



Leisure Sciences

An Interdisciplinary Journal

ISSN: 0149-0400 (Print) 1521-0588 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/ulsc20

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To cite this article: Ian Jones, Andrew Adams & Joanne Mayoh (21 Oct 2025):
Toward a Sociology of Ignorance in Leisure Studies, Leisure Sciences, DOI:
[10.1080/01490400.2025.2576689](https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2025.2576689)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2025.2576689>



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Published online: 21 Oct 2025.



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Toward a Sociology of Ignorance in Leisure Studies

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ABSTRACT

Although ignorance is pervasive within contemporary society, it has been largely overlooked within the social sciences, and has remained completely unnoticed within the study of leisure. This paper advances the case for a sociology of ignorance within leisure. An overview of ignorance is provided, before the lack of attention paid toward the concept is explored. The paper discusses the concept of ignorance, with a focus upon deliberate, motivated and willful ignorance, as opposed to more general, or inadvertent ignorance. The functions of ignorance are then outlined. To illustrate the potential applications of a sociology of ignorance to leisure, we discuss how the study of ignorance may augment knowledge and understanding related to leisure and social justice, with a focus upon race and leisure. The paper concludes with a discussion of the methodological issues related to the study of leisure and ignorance and proposes a framework for its study.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 September
2024
Accepted 4 September
2025

KEYWORDS

Deliberate ignorance;
knowledge; motivated
ignorance; social justice

Introduction

Ignorance abounds, it is ubiquitous, and it endures in contemporary society, indeed at times it even devastates (DeNicola, 2018). To date, however, the concept of ignorance has been almost totally overlooked within leisure studies. This is despite it being a pervasive, often inevitable, and socially consequential part of day-to-day life (DeNicola, 2018; Mueller, 2018) affecting some of the most important personal and social aspects of our being. Some, for example, remain ignorant of the challenges of climate change (Robichaud, 2017) whilst others choose to ignore the fact that the Earth is a globe, believing it to be a flat disk encircled by ice (Jones et al., 2023a). Some prefer to remain unaware of the continued prevalence of racism in western countries (Elias, 2024; Mills, 2007) and meat eaters may choose to ignore the sentience of animals (Leach et al., 2022). As DeNicola (2018, p4) argues, 'every one of us - however intelligent and knowledgeable - is bedeviled by our ignorance...it can threaten anything and all we value'. As such, it has significant impacts both at a structural and individual level. It is within this context that this paper acknowledges Mueller's (2018, p.1) broader call 'to advance

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theory and methodology surrounding ignorance and the social-cultural production of non-knowledge as a broader area of social inquiry', specifically within leisure studies.

Historically, ignorance has largely been ignored by social scientists (Abbott, 2010; Engel & Hertwig, 2020; McGoe, 2019; Mueller, 2018), and 'grossly overlooked in social theory and research' (Mueller, 2020, p.145), even though 'we live in an age of ignorance' (Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008, p. vii), despite the ever-increasing availability of information (Cohen & Garasic, 2024). More recently, however, ignorance is increasingly being recognized across a range of disciplines. This growing recognition has given rise to a nascent but developing body of literature situated within fields such as economics (e.g. Kandul & Ritov, 2017), psychology (e.g. Shepperd & Howell, 2015), theology (e.g. Boothe, 2015), and philosophy (e.g. Williams, 2021). Within the sociological literature, ignorance has been examined in relation to diverse social phenomena, including the mitigation of cognitive dissonance in the context of meat consumption (Kadel et al., 2023), the navigation of moral dilemmas (Mata et al., 2022), attitudes toward green-washing (Momsen & Ohndorf, 2022), environmentally oriented decision-making (Moyal & Schurr, 2022), and the exercise of power in healthcare settings (Ashley & Perron, 2024). Collectively, this emerging scholarship provides a conceptual and empirical foundation that not only informs our analysis but also offers a framework for future research that examines the intersections of ignorance and leisure.

Ignorance and leisure scholarship

Ignorance has been almost entirely absent from the leisure literature. A search of mainstream leisure journals (*Annals of Leisure Research*, *Journal of Leisure Research*, *Leisure Sciences*, *Leisure/Loisir*, *Leisure Studies*, *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*, *World Leisure Journal*) fails to identify a single article that addresses ignorance as its core idea. Indeed, little reference is made to ignorance even as a passing concept within the whole gamut of leisure scholarship to date, with only Stebbins (2024) addressing the relationship between leisure and ignorance in his discussion of the role of liberal arts hobbies as a counter to ignorance, and de Larios and Lang's (2014) study of pluralistic ignorance in a community of those involved in online role-playing games. As such, it seems likely that through continuing to approach leisure through a lens of knowledge omits an opportunity to, as McGoe (2019) suggests, drive knowledge forward.

