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Research Reflection

The Implication of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice for Leisure Studies

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The purpose of this article is to illustrate the effectiveness of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory and encourage more holistic use of his concepts of habitus, capital, field, and symbolic violence in leisure research. We briefly review the manner in which leisure researchers have utilized Bourdieu's work. Second, we apply Bourdieu's notions of habitus, capital, field, and symbolic violence to understand inequitable participation in hunting activities in American society. We conclude by offering recent issues in recreational hunting and recommendations for practitioners based on interpretations of Bourdieu's concepts.

Keywords Bourdieu, habitus, hunting, symbolic violence, theory of practice

Introduction

Throughout a career that lasted more than half a century, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu transformed the practice of social science research through his formulation of novel theoretical tools and provocative empirical studies (Grenfell, 2004). Despite his influence, it is surprising how few North American leisure researchers have employed his

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concepts and theory in their work. Moreover, extant leisure studies' sporadic usage of Bourdieu's concepts failed to demonstrate their interrelations and comprehensive analytic scope of his theoretical framework. While acknowledging the growing interest in Bourdieu's work within leisure studies, we contend that leisure researchers have not used his concepts and theory of practice to their full potential.

Bourdieu's theory of practice offers scholars a unique comprehensive approach for examining differential practices of leisure in contemporary societies. In particular, Bourdieu sought to reconcile what he saw as the divergent analytic frames of objectivism, exemplified by the structuralism of Levi-Strauss, the functionalism of Durkheim, and subjectivism, represented by the work of Husserl and Heidegger (Grenfell, 2008). In place of these extremes, his theory of practice explores activities of everyday life, including leisure, as being constituted through a dialectic of objective social relations and actions based on subjective dispositions (Grenfell, 2008). Furthermore, Bourdieu's critical orientation towards the theorization of the practice of everyday life offers an important counter to the positivist bent of leisure research in North America (Blackshaw, 2010; Rojek, 2010).

What makes Bourdieu even more intriguing for leisure scholars is that, in contrast to other social theorists, he believed that leisure settings, rather than sites of economic production, were the central context for the perpetuation of social inequality and stratification. Thus, the purpose of this article is to describe the utility of Bourdieu's theory of practice and to encourage its holistic use for understanding leisure phenomenon. To this end, this article is organized into three sections. First, we briefly review the manner in which Bourdieu's work has been utilized in leisure studies. Second, using the practice of recreational hunting in the United States, we illustrate how his analytic concepts enrich our understanding of social inequalities related to this leisure practice. We conclude by discussing further implications of his theory of practice for leisure research and practitioners.

Bourdieu and Existing Leisure Research

Overall, Bourdieu's work focused on leisure disposition, and how it constructs and reinforces existing social position and power relations. Although Bourdieu inspired numerous studies across a wide range of disciplines including anthropology, education, sociology, and philosophy, leisure researchers in North America have made relatively little effort to apply Bourdieu's theory of practice to the investigation of leisure and recreation practices. A notable exception to the neglect of Bourdieu's work in leisure studies has been the application of his conceptualizations of social capital, reflected in a special issue of *Journal of Leisure Research* on leisure and social capital. Reviewing the concept of social capital, Glover and Hemingway (2005) noted different conceptualizations from Bourdieu, Putnam (2000), and Coleman (1988) and suggested leisure researchers should be attentive to the distinctions among them. Similar to other scholars, Bourdieu (1984) described social capital as an individual's access to resources via participation in a social network. However, in contrast to others, Bourdieu explicated the inherent exclusivity and potentially repressive effects of social capital. As opposed to Putnam's (2000) more functionalist depiction of social capital, Bourdieu's articulation of the concept was grounded in his understanding of social positioning and social capital's inherent connection to other forms of capital (e.g., economic capital). Since it is valuable only to the extent that it is exclusive, social capital may reinforce entrenched social divisions based on race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation.

