidly as a proportion of the total population. There is already a significant greying of the leisure/sport market. More people are likely to be in work for longer periods in order to build up pension funds. Similarly, the onset of ill-health and physical decline is being postponed by a combination of medicine, public health policies and the adoption of responsible diet and exercise. People are enjoying longer spans of freedom from chronic illness and greater access to paid employment. As a result, their participation in outdoor and cash-intensive leisure forms and practice is extended. If the retirement age is abolished and current health patterns are maintained, the over-65 group will have more surplus income in old age because their mortgage burden is likely to be repaid. One effect of this will be to obstruct employment and home ownership opportunities for younger people.

Coming now to the global dimension, the majority population in the economically weak emerging and developing nations has much lower life expectancies and much higher exposure to risk from famine and chronic illness. Western leisure multinationals have out-sourced a good deal of their manufacturing to low cost, under-unionized labour markets in the Southern hemisphere and Balkans (Klein 2001). These markets also supply the wealthy metropolitan centres of the West with illegal supplies of drugs, pirated DVDs and CDs, contraband cigarettes and sex workers. Their cities, ways of life and unspoiled reserves of nature provide Western tourists with exotic travel destinations. Although the economic redistribution of wealth between the economically advanced and developing world is not insignificant, it is typically concentrated in the hands of the ruling class and illegal gangs and crime cartels (Glenny 2008). The leisure-rich in the economically advanced countries, and the ruling classes and illegal criminal groups in the metropolitan centres of the developing world that support them, have broken away from the leisure-poor. They have perpetual access to free time entitlement, leisure commodities, participation in sport and travel experience that simply have no equivalent in most of the economically emerging and developing world. The majority of the world's population is effectively a leisure under-class.

## The Leisure of Billionaires

Unequal access to resources has a direct influence on leisure practice in terms of capital and expenditure. Indirectly, it influences choice through factors such as education, health and household space. It requires us to think very critically about what is meant by the concepts of individual

and group freedom in leisure. Western democracies have cultivated strong models of citizenship organized around freedom, entitlement and responsibility. But the acceptance of high levels of economic and social inequality means that the positioning of individuals and groups in relation to the perception and experience of freedom, responsibility and entitlement is subject to wide variation and contradiction. A recipient of significant inherited wealth or someone who creates a fortune, is likely develop a co-exist with a broader latitude with respect to the law, notions of civic duty and personal responsibility.

In 2008, *Forbes* business magazine listed 49 billionaires resident in the UK, the richest of whom is the steel magnate, Lakshmi Mittal (\$ 45bn). By contrast, in October 2008 the minimum wage for adults was raised to £5.73 an hour ([www.esrc.ac.uk](http://www.esrc.ac.uk)). Two thirds of minimum wage earners in the UK are women. Key characteristics of leisure have been defined as choice, flexibility, spontaneity and self-determination (Parker 1981). However, the discrepancy in wealth between Mittal and a worker on a minimum hourly wage is so colossal that to compare the two in relation to these characteristics is an affront to common sense. Mittal lives in a different world to most of the rest of us. He enjoys vastly wider lifestyle options, travel opportunities and access to social networks that carry high levels of social prestige.

In 2004 he bought a neo-Palladian mansion in Kensington Palace Gardens, London for £57 million. The property includes a ballroom, an underground car park and a floodlit swimming pool inlaid with jewels. In the same year he spent £30 million on six days of celebration for his daughter, Lakshmi's wedding to the London based investment banker, Amit Bhatia. Mittal's resources for mobility, security and cultural networks mean that his on-location experience of leisure operates in a qualitatively remote context from that of low-income or median wealth experience.

If one looks at the *Forbes* (2008) rich list the gulf between rich and poor, and the inequality of resources for leisure and recreation, is truly staggering.

The number of billionaires in the world in 2008 was reported as 1,125, compared with 946 in 2007.