The future seems equally pessimistic in terms of ignorance gaining any sort of prominence within the field. Silk, for example, (in Silk et al., 2017), suggests a wide and eclectic range of over fifty areas toward which a critical and meaningful study of leisure should direct its future gaze, including areas diverse as neo-liberalism and the state, the cultural politics of celebrity, gender-based violence and financial crises, yet ignorance remains overlooked within this analysis. This is also the case in Johnson et al.'s (2018) introduction to the special issue exploring forty years of *Leisure Sciences*, where several areas are highlighted for future focus, all of which would seem to provide fruitful opportunities for those interested in ignorance, such as social justice, sexuality, and deviant leisure but without specifically referring to ignorance as a key concept. Thus, as well as a paucity of existing work, there remains little, if any, discussion of the potential for a future understanding of ignorance within leisure.

As such, this paper outlines the case for greater attention to be paid to the idea of ignorance within leisure studies. It responds to Johnson et al. (2018) argument that 'leisure research has always benefited from an influx of theoretical issues taken up in other fields ... We believe it will continue to benefit our field...to constantly examine what emerges elsewhere and how it might apply to our research' (p.4). To achieve this, the paper firstly defines and outlines the nature of ignorance, highlighting its various definitions and forms. The functions of ignorance are then outlined. The potential role for the study of ignorance is discussed, with reference to the concept of leisure and social justice. The paper concludes with a brief outline of some potential methodological issues in researching leisure and ignorance and proposes a framework for its future analysis.

Defining ignorance

Even though ignorance has been largely neglected within the social sciences, Croissant (2014, p.5) suggests that what does exist involves 'a great deal of confusion and complexity', with competing conceptualisations, and no consensus regarding how it should be defined. It is clear, however, that ignorance as a concept is more complex than simply the absence of knowledge (Gross & McGoe, 2015), indeed 'ignorance offers its own type of influence and information that cannot be countered simply by adding knowledge' (Dev et al., 2022, p. 658). There are different forms of ignorance (Arfini & Magnani, 2021), each fulfilling a variety of functions (Smithson, 1985), and despite the emphasis upon knowledge being 'good' ignorance is neither irrational nor something that people try to avoid (Mueller, 2018). Neither is ignorance always a disadvantage to those who possess it (Smithson, 2008). Finally, it is not just a passive unwillingness to learn, but is often actively cultivated, and often exploited to gain power or resources.

Whilst everyone possesses ignorance in some form (it is clearly impossible to know everything within our contemporary, information-rich society, what Nelson (2010, p. 96) refers to as the 'infinite justificational fecundity of evidence'), this paper focuses upon a specific form of ignorance, where an active decision is made by an agentic individual to be ignorant themselves, or to promote ignorance to others in a specific context despite the ready and free availability of relevant information. This separates it from 'inadvertent' ignorance (Somin, 2015), or what Fricker (2016, p. 161) calls 'an epistemically innocent absence of knowledge', where the individual is not motivated to be ignorant, but simply unable to acquire information for a variety of means such as lack of access, or lack of time. Thus rather than seeing ignorance as simply the absence of knowledge, it is more about the avoidance of information that is important to us, and concerns us personally (Mudyń, 2023), or information that we *should* know (Lynch, 2016), where we are aware of the existence of that information, and that information is freely available, even if the exact nature or valence of the information isn't fully known (Golman et al., 2017; Williams, 2021). Crucially, this is active, rather than passive. Mueller (2017, p.225) describes the strategies used to avoid information as 'epistemic manoeuvres', such as evasion or misanalysing of information. Thus, there is an intentionality to the ignorance. Such intentional ignorance has been referred to variously as motivated ignorance, willful ignorance, deliberate ignorance, or nescience, differing terms which are seen as conceptually similar by some (e.g. Wieland, 2017),

or subtly different by others (e.g. DeNicola, 2018). Hertwig and Engel (2016, p. 360), for example, define deliberate ignorance as ‘the conscious individual or collective choice not to seek or use information... where the acquisition costs are negligible’. Williams (2021) uses the term *motivated ignorance*, defined as ignorance which ‘is driven not by the costs of acquiring knowledge, but by an active aversion to possessing it’ (p. 7809). DeNicola identifies forms of ignorance such as (a) *rational*, where the individual does not feel knowledge is worth having (b) *strategic*, whereby ignorance will convey a benefit to the unknower, (c) *willful*, where ignorance is maintained despite the individual knowing the salience of that information.

