# Articles

# Leisure, Diversity and Social Justice

Maria T. Allison
Department of Recreation Management and Tourism
Arizona State University

Issues of justice and injustice have only been tangentially addressed in the leisure literature. The "social-justice paradigm" may provide an important conceptual umbrella for leisure scholars to connect a range of research/ scholarly endeavors including issues related to gender, race/ethnicity, social class, disability, age, and sexual orientation. This paper explores the viability of the social-justice paradigm for leisure research by focusing on the work of Young (1990) in *Justice and the Politics of Difference.*

According to Young, many historical discussions of justice are grounded in a distributive paradigm that emphasizes instrumental principles embedded in individualism, accrual of goods/resources, and a competitive marketplace ethos of survival of the fittest. Thus, the "good life" has been defined within parameters of the possession and consumption of material goods and the acquisition of pleasure and comfortable lifestyles. Many post-modern theories of justice, however, move beyond the distributive paradigm to assess the institutional conditions and arrangements that explain particular distributions of wealth, power, and status that exist among historically disenfranchised populations including women, people of color, individuals with disabilities, gays and lesbians, the poor, and the elderly:

> As doers and actors we seek to promote many values of social justice in addition to fairness in the distribution of goods: learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings; participating in forming and running institutions, and receiving recognition for such participation; playing and communicating with others, and expressing our experience, feelings, and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen. (Young, 1990, p. 37)

Social justice, then, concerns the degree to which societal institutions promote the conditions necessary for the realization of these values. *Injustice* is defined by the extent to which the pursuit of such values are inhibited by the oppressive institutional constraints and barriers that inhibit self-determination and growth. Contemporary notions of justice and injustice thus move beyond the overt forms of racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia,

Dr. Allison can be reached at Recreation Management and Tourism, Arizona State University, Main Campus, PO Box 874905, Tempe, AZ 85287-4905 or by email at: icmta@asu.edu.

and ageism toward uncovering the more covert and systemic properties of injustice that are embedded in everyday interaction (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998; Young, 1990):

> Some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanism—in short, the normal processes of everyday life. (Young, 1990, p. 41)

Although the social, cultural, historical and political histories of op-pressed groups differ, there are five conditions that they share in common: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and vio-lence. *Exploitation* refers to the control and domination of one group over the economic and social resources of less powerful groups. Issues about who gets which jobs, how that work is compensated, and what types of work are left for particular groups form the central dimension of economic exploi-tation. Not only is the distribution of types of labor important, but so to are the structural, societal features that continue to constrain the kinds of op-portunities available to people of difference.

*Marginalization and powerlessness* refer to the extent to which groups of people are "expelled from useful participation in social life" (Young, p. 53). Marginalization and powerlessness may take on many forms including ma-terial deprivation as well as exclusion from decision-making, opportunities for personal and workplace development, and a range of life choices. "Even if marginals were provided a comfortable material life within institutions that respected their freedom and dignity, injustice of marginality would remain in the form of uselessness, boredom, and lack of respect" (Young, p. 55).

*Cultural imperialism* refers to the means by which people of difference are codified and represented as "Other" by the dominant groups perspec-tives and experiences thus rendering other groups invisible. It is the process by which the dominant group defines and expropriates the center through widely disseminated mass communication, the maintenance of stereotypes, and other forms of cultural expression. "This, then, is the injustice of cultural imperialism: that the oppressed group's own experience and interpretation of social life finds little expression that touches the dominant culture, while that same culture imposes on the oppressed group its experience and inter-pretation of social life" (Young, p. 60). As many critical and postmodern scholars demonstrate, historically oppressed groups continue to struggle, de-fine, and redefine themselves in ways quite different from those imposed by the dominant order.

*Violence* is the last major characteristic shared by disenfranchised groups. It includes physical and mental abuse as well as *fear of violence*. As Young notes, it is essential to explore not only the idiosyncratic/psychological con-ditions that cause such behavior, but also the social and structural conditions that foster violence in contemporary culture.

*Justice and the Leisure Domain*

Issues of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism have been analyzed to varying degrees in the leisure literature. *Gendered leisure* has perhaps been the most thoroughly explored with regard to issues of marginalization and exploitation of girls and women in sport and leisure. There is an ever-expanding body of literature that identifies the institutional conditions that foster inequity (Craik, 1997; Deem, 1986; Frederick and Shaw,1995; Green, Hebron & Woodward, 1990; Gunter & Gunter, 1980; Hall, 1996; Henderson, 1986, 1994; Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw & Freysinger, 1996; Shaw, 1994, 1999; Wearing, 1998). The role of violence in constricting leisure choices has yet to be thoroughly explored (Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger,1996; Wesely, Allison, Schneider, In press). *Race and ethnicity* leisure-based research has focused less on justice-related issues and more heavily on the influence of race/ethnicity on participation patterns (Floyd, 1998). There is limited research on barriers to access and discrimination (cf. Gramann & Allison, 1999). Leisure-related issues such as environmental justice, institutional bias and discrimination, program/agency nonresponsiveness, and violence have yet to be systematically explored.

*Individuals with disabilities and the elderly* suffer a host injustices around issues of organizational exclusion, discrimination, and stigmatization (Asch & Fine, 1988; Datillo, 1994). This body of scholarship, often encompassed within the therapeutic-recreation perspective, focuses primarily on programmatic initiatives to educate and rehabilitate the elderly and the disabled (Witt, 1988). Although such research is critically important, there is a great need to understand the structural and institutional barriers (Kennedy, Austin, & Smith, 1987) that continue to diminish the rights and opportunities of these individuals in a host of recreation/travel environments (e.g., employment opportunities, program accessibility).

Finally, our leisure-research efforts have failed to systematically address issues related to social class and sexual orientation. Although social class is frequently included as a variable in a range of studies, its role in the lives and conditions among the poor and working classes have been generally ignored (Dawson, 1986, 1988a, 1988b, in progress; Kelly, 1974; Rojek, 1985). This may be due, in part, to the privileged-ideological premise that leisure, by its very nature, is inclusive and neutralizes class-based differentiation (Dawson, in progress).

A similar pattern of omission has occurred with regard to gay and lesbian issues (Kivel, 1994, 1997, in progress; Grossman, 1992; Jacobson, 1994). Kivel (in progress) notes that this scholarly exclusion reflects not only an academic discomfort with issues related to sexual identity, but reflects the heterosexist orientation of society and the leisure field as a whole. Leisure-related issues or marginalization and oppression are just beginning to be explored.

A "social-justice paradigm" is one approach that allows leisure scholars to integrate and expand the parameters of scholarly efforts surrounding

"people of difference." It provides a conceptual map that allows scholars to identify and analyze the shared conditions of experience among disenfranchised populations. Institutional injustice is not selective but cuts across issues of gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, disability, and sexual orientation. If social change is to occur, it is essential to better understand the institutional conditions, properties, and processes that foster exclusion. Furthermore, discussions about diversity and multiculturalism can expand beyond the "richness-in-diversity" perspective to analyses of institutional conflicts (Schneider, this issue) and barriers. These types of research efforts shift analysis from the group characteristics to the institutions that make difference problematic (Allison, 1997, 1999).

Finally, this paradigm provides an important venue for leisure scholars to begin exploring the ideological suppositions that underlie our own scholarly endeavors. It is important to understand the extent to which our unique historical, social, and political development as a science and profession has contributed to the unintended marginalization and exploitation of particular groups in our research and professional endeavors.

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