

BOOK REVIEW**Speaking Up and Speaking Out: Working for Social and Environmental Justice through Parks, Recreation, and Leisure**

edited by
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This book should be part of every park, recreation, and leisure programme, and central in the continuing education of parks, recreation, and leisure (PRL) professionals. It's that important a topic, and that well created a book. Parks movements typically began in order to provide access to all strata in society. Now we face mounting social inequality. Addressing problems of social equity and environmental sustainability is key to high quality of life now and into the future. It is also, of course, a question of fairness. Reams of research have shown that environmental degradation is associated with social injustices and inequality. *Speaking Up and Speaking Out* superbly demonstrates how to and why to work "for social and environmental justice" in the parks, recreation, and leisure field. It is also the rare book that is accessible to all levels from undergraduate to seasoned professional.

Speaking Up and Speaking Out starts with personal accounts of emerging awareness of social inequality. Later sections move into practical yet well-researched accounts of justice and sustainability work in various types of PRL practice. The book is organized in three sections: "Know Thyself," "Those We Serve," and "Serving without Othering." With this framework, the editors demonstrate that service can be imposition and reproduce injustice unless it is done carefully and with full knowledge of one's presumptions and the lived experience of recreation participants.

Diane Samdahl's chapter illustrates most of these features. In "What Can 'American Beach' Teach Us?" Samdahl writes about the growth of a resort town that took over an historic African-American community on the Florida coast. "Until I accidentally learned about American Beach, I had never paired the history of the recreation movement with the parallel history of enforced segregation that prevented a large segment of our population from accessing public parks and recreation facilities" (p. 83). The case is well explained and accompanied by Samdahl's honest appraisal of her lack of knowledge which she then uses to talk about privileged status as a white person. The chapter starts with race and ends with social class and a variety of dimensions of inequality are highlighted.

While appropriate for undergraduates, the book will also push long-time practitioners to new attention to social disadvantages and their personal and profes-

sional involvement. The chapters sequence in such a way as to “scaffold” a learning process. Each chapter also ends with five or so questions for discussion in a class or that can serve professionals as checkpoints on their practice. Chapters often refer to other chapters, meaning the book comes across as a collective effort. Readers should be aware, however, that the book is entirely North American. “Race” features prominently in many chapters, although the U.S. and Canadian experiences on this topic are quite different. Other facets of social disadvantage, inequality, and environmental degradation are also featured throughout.

The chapters rarely point fingers; this is not a book that “guilt trips” readers. The authors take pains, as Samdahl did, to recount their own stories. Whether it is from the vantage of social privilege (such as an elite professor) or someone who has personally experienced racism, homophobia, or other discrimination, the personal accounts and scholarship are well integrated in accessible writing. Editors Dustin and Paisley are to be praised for their leadership in crafting such a well-modulated collection.

One of the chapters most often referred to by other contributors is Erin Sharpe’s “Are You Awake Yet?” Sharpe details the conscientization process of learning about, internalizing, and acting on social differences, discriminations, and one’s own place in the world. It can be an unsettling experience, she points out, because it forces one to reconsider how the world works. This means attention to the systemic and structural elements of society that cause injustice. “For example, racial oppression exists not because of individuals who are racially prejudiced (although there certainly are such individuals), but because we live in a racist society, a society that in all of its forms, practices, and structures, maintains and reinforces the privileging of some races over others” (p. 16). This is why, at the risk of repeating myself, *Speaking Up and Speaking Out* positions social and environmental justice to be the province of every sector of the recreation field and everyone working in the field; the issues are systemic and require full awareness of all professionals to address. Sharpe describes three responses that students (and readers) may have when social justice is brought up: (1) it validates some people’s lived experience; (2) it becomes eye-opening for others; and (3) it will be resisted by others. Systems of privilege are “hidden in plain sight” because they are what is assumed as normal.