Williams (2021) discussion of motivated ignorance identifies two specific forms. Personally motivated ignorance protects an individual from knowledge that may negatively impact them independently of its effect upon others, for example avoiding knowledge that may lead to negative emotions, such as fear. Hence an inactive individual may choose to be deliberately ignorant of health-related messages about exercise frequency (More et al., 2023), the combat athlete may ignore medical advice to rest to prevent a possible deterioration in performance (Ryou & Lee, 2024), or the diner may ignore calorie content of a meal (Nordström et al., 2018). Here, the impact is upon the person, however the motivation for ignorance may be because of social factors, for example the combat athlete may wish to avoid a drop in performance to avoid being seen to be performing badly. Hence, there may also be a social element to personally motivated ignorance.

In contrast, socially motivated ignorance relates to ignorance protecting the individual’s group memberships, driving individuals with a certain social identity to be ignorant of things that might impact the well-being or status of the group itself. An example would be Newcastle United F.C. fans pursuing a strategy of motivated ignorance about the atrocities committed in Saudi Arabia following the takeover of their club by the Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund in order to ‘protect’ the team (Jones et al., 2023b). This approach is also referred to as the *Homo Ignorans* (‘neglecting man’) perspective (Barrafreem et al., 2024).

McGoey (2020) also makes a distinction between micro and macro ignorance. Micro ignorance involves individual acts of ignoring that have limited impacts upon others (for example the sport fan refusing to read articles about their team’s defeats). Macro ignorance has a much more pernicious effect however, defined by McGoey (2020, p. 200) as ‘the sedimentation of individual ignorance into rigid ideological positions or policy perspectives that obscure their own mistaken assumptions from adherents, leading to new patterns of individual micro-ignorance’, for example, a sport coach repeatedly turning a blind eye to the use of racist micro-aggressions within their organization, and subsequently cultivating an attitude that ultimately denies racism within the sport, serving to prevent subsequent moves to counter racism (Long, 2000).

The functions of ignorance

In addition to understanding the different types and perspectives of ignorance, it is useful to consider its various purposes. Hertwig and Engel (2016) have developed a useful taxonomy of the functions of ignorance. Firstly, they note how ignorance may be used as an emotion-regulation device, to avoid situations where negative emotions

may be an outcome of unwanted knowledge, such as that related to medical results or financial predicaments or to counter threats to beliefs about personal and social identities, for example avoiding any information that may alert them to their own prejudice about others (Shepperd & Howell 2015). Although much of the literature focuses upon the health domain, for example avoidance of knowledge about the presence of an illness, or an undesirable prognosis, ignorance may also protect the individual from other contexts, for example as a protection mechanism against negative emotions such as envy, through actively avoiding information about the positive attributes of others (Bruttel et al., 2020).

Secondly, ignorance may be used as a suspense and surprise maximization device. Drama is a key element of many leisure activities, from watching a film (Madrigal et al., 2011), to attending a sports event, (Bizzozero et al., 2016) and ignorance about the outcome may add to the experience. In addition, ignorance about the 'reality' of the event may add to enjoyment, for example, the wrestling fan may deliberately ignore evidence of the pre-scripted nature of professional wrestling to maintain a sense of drama with the contest (Chow & Laine, 2014) even though it is widely known, and easy to access information about the choreographed nature of the sport.

Thirdly, it may be used as a performance enhancing device. Feedback is a key element in developing competence and mastery of many leisure activities, specifically those which may be termed as 'serious leisure'. Whilst feedback is often positive, it can also have negative outcomes, especially if it identifies significant discrepancies between desired and actual performance, and hence ignorance of feedback may have positive outcomes. Ignorance may also impact upon anticipated performance. Through ignoring past cases, an overly optimistic view of future performances may arise, both at a micro and macro level (Hertwig & Engel, 2016). There is some evidence to support this, for example football fans may ignore past performances and demonstrate unrealistic optimism about their team's future results (Jones, 2000).