By comparison with the *Forbes* rich list, the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASH 2007) reported that the median pay for full-time workers in the UK in 2006 was £23,764 (£457 per week). The median for full-time male workers was £25,896 (£498 per week); for full-time female workers the median was £20,488 (£394). Turning to the USA, statistics from Social Security Online report that the median annual wage in 2006 was \$38,651 (\$743 per week). At the time of writing the exchange rate is \$1.89 to £1, so in sterling the median US annual income is £20,450 (£393 per week). In Australia, the Bureau of Statistics reported that the median annual wage is A\$53,200 (A\$1,023 per week). For males the

			\$(bn)
1	Warren Buffett	Investments	62.0
2	Carlos Slim Helu	Telecoms	60.0
3	Bill Gates	Software	58.0
4	Lakshmi Mittal	Steel	45.0
5	Mukesh Ambani	Petrochemicals	43.0
6	Anil Ambani	Diverse sources	42.0
7	Ingvar Kamprad	IKEA stores	31.0
8	KP Singh	Property	30.0
9	Oleg Deripaska	Aluminium	28.0
10	Karl Albrecht	Aldi Stores	27.0
11	Li Ka-Shing	Diverse sources	26.5
12	Sheldon Adelson	Casinos/hotels	26.0
13	Bernard Arnault	Luxury goods	25.5
14	Lawrence Ellison	Software	25.0
15	Roman Ambramovich	Oil	23.5
16	Theo Albrecht	Aldi stores	23.0
17	Liliane Bettencourt	L'Oreal	22.9
18	Alex Mordashov	Manufacturing	21.2
19	Alaweed bin Talal	Investments	21.0
20	Mikhail Fridman	Oil/banking	20.8

**Figure 1 20 Richest people in the world 2008**

Source: *Forbes Business Magazine*

median average income is A\$55,800 (A\$ 1,115 per week); and for women it is A\$47,600 (A\$915 per week). Currently the exchange rate is A\$2.25 to the pound, which means that the median wage in Australia expressed in sterling is £24,181. For men, the sterling annual wage is £25,363; and for women it is £21,636.

For the ultra-rich, the present tax system relies on charitable donations as the primary mechanism of redistribution. In 2006 Warren Buffett pledged \$31 billion to the *Gates Foundation* to help address global healthcare issues. Similarly, in 2004 Lakshmi Mittal set up the Mittal Champion's Trust with a donation of \$9 million to support 10 Indian athletes with world-beating potential; and in 2007 he matched the money raised on the BBC Comic Relief edition of the programme *The Apprentice* (£1 million).

These high profile donations are generous and welcome acts of philanthropy. But they hardly amount to a co-ordinated programme of global redistributive justice. There is a strong moral case for allowing the rich to dispose of their money as they see fit. But it is counterposed by the plight of the poor, and especially the world's hungry. In addition, the presence of a billionaire class in society who subsist with a broader sense of latitude in respect of questions of law, civic duty and personal responsibility is subject to the same objection made by Veblen (1899) in relation to the conspicuous consumption of the leisure

class. Namely, it is socially corrosive to condone excessive latitude with respect to leisure conduct, since it will be subject to the laws of imitation. The trickle-down effect of a loose attitude to rules of leisure conduct will eventually weaken the fabric of society. What is to be done?

One solution favoured by the traditional Left is to impose punitive levels of taxation upon the wealthy, to generate resources for the state to redress the inequality gap. This is subject to many objections. To begin with, it is a disincentive to labour or investment, since the fruits of labour and investment that traditionally accrue to the individual are partly expropriated by the state. Similarly, positing a state response to inequality and a climate of latitude in leisure culture, absolves individuals and groups from taking responsibility over their own lives and forms of practice. Developing emotional intelligence and the emotional labour to function as a competent, relevant and credible actor is the prerequisite of citizenship. By invoking the state to act as a regulator in this sector, a diminished view of citizenship is enjoined, which in turn will deplete the stock of social capital and social energy in society.

In any case, a separate set of questions is raised if one moves away from the subject of economic and social inequality to that of the place of distinction among individuals and between groups (Bourdieu 1984).

It will quickly be seen that competition for distinction and prestige does not end with the birth of egalitarianism. It is worth going into this issue for a moment, since many approaches in Leisure Studies appear to argue the contrary case. That is, that egalitarianism will engender solidarity and combat injustice (Andrew 1981; Clarke and Critcher 1995).