This dynamic has been well-illustrated by several empirical investigations, including Glover's (2004) analysis of social divisions and racial discrimination in the context of a community gardening project, Sharpe's (2006) depiction of social status and social capital

within a grassroots softball league, and Devine and Parr's (2008) exploration of the manner in which the concept of disability is structured by social networks in a summer camp (see also Haluza-DeLay, 2006; Mulcahy, Parry, & Glover, 2010; Shinew, Glover, & Parry, 2004; Son, Yarnal, & Kerstetter, 2010). While this line of analysis has continued, Arai (2006) has challenged leisure scholars to be more circumspect in their use of social capital. In contrast to thinking of social capital as an associated feature of static social networks, she contended that scholars must recognize the "spheres of play" that exist in contemporary societies, especially in leisure contexts, that facilitate more fluid identities and social relations.

In addition to social capital, some leisure scholars have used the singular concepts of habitus and cultural capital. These include examinations of leisure repertoires (Stalker, 2011), underrepresentation of African Americans as visitors to Rocky Mountain National Park (Erickson, Johnson, & Kivel, 2009), interracial contact in leisure (Floyd & Shinew, 1999), informal hierarchies in communal celebrations (Dunlap, 2009), demographic transformations in societies' cultural habits (Luckerhoff, Lemieux, & Paré, 2008), the gendered nature of video-gaming (Delamere & Shaw, 2008), women's participation in ice hockey (Auster, 2008), leisure consumption in the relationship with power (Rojek, 2006), swing dancing (Doane, 2006), skateboarding (Atencio, Beal, & Wilson, 2009), and cycling (Steinbach, Green, Datta, & Edwards, 2011).

While we applaud these efforts, singular usage of Bourdieu's concept significantly weakens his explanatory power. In fact, habitus, capital, and field are not independent to one another but deeply interrelated within Bourdieu's holistic theoretical framework. By synthesizing three concepts' novel insight into culture, power, class formation, and social reproductions into his theory or practice, Bourdieu ultimately offers a comprehensive explanation on the manner in which social inequities are established and reproduced through social institutions and cultural practices (Grenfell, 2008; Swartz, 1997). Thus, examining each concept out of the context of his larger theoretical perspective obscures Bourdieu's theoretical depth and the full efficacy of his work for analyzing leisure behavior.

Habitus, Capital, and Field: Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

To advocate more robust use of Bourdieu's work, we begin by describing his theory of practice as embodied in the interrelated concepts of habitus, capital, and field (Bourdieu, 1984), and proceed by suggesting how these concepts may be applied to inequitable hunting participation in the U.S. *Habitus* describes individuals' subjective dispositions and modes of conduct that result from the internalization of social and cultural norms, social structures, and material relations (Browitt, 2004). As such, habitus determines what is appropriate or inappropriate, available or unavailable, and possible or impossible for individuals in a given social situation. In doing so, habitus reconciles the agency-structure dichotomy in sociological analysis by describing the socially constructed nature of individual preferences and choices and their relations to the shared cultures that define social groups. In addition, the concept of habitus captures the manner in which individuals' dispositions are structured by deep socio-historical conditioning (Widick, 2004). As such, habitus is an expression of individuals' social status as well as their historical position in the social context.

In this regard, the concepts of *capital* and *field* play a crucial role in the formation of habitus. For Bourdieu (1986), capital is not merely a social resource that may be used for productive ends, but also an important determinant of individuals' social status. His schema includes four types of capital: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. Economic capital can be readily converted into money so it indicates one's financial status. For Bourdieu, economic capital is important primarily because it provides access to the other forms of capital. Social capital refers to those resources that are available via one's social

networks, and describes the extent to which individuals can extract such resources in the service of certain goals. Thus, social capital is concerned not only with “how many people I know” but also “who I know.” Cultural capital denotes a wide range of embodied characteristics (e.g., an athletic physique), cultural resources (e.g., a collection of paintings), and institutional credentials (e.g., a doctoral degree) that are positioned as superior or inferior based on ascribed social and cultural status. Interestingly, cultural capital is often pursued in the context of leisure, and one’s cultural awareness is often expressed via patterns of consumption and ownership of cultural objects.

Finally, symbolic capital is “a form of power that is not perceived as power but as legitimate demands for recognition, deference, obedience, or the services of others” (Swartz, 1997, p. 90). It is charisma or power that *legitimizes* value of capital within the field. Bourdieu argued that exercising such power is a form of *symbolic violence*. In short, symbolic violence is a tacit and subtle form of oppression exerted by dominant groups in order to maintain or improve their superior position. Bourdieu (1977, 1990) contended that symbolic domination plays an equally important role as physical and material oppression in the formation and reproduction of social hierarchies in contemporary human society. Dominant social groups establish social hierarchies by justifying their distinctive dispositions and cultural tastes as superior in quality, thereby distancing themselves from others. These groups also use social capital and symbolic violence as a means to limit access to the skills, appreciation, and spaces required to participate in dominant culture. The dominated often unconsciously accept the superior symbolic status of higher cultural and social tastes and the inferior symbolic status of their own positions and dispositions without significant or sustained resistance (Schubert, 2008).