Finally, ignorance may act as a strategic device. There are several different strategic functions of ignorance, with varying degrees of relevance to leisure. One is the role of ignorance as a self-disciplining device, whereby knowledge that may lead to a future self that is inconsistent with the values of the present self is avoided. An example of this may be a serious runner who avoids reading about knee degeneration with age, to avoid the perceived need to cut down on their activity and become, in the future, more of a casual athlete. A second strategic function of ignorance is to eschew responsibility, by avoiding information about the consequences of any actions, an act which may reduce cognitive dissonance about leisure behaviors that have a negative impact upon others. Thus, those traveling to an international sporting event may choose to be ignorant of their impact upon the climate (Frühauf et al., 2020). Participants in some forms of deviant leisure, for example, may reduce a sense of cognitive dissonance of their activities through avoiding any information about its impacts upon others, such as street racers ignoring safety risks to the general public. Thirdly, as we have noted above with reference to the idea of socially motivated ignorance, such behavior may protect a sense of group membership. Finally, ignorance may be used to avoid a sense of social liability, for example the competitive cyclist provided with a performance enhancing substance, who deliberately avoids knowing what the substance is, or the drinker who avoids knowledge of the effects of their alcohol consumption upon others.

Organizations as well as individuals may demonstrate collective ignorance (Alvesson et al., 2022; Engel & Hertwig, 2020; Jalonen, 2024). McGoey (2019), for example, highlights how the Grenfell Tower disaster of 2017, where residents of a high-rise tower were killed in a fire, was exacerbated by the design of the building was due to the collective ‘willful ignorance of experts’ (p.24) such as the Local Authority, who dismissed the ability of residents to truly understand the safety issues that led to the destruction of the building with the loss of 72 lives. Other recent examples are highlighted by the BBC, who noted how NHS executives had systematically ignored warnings about the child serial killer, Lucy Letby, leading to delays in investigations that resulted in the deaths of further babies (BBC News, 2023), and Wallis (2021) who has systematically highlighted the role of deliberate ignorance within the British Post Office, leading to the largest miscarriage of justice in British legal history where more than nine hundred sub postmasters were convicted based on faulty software. Such macro ignorance is not always, however, dysfunctional. Stewart (2012), for example, demonstrates how ignorance had a functional role to play between various organizing committees of the Olympic Games, and could actually exist as a productive force, for example to prevent criticism of the planning process.

Theorizing ignorance: ignorance, leisure, and social justice

To illustrate how the lens of ignorance might facilitate further analysis within leisure, we can examine its use in exploring a particular topic, in this case the concept of leisure and social justice. We would stress that this is a single example, and, in reality, this lens could be applied to a broad range of leisure related concepts. Social justice has received increasing attention over recent years from leisure scholars, motivated by the need to understand multiple kinds of discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual identity, ability, and socio-economic status, and to challenge existing social structures (Parry et al., 2103). This attention has emerged from a long tradition of examining leisure and social change, driven by both a perceived need to end oppression and marginalization within leisure contexts, as well as functioning as a ‘point of convergence for otherwise isolated pockets of literature’ (Stewart, 2014, p. 326). Within this context, Stewart identifies a need for explanatory approaches, which allow solutions to be identified. Thus, there is a need for greater understanding of the reasons for social injustice within leisure. As Stewart notes, ‘the application of frameworks that address causal factors for oppression, marginalization, and power differentials provide insight for social change’ (Stewart, 2014, p.330). We focus our analysis on one specific context of leisure and social injustice, that related to leisure and race, an area where the structural and systematic nature of racism in leisure has experienced a ‘silence’ in terms of being acknowledged (Mowatt, 2018), and where ignorance may be an important lens with which to developing our understanding (Elias, 2024; Freedman, 2024; Mills, 2007).

We further focus our analysis upon the relationship between power and ignorance, specifically in terms of how ignorance can be used to maintain power relations. Frias and Dattilo (2021) note, for example, that power is inherent within every leisure encounter yet is ‘unnoticed by those privileged in situations’ (p. 4). As such, it is useful to understand and explore the nature of inequality through the lens of such

ignorance. Thus, research can focus not only upon what those in power do (where most attention has been paid), but more about what they ignore, how they ignore it, and why they ignore it. Freedman (2024, p. 2) argues that where such unequal power relations exist, motivated ignorance may emerge as ‘a self-protective non-knowing which frees individuals from having to reflect on the privileges that they have in virtue of membership in a dominant social group’, to maintain structural inequalities at the expense of harms to other, less powerful groups. This was an argument first raised many years ago by Moore and Tumin (1949), who had suggested that ignorance fulfills a number of social functions. These include that of the preservation of ‘privileged position’, to maintain social relations and to reinforce dominant values and stereotypes. This is echoed by Alcoff (2007) who notes how oppressive, or dominant groups actively generate ignorance to allow inequality and abuse to be presented as just and fair. Hence, ignorance through denial becomes a rational behavior for dominant groups in terms of race (Mills, 2007), and understanding such a rational process, focusing on understanding not only on what people don’t know, and what they don’t need to know, but perhaps more importantly also what they feel they *need* not to know (Medina, 2013) becomes key in terms of understanding.

