FEMINISM IN THE TIME OF LEISURE
“FEMINISM AND EDUCATION IN THE WISDOM OF LEISURE FRUITION VERSUS MODERN SOCIETY AND THE COMMAND FOR ALIENATION”

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ABSTRACT
In this paper we present some considerations on gender issues that still exist in modern society and how they can affect the fruition and the choice of leisure activities. In the first part, we make a short introduction to Cultural Studies, which provide the framework for this reflection. Then we make an assessment of Gender studies from the perspective of Cultural Studies. Next, we make some considerations about the quality of leisure and about how leisure activities may or may not be considered as such, depending on context and gender. In the final part of the text, we present and analyze the current lines of study on gender and leisure, trying to identify what can still be reformed through education and other means, in order to enable equal access to the leisure experience, ensuring it as a universal right.

KEYWORDS
Feminism; Leisure; Cultural Studies; leisure fruition; consumerism.

1. Introduction
a) Short introduction to Cultural Studies

The definition of Cultural Studies on the 21st century is still scattered. As a study field, Cultural Studies fall under both the Humanities and Social Sciences, and must encompass and study various disciplines, especially intersecting themes, political, cultural, and social issues. This area of knowledge is guided primarily by its great interdisciplinarity, aiming for the promotion of an exchange of themes that allow a better understanding of cultural processes in society. Stuart Hall defines Cultural Studies as “(...) a new interdisciplinary study field organized around culture as a central concept (1997: 11).”

Although Cultural Studies are a very broad research field, they possess a set of inescapable themes, including power relations and gender issues. Or, as Baptista (2009) puts it, the study of the modes of social and political construction of ‘identities’, addressing issues of nation, race, ethnicity, diaspora, colonialism and post-colonialism, sex and gender, etc. These have been the most investigated topics in recent years, giving rise to an important mass of great quality results important in and outside Academia.

This interdisciplinarity provides the standing for our reflections on gender issues, on how they can influence leisure-time fruition and vice versa.

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2. Gender issues

a) Gender from the perspective of Cultural Studies

Ordinarily gender issues are addressed as an issue solely concerning women. However, there is now a greater concern in observing and treating these issues as something that concerns all humans.

“For us, in Cultural Studies, Gender issues do not concern only women. Gender issues matter to women, matter to men, matter to all human beings” (Bapista, 2013)

In the context of Cultural Studies, from a sociocultural perspective, it is undoubtedly important to address gender issues from a critical point of view to see how this issue influences contemporary society. It is also important to note the theoretical openness in Cultural Studies for reflection and their predisposition to rethink concepts towards the demystification of culturally constructed and pre-established ideas.

Cultural and sociologically, gender is primarily seen as a matter of nature, as a biological factor. This is determined at birth, and contains an enormous psychological weight with expectations arising from a patriarchal society that imposes precise social roles to women and men.

“The models of roles for each gender and the relations between them are very entrenched in social structures and are part of the self-image and identity of individuals” (Towen, 1996).

However, Jackson & Henderson came to the conclusion that the cultural interpretation of gender and the role of gender rules were more limiting than the actual biological sex. Gender is a complex aspect of personal and social identities, which also affects the way people live and enjoy their leisure time. The feminist movement has broadened the epistemological and methodological possibilities of leisure studies.

It is thus clear that, when talking about gender, we should also talk about feminism. We cannot forget that feminism was and is important in the evolution of society and in cultural studies. According to Sapiro (1994) Feminism is not just a way of thinking about the world, but a way of acting. The feminist movement has shown how women were exploited and offered the prospect of a new approach to thinking about the world.

Most likely we can today speak of various genders because of the ongoing action of feminist movements that did and do reduce the gap between the social roles of men and women, thus providing an evolution that allows the creation of other gender types, including “agender”, which means having no gender.

“in this week’s “Visão” magazine we can read the following title: ‘Facebook without identity limits?’ And the text begins as follows: ‘today, in the United States, if you’re a Facebook user you have over 50 options to customize your own gender’. That is, in addition to Facebook allowing each user to say whether they are male or female, there are already 50 possibilities between being male or female.” (Bapista, 2014)
3. Leisure Times

“Time in people’s lives is organized according to the culturally assimilated standards that guide how to dispose of that time for the various productive and positive activities. From this subject develop their sense of ‘time for myself’.” (Martins, 2012)

“...this time, which could be a time for the truest leisure, is ultimately spoiled by consumerism, which commercializes it, makes it a thing and impoverishes its meaning.” (Martins, 2012)

By analyzing these statements by Martins, we can clearly see how the notion of time and what to do with it depend on social trends that influence the individual. Hence, it is increasingly necessary to emphasize the role of education and training in this demand for the usage of time towards a pursuit of leisure fruition. In fact, we cannot forget that through leisure, human beings can find their sense of self, thus elevating their personal capacities, and finding some peace, then contributing to the evolution of social identity.

“The whole process of education/training/gearing of modern society generated the values of today’s consumer society, and does not include the gearing to being/existing in a time of ‘doing nothing’.” (Aquino e Martins, 2007)

In view of this statement, which extols education and training as the foundation for a lifestyle contrary to consumerism, Aquino and Martins state that education/training of modern society alienates its role of teaching the individual to “do nothing”, which in this context could simply mean that “doing nothing” refers to something that has no mandatory time, place and, above all, is not a routine.

