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## Book Reviews

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*Leisure Life: Myth, Masculinity and Modernity.* Tony Blackshaw. London: Routledge, 2003.

**Reviewed by** Chris Rojek  
Professor of Sociology & Culture  
Nottingham Trent University  
Nottingham, England

This ambitious book tries to fuse location data on leisure obtained through participant observation with cutting-edge social theory. At its heart is a part ethnography/part memoir account of the author's participation in masculine working class leisure in Leeds. This is the most satisfying part of the book. Leisure studies is peculiarly bereft of genuinely convincing ethnographic studies. Certainly, nothing has been produced to match Paul Willis's (1977) hugely impressive *Learning To Labour*.

Blackshaw's work is not in that class. He is too close to the material, too involved in the leisure trajectories he describes and too clumsy in connecting leisure location data with theory, to match Willis's achievement. Nonetheless, there are rewarding insights into working class leisure forms here. The significance of the week-end and the vacation in working class leisure trajectories is well observed. Similarly, the description of performative space in leisure through which inhibited aspects of working class, masculine identity are released is powerfully rendered. However, the effect is weakened by ill judged *mis-en-scene* "imaginative" accounts of leisure "on location". The author aims to achieve the verbal equivalent of archive film-file footage, bringing back to life the immediacy and excitement of leisure events. But too often his accounts deteriorate into a sort of middle age sentimentality about lost youth and thinly concealed ambivalence about the value of education and upward mobility compared with the spontaneity and solidarity of his working class past.

Class is presented as the central structural influence on leisure practice. While the effects of gender, race and the life-cycle are noted, they are always inflected through the axis of class inequality. The context of the study is modernity rather than multi-culturalism. Drawing extensively on the sociology of Zygmunt Bauman, Blackshaw portrays modernity as dissolving boundaries and sweeping away collective agency. Blackshaw maintains that a major function of working class leisure is to sponsor intimacy based around nostalgia for unrealised power. The pronounced role of drinking, *braggadocio*, real and mock violence in leisure ritually symbolize working class impotence at work and in government. The sting in the tail of modernity is that these forms finally do not matter very much. They are abandoned as curiosities by

the tide of “progress”. The mechanical emphasis on collectivity, belonging and shared social capital in working class leisure is regarded as charming obsolescence in a consumer culture driven by individualism, velocity and self-help. Blackshaw’s “lads” are marooned in a matrix of leisure forms that provides a hollow memory of the past. They are constantly aware that leisure is an interlude in a world that is beyond their control and indifferent to their fate.

The book is curiously silent about strategies for action preferring instead to imply that modernity renders choice, freedom and self-determination superfluous in working class life. The presupposition of Blackshaw’s argument is that little can be done to change the character of the system. One either takes steps to acquire upward mobility and join the ranks of class traitors or one slides into a version of what Gellner called “romantic organicism” where the myths of class colonize individual consciousness. Both options reinforce class rule. The first provides new recruits to the legions of administrative and knowledge staff that manage the system, the second expands the pool of working class fatalism and quiescence. Despite the vitality of working class leisure forms there is therefore an oddly depressing quality expressed in the book about their functions.

Globalization and hybridity—themes that are growing in significance in leisure theory—do not feature in the book. The empirical focus is resolutely provincial. Leeds becomes the test-case for theories of modernity. The result is an enhanced sense of the location analysis of leisure practice. One can almost taste the beer in Blackshaw’s descriptions of beery week-ends of relentless pubbing and clubbing in Leeds city centre. But engagement with the larger themes of the role of multi-national corporations in directing working class leisure practice and the ambivalence of the state in promoting opportunities for advancement through leisure and upward mobility, is rare. If one can make a distinction between the *location* analysis of leisure practice (meaning quantitative and qualitative analysis of empirical leisure action), and *context* of leisure forms (meaning the networks of power and inequality that influence the allocation of economic and social capital), this study errs firmly on the side of location. Where questions of context are raised they are dealt with at the level of abstract theory. The latter is a promiscuous assembly from the writings of Bauman, Baudrillard, Bourdieu, Foucault, Victor Turner, Derrida. Often this treatment seems half-digested, as if Blackshaw is tendentiously using theory to support his empirical material. The more interesting and worthwhile option is to use empirical data to test theoretical propositions. An action approach to leisure studies arguably works best when it uses empirical data collected through location analysis to test the theoretical propositions of context. Moreover, the testing process should not simply be a method of falsifying or validating theory, but producing knowledge that will actively improve leisure life options. Blackshaw’s work avoids this turning. His book has a sort of disassociated quality, in which the empirical material is seldom illuminated by theory and *vice versa*. Perhaps there are two books here. One, an ethnography of working class leisure; and two, a

package tour around some aspects of *au courant* social theories that are grafted on to questions of leisure. Although there are some useful insights, and the ambition of the author should not be faulted, the book reads awkwardly as if it is caught between the devil and the deep-blue sea.

### Reference

Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labor: How working class kids get working class jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.

*Sport and Social Exclusion*. Michael Collins with Tess Kay. (2003). London and New York: Routledge

**Reviewed by** Kostas Alexandris  
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki  
Thessaloniki, Greece

*Sport and Social Exclusion* is a critical review of academic literature and applied projects, which were conducted mainly in the UK, in the areas of social exclusion, sport/leisure participation, and social policy. The main objective of the book is to indicate how specific groups of the population are disadvantaged in terms of sport and leisure participation. Michael Collins uses the concept of social exclusion as the main theme of the book, and the base of the analysis of the inequalities in sport participation.

The book starts with the definitions of the concepts of poverty and social exclusion (Chapter 2). The influence of poverty on leisure participation is the focus of chapter 4. Based on the British literature and on a British case study Collins argues that poverty is one of the major reasons for not taking part in sport and leisure activities. Collins did an excellent job using both the academic literature and the case study, and his conclusions are very clear. However, I would like to point out that the focus of this chapter and the evidence presented are on organized sporting activities, provided by leisure centers. The issue of the relationship between income and participation is more complex, when we refer to outdoor (unorganized) sporting activities. Studies in the area of leisure constraints, for example, have not supported the importance of financial constraints as determinants of sport and leisure participation.

Chapter 3 is a review of leisure constraints and leisure benefits literature. Collins made it clear that the objective of this chapter was only to provide definitions of the concepts, and not to review the extensive literature on the topic. However, considering the fact that leisure constraints have been a major theme in leisure studies literature in the last 20 years, and that this literature is very relevant to the issue of sport exclusion, I think that the book would benefit from a more detailed review of studies in this area, and from integrating the constraints theory, concepts, and findings within different chapters in the book.