## Positional Goods and Leisure

The neo-liberal argument about managing scarcity is based on the proposition that too much government is bad for society. Individuals should be free to invest and engage in leisure practice providing it does not interfere with the liberty of others. The egalitarian argument is in favour of interventionist government to establish a level playing field to enable individual competition and enterprise to flourish. Private investment, labour and leisure must be subject to the greater authority of the common good. Upon this argument egalitarians claim a rational basis for fiscal intervention and central restraint of practice in respect of private investment, labour and leisure.

You can stand on this side or that side of the divide and find plenty of evidence to confirm either case. What seems incontrovertible is



that no matter what system of managing scarcity is adopted individuals and groups will search for distinction and use leisure choice to signify honour, privilege and rank. In other words, there is a perpetual market for what the economist Fred Hirsch (1976) refers to as 'positional goods'.

These are goods that someone can enjoy only by depriving someone else of them. Their value is a function of scarcity. Because there are not enough of these goods to go around they command high status and economic value. If I have the best room in the Savoy Hotel and send my children to the best fee-paying schools, I am depriving someone else of access to the best hospitality experience and someone else's children of the benefit of the highest achieving educational environment. However egalitarian a society becomes there will always be a ranking of positional goods that conveys high prestige to those who are able to enjoy them.

Hirsch (1976) argues that the positional goods economy creates a permanent condition of relative deprivation. This law is true even in conditions of increasing affluence where more and more people become better off. As wealth in society rises, and my room in the Savoy Hotel falls within the income bracket of individuals and groups with lower social status, my propensity to book a more expensive room at the Hotel Pierre in New York will increase. Thus, the productive resources in society are progressively squandered in achieving ends of status that accumulate no general economic value.

Consider the issue in terms of the A&B analysis perspective<sup>2</sup>: If the incomes of A and B grow, but A's grows twice as fast as B's, the capacity of A to accumulate positional goods increases. If A consumes a greater proportion of positional goods his social status is magnified. If B witnesses the gap in positional goods consumption with A growing, his propensity to spend more of his disposable income in catching up will increase. Frank (2003) argues that the race to consume positional goods is to the detriment of collective wellbeing. One reason is that the race of the lower orders to match the consumption of the top quintile multiplies waste in society. If A spends his disposable income on the most powerful Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV), he creates the incentive for B to desire the same purchase so as to keep up with the Joneses's. If B's propensity to consume an SUV depends upon borrowing more he increases his level of indebtedness. If enough Bs emulate this pattern of behaviour, the indebtedness of the entire economy grows with corresponding risks to economic stability and growth. The argument updates Veblen's (1899) classic case against conspicuous consumption. Namely, that as societies become more wealthy the most well-off have a tendency to spend more on goods that have no economic productive worth, but high cultural cachet. The reason for this is that the

consumption of waste automatically conveys to others liberty from the necessity to work. In societies where the work ethic is paramount, liberation from this necessity is coveted. Hirsh (1976) and Frank (2003) concur with Veblen's (1899) conclusion that conspicuous consumption imperils economic stability by allocating a dangerous volume of productive resources to ends that have no economic benefit for society in general.

Relative deprivation is a term coined by Stouffer et al. (1949) in their study, *The American Soldier*. It means the perception by an individual or group of being adversely positioned with respect to scarcity than comparable individuals and groups. The concept was developed in the context of the affluent society by Runciman (1966) to explain why some individuals and groups continue to feel disadvantaged despite experience rising levels of prosperity.

The burden of the argument is that relative deprivation, like the poor, will always be with us. Undoubtedly, we must be realistic about what social engineering and the spread of affluence can achieve. This is not to be inferred as a covert anti-egalitarian argument. Neo-liberalism is very reassuring for anyone who believes in the doctrine of free enterprise as the key to wealth creation. But it is also a confidence trick. To begin with, it turns a blind eye to the negative social and economic consequences of wealth creation that have to do with conspicuous consumption and re-gearing the ladder of positional goods. The affluent society may make some people better off and generally increase the resources devoted to leisure, but it does not necessarily produce contentment. The law of relative deprivation means that the 'have's' will always position themselves economically in a manner that guarantees distinction from the 'have not's'. This law holds good irrespective of the level of economic growth achieved and the dedication of egalitarian policy.