Bourdieu’s articulation of capital was inextricably linked to the concept of *field*. Field is the structure of the social spaces where habitus is formed, capitals are distributed, and their values are determined (Bourdieu, 1984). Metaphorically speaking, field may be understood as an athletic field where individual players hold their own position and implement their own strategies to compete against other players to maintain or improve their status by accumulating greater capital, in its various forms (Thomson, 2008, p. 69). Multiple fields exist in society and each field has its own history, rules, and social orders.

Using these concepts, Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of practice simultaneously offers broad and in-depth explanations of the ways in which social inequality is created and reproduced across generations. Moreover, Bourdieu emphasized that power relationships and inequities were elemental features of human society and should therefore be a perpetual focus of human behavioral research (Swartz, 1997). Leisure practices are not exceptional in this regard, especially to the extent that they tend to reproduce varying forms of social, political, and economic inequities (Blackshaw & Long, 2005; Rojek, 1989, 2005, 2006). With this in mind, we illustrate Bourdieu’s theory of practice by sketching its application to the phenomenon of inequality in hunting participation. Authors such as Arai and Pedlar (2003) and Edwards and Matarrita-Cascante (2011) critique that much of the existing leisure research is predominantly individualistic and agency-focused and emphasizes the psychological experiences of individuals. Moreover, what is often absent from examinations of inequality in leisure or even explorations of differences in leisure patterns is sound theoretical underpinning and robust description of leisure as practiced (Floyd, 1998; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2001). Bourdieu’s insights into power and larger social structure hold the potential to enrich our understanding of individual leisure and recreational practices within the social and cultural context. In this paper, we will analyze recreational hunting participation in the United States based on Bourdieu’s theory of practice. Through its new approach to hunting inequality, our analysis will provide meaningful practical implications for alleviating the discrepancy in leisure access.

Hunting Participation and Bourdieu

Recreational hunting is among the most popular form of hunting in contemporary American society (Sharp & Wollscheid, 2009). Researchers have identified gender and race as the two most significant predictors of recreational hunting participation; women and people of color are far less likely to engage in hunting compared with White men (Heberlein, Ericsson, & Wollscheid, 2002; Heberlein, Serup, & Ericsson, 2008). For example, 13.7 million Americans participated in hunting in 2011, and the overwhelming majority of those hunters were men (89%) and Whites (94%) (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2012). However, the hunting literature tends to ascribe this disproportional participation pattern to a few demographic factors or personal preferences and falls short of comprehending this leisure phenomenon within a comprehensive theoretical framework.

Field is a useful conceptual tool to examine the socio-historical context of recreational hunting participation in the United States. Although hunting is a male dominated leisure activity in contemporary American society (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2012), the idea of hunting as a domain of masculine recreation is a relatively recent construction within the hunting field, originated with the editors and writers of hunting magazines such as *Outdoor Life*, *Field and Steam*, and *Forest and Stream* (Smalley, 2005a). As recently as the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such magazines advocated and encouraged women's participation in recreational hunting, claiming that hunting was appropriate for both men and women (Smalley, 2005a; 2005b). Not only did women submit hunting narratives, fiction, and poetry, but they also became editors and regular columnists for prominent hunting magazines (Smalley, 2005a). During this period, the primary focus of hunting magazines was to distinguish recreational hunting from utilitarian subsistence or market hunting and thereby establish it as a legitimate sport (Smalley, 2005b). As such, male editors and writers believed that presence of women would enhance the reputation of recreational hunting as a respectable leisure activity. Thus, what hunting magazines emphasized was "not some masculine conception of hunting that carried deep cultural significance for men's gender identities, but rather a *race* and *class-based* definition of a sport that included both women and men" (Smalley, 2005a, p. 188, emphasis added). For example, Charles Hallock, editor of *Forest and Stream*, claimed that legitimate hunting is reserved for "wealthy man and hard working citizen," and "negroes of South, who all use guns" are not included in this category (Smalley, 2005a, p. 188).

