

## **WHAT WE AREN'T STUDYING IN LEISURE: A LOOK "OUTSIDE" OUR FIELD**

*Yaniv Belhassen, University of Illinois*

*Christine Buzinde, University of Illinois*

*Zhi Li, University of Illinois*

*Rasul Mowatt, University of Illinois*

*Michael Mulvaney, University of Illinois*

*Heidi Reible, University of Illinois*

*Kimberly J. Shinew, University of Illinois*

### **Introduction**

Critically reading scholarship outside the leisure field is important for several reasons. Opening one's eyes to research in other fields, including its strengths and weaknesses, is a good starting position for spotting new possibilities in our own field. Another benefit is to achieve a comparative perspective, including learning about empirical research finding in neighboring fields and discovering alternative theories to guide our research. Yet another advantage is seeing links between distinct phenomena that can potentially lead to creative research. In our review of scholarship "outside" the leisure field, we discovered many scholars are examining common, everyday leisure activities that we as a field are not discussing, at least not to a large extent. Moreover, many of these leisure activities being discussed and examined are participated in by large segments of the population, and influence their day-to-day experiences as they go about their lives. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to describe some of the more popular daily leisure activities that are being discussed outside the field, but which are currently understudied in leisure studies.

### **Internet Use**

Since its inception, the Internet has become a global network connecting individuals all over the world (Mesch, 2001). Through electronic mail, newsgroups, and chat rooms, individuals are communicating, creating new social relationship, and exchanging resources such as social support, information, and knowledge. Internet use has become an extremely popular form of leisure for people of all ages, but seems particularly popular among younger age groups. In support of this contention, studies have reported a negative relationship between age and Internet use, in that the frequency of use is higher among young people (Kraut et al., 1998). Some scholars have argued that the Internet is especially attractive to people who have trouble getting out of their homes to socialize (Kling, 1996). According to this view, frequent Internet use is appealing to individuals who feel socially insecure, have restricted social lives, and are not involved in many social activities (Griffiths, 1999; Kling, 1996). Further, Internet use can be seen as a type of leisure activity that requires time, which may be at the expense of other face-to-face activities (Kraut et al., 1998). The time people devote to using the Internet might substitute for time spent on other leisure activities. Thus, internet users might differ from nonusers in the amount of time they engage in other leisure activities. Individuals who engage less in leisure activities might be more likely to be frequent internet users. The empirical evidence on this issue is contradictory. Some studies report that computer use is a substitute for social interaction with friends (Kraut et al., 1998), but others have found

that computer use is not at the expense of other social activities (Katz & Aspden, 1997). For example, a recent study reported a small but positive significant correlation between frequency of on-line service use and some leisure activities, such as going to movies and reading books (Robinson, Barth, & Kohout, 1997). As the empirical evidence is contradictory, the relationship between leisure activities and Internet use remains unexplored. We feel this is a fertile area of study given the popularity of internet use, and is deserving of further research from a leisure perspective.

### **Home Gardening**

Home gardening has become a popular leisure activity among adults. A recent report by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC, 2000) claimed that just over half of the adult population gardens weekly and a third do some gardening every day. The accessibility of gardening, for most people, and the relatively low cost make it an attractive leisure activity. Moreover, the garden space has become an important domestic space for leisure. As Bhatti and Church (2001) noted, gardens are interesting settings in that they provide researchers with a leisure space in which to examine social interaction, cultural exchanges, and family leisure. Often times the garden becomes an 'outdoor room' where children play, families relax, and entertaining occurs. In that sense, the garden is both a personal and private leisure space for group interactions involving family and friends (Allan & Crow, 1991). Gardens are also spaces that highlight complex relationships between leisure attitudes and age, gender, income and time availability. For example, the type of garden an individual chooses to cultivate is based, in part, on her/his available leisure time. Choosing to plant annuals versus perennials is often times based on one's amount of free time (Evans, 1999). Furthermore, some studies have suggested that gardens are not just a leisure space, but also a site for understanding, sensing, and connecting to nature. A home garden has been referred to as "nature under control," despite the huge variations between formal gardens and more natural gardens (Hoyles, 1991). Although community gardens have recently received some attention in our field, home gardening remains a relatively unexplored area of research. The relationship between the gardening activity and the gardening space lends itself to creative inquiry.