In turn, Russel, in 2002, declared and categorically criticized the strictly utilitarian conception of education, by affirming that it also ignores the real needs of individuals, that the cultural components in the formation of knowledge are geared towards training individuals with purposes of mere professional qualification, thus forgetting the thoughts and desires of individuals, making them occupy much of their free time with broad, impersonal and meaningless themes.

These inductions point towards the possibility of there being a certain inability for individuals to achieve a balance between the obligations imposed by society and its rules and their most intimate and personal desires. Consequently, the failure to deal with time and manage it under the Self’s internal point of view, makes it impossible to practice and foster Leisure, which may lead to alienation.

Literature points out the need to educate individuals, not only for the perception of work intricacies but also to the most diverse and possible types of leisure, which means teaching how to avoid the alienation that can be caused by spare time and is as dangerous as the alienation caused by work. (De Masi, 2000)

“NOW is the only time when something can effectively be done.” (Tolle, 2002)

As an example, we refer to Shaw (1994), who identified three possible approaches for the analysis of women’s leisure: leisure as limited aspect, leisure as limiting element and
leisure as resistance. The author suggests that leisure is not only a limiting force and a limited space of action, but can also become a kind of resistance, an active fight against the powers that be. Shaw (1994) also states that the phenomenon of leisure as resistance can be observed in women who practice sports related to physical endurance.

Despite progress in the conceptualization of the phenomenon of Leisure, this is undoubtedly a concept that varies according to gender. The problem is that although there is increasingly more research on Leisure, with respect to women there has not been a significant social change that allows a large practical advance. The lives of many women are not much different or better than in the past.

There is currently the perception that women tend to have a voice in decision-making regarding daily routine, which does not mean that they are freer, as it can solely mean having less time to enjoy leisure.

4. Gender Issues in the Time of Leisure

The appearance of social movements, such as feminism, and also new social values such as leisure are the basis of a new social structure.

Feminism is not only a way of thinking about the world but also a way to act, so the disagreements about its meaning are disagreements about how people think and act.

The interaction of free time with other dimensions of personal, social and economic life almost always show inequality. This inequality manifests itself not only on the quantity but also on the quality of people’s leisure, as well as on the opportunities and strategies of personal and human development.

We believe that one of the manifestations of this inequality is based on the differences between men and women. The vast majority of women in the world actively contribute to the welfare of others around them. These women have less free time than men and dedicate most of their time to the free moments of others. Society, family, and patriarchy strongly contribute to hinder women’s access to leisure.

In women’s lives, the distinction between what is obligation, work and leisure is not clear; the same activity, such as cooking, can be leisure or work depending on the context.

Thus, when faced with this reality, we realize the complexity that is to study and evaluate women’s leisure fruition time.

Society gives women their space as a domestic space. Those that, little by little, are already extending their performance space to the public sphere are, however, required to claim their right to having their own space, to having their own time and to being able to devote it to leisure.

“The gender issues we are now confronted with, from the perspective of Gender studies, require us to not only study power but also the systems of power, which somehow produce men and women, such as we know them, wherein the man, obviously, is recognized as a dominant figure and the woman as the man’s Other” (Baptista, 2014)

There is no doubt that feminist movements contributed to the process of criticism, correction, and integration and gradual transformation of leisure studies. Gender and other vari-
ables such as politics, culture and social class shape, within research, different interpretations, including the importance of having freedom as the undisputed basis of the assessment of a leisure moment.

5. Conclusions

The assumptions in researching and conceptualizing women’s leisure cannot forget the external influence of the guidelines and political options of a particular culture.

Sociological principles bind leisure to culture and social organizations, while the researchers who come from psychology and social psychology bind leisure to individual perceptions and attitudes (Ingham, 1986).

We are therefore talking about a concept that cannot be exclusively tied to a single field of study, that is, it seems evident that the perception of leisure time and of its fruition depends on a number of factors, both internal and external to the individual, and that it is a permeable concept.

It takes multiple perspectives to develop some inclusive theories that do not neglect any dimension of leisure experiences according to gender.

However, the leisure experience, which is but a universal right, cannot be enjoyed if it is not put into practice, given the still existing tendency to focus solely on productivity. There is no doubt that women have to claim this right. It has often been unnoticed, because managing a family necessarily involves taking on a number of requirements, including everyday tasks and, frequently, being caregivers of children, parents and other family members who need special care.

The patriarchal society has consolidated the difference of social roles since, according to Murillo (1996), the capabilities that were considered necessary to perform domestic activities were, for example, emotionality, affection, sensitivity, tenderness, intuition, committal, etc. These capabilities are considered inherent in women. Both leisure and freedom are elements that develop from an optional form of control and self-determination (Shaw, 1994), allowing individuals to improve their health, well-being and quality of life (Mannell and Kleiber, 1997).

In short, speaking of leisure from a feminist perspective implies reformulating positions that allow access to equal experience, i.e., first being aware of the imbalances that exist in this area to then be able to create spaces where alternatives that bring in more egalitarian models may emerge. For that reason, we should not forget that awareness is a fundamental first step on the construction of a path, but it is also a first step in its implementation, and is in itself an act of power (Jiménez, 1995).

References