However, the gender-neutral image of hunting started to disappear in 1920s. Once hunting has been recognized as a legitimate recreational activity for elite White Americans, the editors and writers accomplished their political goal so they were not particularly concerned about women's hunting anymore (Smalley, 2005a). In the meanwhile, the popularity of hunting gradually diminished in America due to urbanization, preservation movement, and prevalence of anthropomorphism represented by fables, children's books, and Disney cartoons (Altherr, 1987). The editorial needed a new political agenda to rejuvenate hunting's popularity.

Coincidentally, the outbreak of World War II provided a suitable circumstance for hunting magazines to promote their sport based on nationalism and militarism. Once the United States entered the war in 1941, establishing a strong military force quickly became a priority. To bolster hunting's popularity once again, hunting magazines promptly took advantage of this social circumstance; rather than embracing female hunters, they discarded the class-based image of legitimate hunters and started to define recreational hunting as an enjoyable pastime for every White man (Smalley, 2005b). They posited that many of the skills and experience involved in hunting could significantly strengthen America's military power (Altherr, 1987). For example, *Field and Stream* Editor David Newell professed in

1942 that “if [a man] can hit a running deer, he can hit a running Jap. If he can swing fast enough for a mallard, he can knock down a Messerschmitt” (Altherr, 1987, p. 157). Moreover, hunting magazines deliberately created and disseminated “an image of sport hunting that was exclusively male and decisively masculine” in order to entice World War II veterans (Smalley, 2005a, p. 190). They portrayed hunting as the activity that recaptures profound battlefield experience and used “militarist and misogynist rhetoric to exclude women from authentic sport hunting” (Smalley, 2005a, p. 193). In postwar portrayals of hunting, women were often described as intellectually, emotionally, and physically incapable of handling firearms and appreciating recreational hunting. Within the United States, women’s participation in hunting was discouraged and problematized until the 1970s.

While militarism helped to create the masculine image of recreational hunters, racism was also a strong ideological force that legitimized the exclusion of African Americans in recreational hunting. Despite the fact that subsistence and market hunting were important survival and economic activities for African Americans during post-Civil War era, White editors and recreational hunters denigrated African Americans’ hunting practice as uncivilized form or unethical overexploitation of game (Giltner, 2008; Smalley, 2005b). Furthermore, racial discrimination limited African Americans’ acquisition of economic, cultural, and social capital required for recreational hunting. Institutionalized slavery and its legacy in the United States made it almost impossible for African Americans to accumulate sufficient economic capital to purchase hunting equipment (Feagin, 2000; Feagin, 2006; Swinton, 1990). Similarly, fishing and hunting clubs that constituted early environmental and conservation movement in the United States functioned in part as “a refuge for well-off Euro-Americans” where they can escape from “urban melting pot” and experience “joys of primitive fraternity among their racial and ethnic kin” (Jordan & Snow, 1992, p. 76). As such, it was unimaginable that African Americans would be granted access to fishing and hunting clubs (Fox, 1981). Many national parks and wilderness areas were also visited and managed primarily by White middle-class and people of color were not allowed to freely visit these areas (Byrne & Wolch, 2009; Dorsey, 1998; Taylor, 2000). Racist gun control laws that existed in much of American history also limited African Americans’ access to guns and firearm licenses (Cramer, 1995). Compared to White Americans, African Americans generally had greater difficulty accessing financial resources, equipment, knowledge, skills, and social support that were necessary for engaging in recreational hunting.

Thus, Bourdieu’s critical perspective allows us to analyze disproportionate access to recreational hunting in the light of power and helps scholars understand how such inequities resulted in the transformation of individual dispositions towards the activity. White male writers who had more symbolic capital in the field of recreational hunting exercised symbolic violence to exclude women and people of color from recreational hunting. They arbitrarily constructed women and African Americans as inauthentic and illegitimate hunters in order to maintain their superior position in the field of recreational hunting. Militarism and racism were two ideological contexts that justified this discriminatory practice (Stewart, Parry, & Glover, 2008). Women and African Americans rarely recognized the arbitrariness and historical contingency of such portrayals and readily accepted their subjugated position as common sense. As a result, the cultural construction of hunting as an activity for White men has been normalized without encountering significant resistance.