For example, after years in outdoor recreation, I began teaching in a university PRL program. Students usually assume the outdoors to be “natural” and valorize it as “good.” But another instructor had a class spend an autumn night outdoors with only the clothing they could buy with \$10 at a thrift shop. Nature is not so good in those circumstances! Similarly, when the Girl Guides of Canada tried to understand why new immigrants and refugees would not participate, even when funding was provided, they had to re-examine what they had assumed was normal to everyone. Leaders learned that “camping” sometimes evoked the horror of refugee “camps” and was not an experience to be sought.

The PRL profession has to engage these issues or be a tool for social dominance. How many of us will think about Aspen, Colorado, and how such “leisure spaces serve as social venues that mirror and promote dominant social paradigms” (p. 92)? Yet in their excellent book, *The Slums of Aspen: Immigrants vs. the Environment in America’s Eden*, Park and Pellow (2011) show how recreation in Aspen is

produced on the backs of low-waged and precarious labourers, “where we live and work and other people play” (paraphrasing a popular slogan in the environmental justice movement). “Environmental privilege” is produced by the operations of a “leisure imaginary” that rarely if ever takes social justice into account, Park and Pellow charge.

Chapter after chapter of *Speaking Up and Speaking Out* compellingly illustrates the unpacking of privilege as the beginning of equity and justice. Nina Roberts’ narratives of racialized discrimination as a recreation professional unpack institutional racism in the PRL profession. Troy Glover delineates the consequences of “peak oil” and climate change. Susan Arai creates a poem about the intersections of her experience as Asian-descended, Canadian-born, and nonheterosexual woman. Interestingly, Arai has heavily footnoted her poem. And then, she interviews herself in conventional textual form about why she wrote her contribution as a poem, which points out how expository preferences and epistemological norms also undermine acceptance of difference. Gwynn Powell, Joseph Pate, and Corey Johnston create reader’s theater about service learning as genuine service, that is participation with others without othering. The text is surprisingly inclusive; Mary Parr describes “hyperparenting” as a social justice issue. Initially unconvinced, I soon learned that such overparenting is a class-related privilege, and Parr is to be commended for a nuanced discussion that shows the benefits and disadvantages of both middle class and working class parenting strategies. A wealth of other valuable chapters await readers.

As this review has indicated, there is much diversity in the contributions to *Speaking Up and Speaking Out*. The book is not a compendium of social injustices and what the PRL profession can do about them. It is something far more complex, and for that reason, more beneficial. Readers should find themselves challenged and will not agree with all points, but that is to be expected. If addressing sustainability and justice were obvious and universally acceptable, they would not be present concerns.

Is it such a challenge to get the PRL profession to examine its practices in light of social and environmental justice? Are concerns about social justice and environmental sustainability just for “special” sectors of the PRL field? *Speaking Up and Speaking Out* capably demonstrates that these should be thoroughly integrated as a foundation to the work in the PRL profession.

If I have any concerns with the book, it is that I would have liked to have seen a more sustained and careful conceptualization of what “justice” means. Similarly, it became clear that “environmental justice” in the chapters usually meant environmental protection, as if that were justice for nature. This differs from the more common usage of the term to mean the disproportionate distribution of environmental risks such as pollution or hazardous waste among populations of different racial and income characteristics. Considering “justice for nature” is valuable because it extends the typically anthropomorphic environmental justice literature. But again, concepts such as justice and nature are culturally specific, even ethnocentric, ways of thinking.

After a while, the phrases “social and environmental justice” or “social justice and environmental sustainability” become cumbersome. In the spirit of reflexiv-

ity and dialogue that *Speaking Up and Speaking Out* promotes, I suggest “just sustainability” as a usefully encompassing term. It has been advocated by Agyeman (2005) as a proactive approach for action that includes high quality of life and equity in the present, living within ecological limits, and fairness for future generations. This positive vision permeates *Speaking Up and Speaking Out*. I dearly hope that it becomes well established in university PRL programmes and professional continuing education.

References

- Agyeman, J. (2005). *Sustainable communities and the challenge of environmental justice*. New York: New York University Press.
- Park, L. S. H., & Pellow, D. N. (2011). *The slums of Aspen: Immigrants vs. the environment in America's Eden*. New York: New York University Press.