### **Televisions Viewing**

There are few leisure activities that we devote more time to than television viewing. According to a recent study, more than half of youth watch more than three hours of television per day on weekdays, and 60% of parents rarely or never limit their child's television viewing habits (Thompson & Austin, 2003). The average television weekly viewing time is approximately 27 hours per week, while the average reading time is 8; a 3 to 1 ratio (Thompson & Austin, 2003). Studies support the finding that children watch too much TV and spend too little time in other more active (both mentally and physically) leisure pursuits. It has been argued that negative side effects of high levels of viewing might include the promotion of "unintelligent consumerism" and a physically and intellectually passive dependency. However, the impact of television on social adjustment and youth behavior is not well understood. Tentative findings are that high amounts of television viewing are associated with relatively poor social skills and peer relations (Levine & Levine, 1996). In one study (Sharman, 1979) there was a relationship between low self-esteem and watching cartoons, which is often viewed as a form of

escapist behavior. Another study (Anderson, Huston, Schmitt, Linebarger & Wright, 2001) found that preschoolers, males in particular, who had an opportunity to view educational TV behaved less aggressively as adolescents. Television viewing has been linked to increased violence, teenage pregnancy; sexual perversion, disrespect for adults, and the stereotyping of low-status minorities and women (Thomspon & Austin, 2003). Overall, there are many gaps and contradictions in the literature. Further, the impact of parental control, social class, race, and peer pressure is not fully understood. The inability to disentangle multiple variables has plagued the effects of television viewing in many research studies. It has been suggested that since the effects of television viewing are not monolithic, care must be taken to consider various socioeconomic and environmental factors, as well as the reasons for viewing. Clearly, program content is an important consideration that needs to be also examined. In general though, the research appears to be saying that high levels of unsupervised mindless television viewing, especially when it is done in lieu of other more active leisure pursuits, can have detrimental effects. Again, we feel that given the popularity of this leisure activity, further research in our field is warranted. Television viewing is a daily activity for most people, and should be better understood from a leisure perspective.

### **Drinking**

Drinking and “partying” are popular leisure pursuits among a broad range of age groups, but are particularly popular among young people. Despite the apparent popularity of these pursuits, very little is written in leisure studies literature about these free time activities. According to Lo (2000), drinking alcohol has always played a dominant role in the lifestyle of young people by influencing their choice of leisure activities. Drinking on college campuses has become widely accepted and expected and thus, the topic has received quite a bit of attention outside the field. In particular, many studies have been conducted to explore the motivations associated with drinking (and illegal drug use), the frequency in which people engage in drinking behavior, correlates of drinking, and the social contexts in which people drink. There are entire journals devoted to these topics (Journal of Studies on Alcohol, Drug and Alcohol Dependence, International Journal of the Addictions). The overall breadth of articles related to drinking is quite impressive. For example, West (2001) examined drinking behaviors as sites for understanding how masculinities get socially constructed and negotiated. The leisure activities included in her study were drinking games, particular forms of male joking and bantering, watching or playing sports, sexual encounters with women, and the act of “being drunk.” Furthermore, “drinking with the boys” enables men to segregate by gender and by choice. West cited Sulkunen et al’s., (1997) contention that while the gendered division of labor in formal organizations such as the workplace has some history of analysis, less has been written about the creation of gendered divisions of leisure. We recognize that there has been much written about the gendered division of leisure, but these studies were not cited in this study that appeared in the Journal of Men’s Studies. As has been noted in other writings elsewhere, we often times seem to talk amongst ourselves, with our research and scholarship not being widely cited or recognized by others.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to provide a few examples of leisure activities and pursuits that are being examined by scholars “outside” our field. There are numerous other examples we found, including studies on cooking (Hollows, 2003) and shopping (Nava, 1997), going to nightclubs (Huat, 2004) and “funk balls,” and chat rooms devoted to cybersex (Palandri & Green, 2000). This paper was written to encourage leisure researchers to look outside the field of leisure studies to gain a greater appreciation and understanding of the role of leisure in the lives of individuals and society. Further, we posit that by critically reading about leisure topics written in journals in neighboring fields, we will be better informed regarding how to make linkages that are currently lacking, and will ultimately be more creative researchers of the phenomenon of leisure.