The concept of habitus explains today’s disproportional hunting participation as the product of multiple social conditions including the historical development of this activity. By internalizing previously mentioned socio-historical circumstance, women and African Americans have established the habitus that makes them perceive recreational hunting as unorthodox or undesirable activity. For White males living in rural areas, participation in

recreational hunting has been deemed appropriate and desirable, even commonsensical. Since the 1920s, hunting has been accepted as a venue for rural White men to display machismo and immerse themselves in comradeship with other male participants (Emel, 1995; Kheel, 1996; Marks, 1991). Rural male hunters considered hunting as an important educational opportunity for young generations to shape a strong masculine identity and learn about manhood (Kheel, 1996; Smalley, 2005a). The majority of male hunters are introduced to hunting by their fathers or other prominent male mentors (Bissell, Duda, & Young, 1998). Today, 81% of rural male residents in America who had a hunting father engage in hunting at least once in their life time (Stedman & Heberlein, 2001). The male dominance in hunting has been perpetuated by adult male hunters by introducing their male descendents to this activity. Conversely, participation in the same activity by members of excluded groups, female and African American in this case, would be seen as inappropriate and impossible or even an act of betrayal of one's cultural heritage and norms. Opportunities to participate in hunting might not be seen as available to particular race/ethnic and/or gender groups. Habitus explains that unequal hunting participation both produces and is a product of distinctive group tastes that have been inter-generationally shaped and reproduced.

Our analysis on today's unequal hunting participation using a framework from Bourdieu illustrates a socio-historical backdrop of the way in which hunting has been constructed as a gendered and racialized leisure activity and how this image has been perpetuated. Bourdieu's analytical perspective deepens our understanding in hunting participation by going beyond investigation on demographic characteristics and expanding our focus to power dynamic, formation of habitus, and the larger socio-historical structure. The utility of Bourdieu's theory of practice lies in the excavation of these intricacies and complexities associated with leisure activity.

Conclusion

In this article, we have sought to acknowledge the potential benefits of Bourdieu's theory of practice in leisure research and thereby promote the comprehensive use of his theories in leisure studies. Bourdieu's ideas promise to expand the ways in which leisure behavior may be examined and understood. Our analysis on disproportional hunting participation showed that White Americans exercised symbolic violence and historically limited women and African Americans' access to hunting clubs and the activity. White male domination in hunting is almost taken for granted in contemporary American society, yet critical analysis on power dynamics in the field of hunting magazine revealed the gendered and racialized image of hunting is highly problematic. By understanding unequal access to certain leisure activity as the dominate group's meticulous control or oppression toward people with less power, Bourdieu's theory of practice encourages us to understand the leisure participation in the light of a larger social and power inequality sustaining in our history. We believe his theoretical framework can also effectively explain inequalities in numerous other leisure contexts.

Moreover, an important practical implication of Bourdieu's ideas is to excavate symbolic violence deeply embedded in leisure contexts and eventually help practitioners to design programs and business courtesies that alleviate or dispel such disparities. Recently, recreational hunting's White male image has been the target of interrogation. Ironically, women and African Americans' participation in hunting becomes an important issue in the field of hunting because they can potentially offset declines in hunting population over the years (Heberlein, Serup, & Ericsson, 2008). Moreover, the continuous advancement of firearm technology has increased women's access to hunting so the activity's masculine

identity becomes questionable (Haraway, 1991; Littlefield, 2010). If hunting magazines or practitioners once again take advantage of this situation and try to control or promote women and African Americans' hunting participation primarily for their own financial or social benefits, they would repeat the symbolic violence and perpetuate existing power inequality. For Bourdieu, a critical step to terminate or alleviate this injustice is to *empower* women and African Americans and strengthen their agency by enlightening the arbitrary construction of White male dominance in the field of recreational hunting. Subsequently, practitioners may be able to change leisure habitus of the two groups by helping them to freely explore the activity and independently decide their participation. Thus, Bourdieu's theory also offers meaningful practical implications for promoting leisure participation from historically disfranchised groups. We hope more leisure researchers recognize merits of Bourdieu's work and comprehensively utilize his concepts and theory in their investigations of diverse leisure and recreation phenomenon.

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