One possible framework that could prove to be valuable is that of Mueller’s (2020) Theory of Racial Ignorance (TRI). As Mueller notes, this theory, which builds upon notions of white ignorance, acknowledges micro and meso processes, as well as the role of history in maintaining inequality. Crucially, given our discussion above, it also locates ignorance as an active process in maintaining inequality. Five tenets are presented and used to explain how an analysis of issues related to race, social justice and leisure may progress away from a focus on the use of knowledge toward an understanding of the active role of ignorance as a means to maintain inequality.

1. The *epistemology of ignorance*, which explores how ignorance is maintained through the adoption of a particular approach in terms of choosing both what to know and how to know it. This could focus on *how* ignorance about leisure and inequality may be produced, going beyond a colorblind ideology that focuses more upon the denial of racism and its impacts by acknowledging the historical and structural processes that are generally absent within colorblind explanations of racial inequality (Mowatt, 2018). Ugolotti and Caudwell (2022), for example have noted that research on refugee leisure practices has been ‘remarkably narrow’ (p. 2), ignoring questions that sit outside the concerns of policy makers or practitioners, enabling the ‘leaching out’ of political histories and processes that actually shape the lives and leisure of today’s forced migrants. This tenet of TRI may be used to explore the underlying processes that have led to our ignorance of refugees’ leisure practices, and how their current leisure practices have been shaped over time.
2. *Ignorance as ends-based technology*, which examines its function in terms of legitimizing white privilege, that is *why* does ignorance occur? Therefore, by viewing ignorance as something that has an active role in the creation and perpetuation of racial inequality within leisure allows us to understand why such inequalities may be deliberately created, rather than simply emerging as a passive consequence of leisure structures, such as those related to historical, economic, or institutional inequities. Fonseca (2021) provides a case study of the Coachella Valley golf development in Palm Springs, U.S.A., noting how whiteness in the

sport was reinforced not only by the ignorance of exclusively white investors of both the complex ecosystem of the area and the excluded non-white communities, but also how the design of the club was deliberately designed to ensure that the club was 'rendered invisible' to those who were not 'the right kind of person' (p.460). As Mueller (2020, p. 149) notes, this is because 'TRI assumes dominant groups hold a unique, rational investment in not understanding a variety of things related to race, racism, and racial domination'. This tenet of TRI could be used to understand the motivations of ignorance, moving beyond what inequalities exist, to explore how they have emerged and been legitimized as a result of the active use of ignorance.

3. *Corporate white agency*, which examines the *sources* of ignorance at a collective level. There are a wealth of white institutional spaces (Moore, 2008) controlled by elites such as the media. Those in control have a role in the construction, suppression and distortion of narratives about marginalized groups and leisure, specifically in terms of the broader power relationships and dynamics, which can be explored through an examination of who is ignored, and why. Jackson (2020), for example notes that whilst women athletes were among the first to associate themselves with the Black Lives Matter movement, they were systematically overlooked by the racialized and gendered economy of the mainstream media. This tenet of TRI can be used to understand how not just individuals, but also institutions such as the mass media may demonstrate both ignorance of certain issues, but also through portraying those with a contrary viewpoint as ignorant (Boykoff, 2006).
4. *Centrality of praxis*, which explores how ignorance is manifested in day-to-day life, not only explicitly, but more tacitly. The relationship between ignorance, stereotyping and subsequent prejudice and discrimination within leisure could be explored through this framework. To give two contrasting examples: Grossman et al. (2005) note how transgendered young people often become victims of stereotyping in their leisure, a process which relies upon ignorance; and Kraus (2010) who discusses how belly dancers experience stigma due to societal ignorance of the activity. Ignorance is clearly crucial to such outcomes, yet overlooked, and has potential to underpin studies into leisure and prejudice through the framing of ignorance not as a passive 'not-knowing', but as a more active process of 'not wanting to know'. Often-cited solutions to prejudice and discrimination are those of simply providing more positive interaction between members of different groups ('the contact hypothesis'), or providing positive anti-stereotypical representations of stereotyped groups, yet both fail to acknowledge the active nature of ignorance, by assuming a passive acquisition of knowledge will simply reduce stereotypes and prejudice.
5. *Interest convergence*, a central tenet in Critical Race theory, explores the conditions which affect ignorance. Interest convergence acknowledges how changes are only made where moves toward reducing inequality converge with the interests of dominant groups. DeLorme and Singer (2010) describe an example of this in terms of the greater integration of black student athletes within US college sport. Whilst this growth may be seen positively, it ignores the greater, and lucrative benefits to the universities, as well as ignorance of the fact that most student