## References

- Allan, G., & Crow, G. (1991). Privatisation, home-centredness and leisure. *Leisure Studies*, 10, 19-32.
- Anderson, D. R., Huston, A. C., Schmitt, K. L., Linebarger, D. L., & Wright, J. C. (2001). Early childhood television viewing and adolescent behavior. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 66, 1-147.
- Bhatti, M., & Church, A. (2001). Cultivating nature: Homes and gardens in late modernity. *Sociology*, 35, 365-383.
- Griffiths, M. D. (1999). Internet addiction. *Psychologist*, 12, 246-250.
- Hollows, J. (2003). Leisure, labour and domestic masculinity in *The Naked Chef*. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6, 229-248.
- Hoyle, M. (1991). *The story of gardening*. London: Pluto Journeyman.
- Huat, C. B. (2004). Conceptualizing an East Asian popular culture, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 5, 200-221.
- Katz, J. E., & Aspden, P. (1997). A nation of strangers? *Communications of the ACM*, 40, 81-86.
- Kling, R. (1996). Synergies and competition between life in cyberspace and face-to-face communities. *Social Science Computer Review*, 14, 50-64.
- Kraut, R., Patterson, M., Lundmark, V., Kiesler, S., Mukopadhyay, T., & Scherlis, W. (1998). Internet paradox: A social technology that reduces social involvement and psychological well-being? *American Psychologist*, 53, 1017-1031.
- Levine, F. U., & Levine, R. F. (1996). *Society and education* (9<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, pp. 121-124.
- Lo, C. D. (2000). The impact of first drinking and differential association on collegiate drinking. *Sociological Focus*, 33, 265-280.
- Mesch, G. (2001). Social relationships and internet use among adolescents in Israel. *Social Science Quarterly*, 82, 329-339.
- Nava, M. (1997). Women, the city and the department store. In P. Falk and C. Campbell (Eds.). *The shopping experience*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Palandri, M., Green, L., (2000). Image management in a bondage, discipline, sadomasochist subculture: A cyber-ethnographic study. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 3, 631-641.

- Robinson, J. P., Barth, K., & Kohout, A. (1997). Social impact research: Personal computers, mass media and use of time. *Social Science Computer Review*, 15, 65-82.
- Sulkunen, P., Alasuutari, P., Natkin, R., & Kinnunen, M. (1997). *The urban pub. Finland: STAKES*.
- Thompson, F. T., & Austin, W. P. (2003). Television viewing and academic achievement revisited. *Education*, 124, 194-202.
- West, L. A. (2001). Negotiating masculinities in American drinking subculture. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 9, 371-392.

**ABSTRACTS**  
**of Papers Presented at the**  
**Eleventh Canadian Congress on Leisure Research**  
**May 17 – 20, 2005**  
**Hosted by**  
**Department of Recreation and Tourism Management**  
**Malaspina University-College**  
**Nanaimo, B.C.**  
**Abstracts compiled and edited by**  
**Tom Delamere, Carleigh Randall, David Robinson**  
**CCLR-11 Programme Committee**  
**Tom Delamere**  
**Dan McDonald**  
**Carleigh Randall**  
**Rick Rollins**  
**and**  
**David Robinson**



**Copyright © 2005 Canadian Association for Leisure Studies**  
**ISBN 1-896886-01-9**



Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). Please note that this document is copyrighted and CREDIT MUST BE PROVIDED to the originator of the document when you quote from it. You must not sell the document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by the Lifestyle Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>