This preferential positioning in relation to scarcity is not the reward for enterprise and industry, it is the expression of power. Warren Buffett and Lakshmi Mittal are not billions of times better than the workers on minimum wage. Their wealth is disproportionate to their talents and achievements and is only sustained by a system of unequal resource distribution that identifies scarcity as the spur to personal motivation. It is *power* that governs the allocation of resources and therefore the condition of scarcity. One could have a system in which personal want or protection of the environment was the key criterion of resource distribution. That this has not happened on a society-wide basis is testament to the

might of the wealthy whose privileged position enables them to defend and enhance their privileged status in relation to scarcity.

## The Dialectics of Positioning

Outwardly, the study of leisure is the study of how individuals exercise voluntarism. That is, the study of how individuals and groups make choices exercise freedom and succeed or fail to achieve life satisfaction in leisure. But voluntarism is neither absolute or unique. To subsist as a competent, relevant and credible actor, individuals and groups must accumulate, monitor and refine considerable emotional intelligence and expend significant emotional labour. This compromises orthodox notions of freedom, choice and self-determination that have been traditionally attributed to leisure forms and practice.

By this I mean: a) there are real differences between individuals and groups in respect of the choice, freedom and life satisfaction that might be exercised in leisure practice; and b) choice, freedom and life satisfaction must be considered as qualities of citizenship that are enmeshed with complex codes and representations that render them as attractive and desired characteristics in the conduct of life. Leisure is not just a matter of form and practice. It is a question of how form and practice is *represented* in relation to power. Individuals, groups and the leisure choices they make are located in a context of power. The defining feature of this context is unequal divisions between individuals and groups in relation to scarcity. This is somewhat disguised in everyday life, because leisure cultures typically focus upon *surplus*. That is, leisure forms and practice are organized around surplus time, surplus wealth and conspicuous consumption. However, surplus is a relative concept. No matter how abundant their access to surplus time and wealth, every individual and group is located in a context of scarcity.

The study of leisure addresses the dialectics between scarcity and surplus. By the term dialectics is meant the changing balance of power relationship between access to scarcity and the distribution of surplus. This requires the student of leisure to examine how emotional intelligence and emotional labour are applied in leisure settings; the relationship between material and symbolic inequality and trajectories of leisure behaviour; and the role of institutional allocative mechanisms, principally the state, the corporation, religion and the media, in distributing resources and legitimating or 'normalizing' the historically and socially specific distribution of power. Further, since social, cultural and economic processes have now been fully revealed to be global and to work outside the law as well as within it, students of leisure need to operate

with a conceptual canvas that incorporates globalization and illicit leisure, not as side issues, but as matters of central concern.

The next chapter is offered as a contribution to understanding the limitations of the old paradigm in leisure studies and making explicit the canvas that must be addressed if leisure and recreation are to be studied in relevant ways today. Before moving on to this, the high water mark of the old paradigm needs to be addressed: namely, the leisure society thesis. This thesis was the magic carpet that made the study of leisure so appealing to students in the late 1960s and 70s. It perpetrated a vision of leisure forms and practice that stressed social harmony, exaggerated the progressive effects of technological determinism, misconstrued the role of the corporation in forcing leisure behaviour to adopt the form of mere consumption activity, ignored the effects of globalization (particularly with respect to the development gap), neglected the question of illicit leisure and blandly reproduced the traditional connections between leisure, freedom and choice. From the perspective of an approach which understands the significance of emotional intelligence, emotional labour and material scarcity as the context in which leisure forms and practice are situated, the consequences of the leisure society thesis have been severe and on the whole negative. The leisure society thesis put the study of leisure on the map, but it committed it to studying a landscape that was ideal rather than real, wished-for rather than evidence-based.