athletes leave without a degree, so that ‘the majority of the benefit is realized by the universities and their athletic departments (overwhelmingly operated by elite Whites)’ (DeLorme & Singer, 2010, p. 373).

There are, without doubt, many other areas that could be examined in this way, our intention was simply to provide an indication of some of those where an alternative approach could help develop our understanding. The following section outlines our thoughts as to how this could be done.

Researching ignorance in leisure studies

As Jalonen (2024, p. 910) notes, researching ignorance is a ‘challenging endeavour’. One important starting point for the study of ignorance and leisure is that we must not become too concerned with its definition. As Engel and Hertwig (2020) suggest, the definition should fit the intended research purpose, and balance must be made between too tight a definition, which may exclude cases at the margin of what could be considered ignorance, and too loose a definition, which may reduce the usefulness of any analysis. Neither should we be overly concerned with the terminology used—as noted earlier, several terms (motivated ignorance, deliberate ignorance and willful ignorance) are used. Provided the key characteristics of the phenomena—the deliberate avoidance of freely available information—are evident, then future work need not get tied up in discussions about nomenclature at the expense of greater understanding of the phenomenon. Instead, as Dotson (2011) suggests, the focus should not be just on the type of ignorance possessed or even an individual’s or group’s culpability in possessing that ignorance, but rather in the ways that ignorance causes or contributes to harm or other outcomes. Dev et al. (2022) present a three-stage framework for researching ignorance, these stages being (1) sensing absences (2) describing ignorance and (3) assessing the causes of ignorance.

Sensing absences

McGoey (2020) notes that the study of ignorance eludes both easy observation and quantification and as such, research into ignorance presents a number of unique challenges to the leisure researcher. As with any concept, it is always easier to research what people do, rather than what they do not do, with most of the limited number of studies related to ignorance focusing upon what people ‘knew’, rather than on what they didn’t know (Stewart, 2015). Although Alvesson et al. (2022) suggest that ‘there is an abundance of willful ignorance in most organizations’ (p. 854), both Stewart (2015) and Van Portfliet and Fanchini (2023) acknowledge that such ignorance is actively constructed, and as such, those involved are unlikely to be motivated to discuss it at the time it occurs. Thus, whilst Hertwig and Engel (2021) suggest that survey data could be used to identify the prevalence of, and a description of people’s use of ignorance within leisure, such quantitative approaches will prove challenging given ‘the inescapable fact that ignorance is always by definition immeasurable’ (McGoey, 2020, p.199) Thus, a potential tactic is to identify the individual, organization or group first, and then seek out ignorance through identifying the consequences of ignorance,

exploring potentially rich areas, such as gender discrimination within leisure, or social inequality in leisure activities, rather than starting by looking for the causes or characteristics of ignorance. Thus the researcher ‘works backwards’, using the consequences of ignorance to provide clues as to its potential existence. Alternatively, Hertwig and Engel (2021) alternative proposals for exploratory work seem appealing, these being experimental designs to measure the ‘reality’ of types of ignorance, or, as arguably the most desirable approach, to collect data ‘in-the-field’, observing peoples use of ignorance in a naturalistic environment, where an ethnographic approach may allow ignorance to be more easily detected through longer term immersion within the field (Dev et al., 2022), for example as demonstrated by Lange’s (2016) ethnography of the replication and adoption of ignorance among high frequency traders. This may be particularly appropriate in contexts such as sport organizations,

This may be done just as easily through the exploration of online behavior, for example through netnographic designs (Kozinets, 2020). Such research, even though its focus on depth and immersion, can explore both personal dimensions (for example who are more likely to demonstrate ignorance, and why) as well as broader environmental dimensions (such as exploring which factors are likely to promote the adoption of ignorance as a strategy). Thus, where ignorance is demonstrated online (for example the study of Jones et al., 2023b), where fans of Newcastle F.C. were willing to discuss their active ignorance of the controversies surrounding the Saudi takeover of their team, this is a potentially rich research design.

A final, although ethically problematic strategy, may be to conceal the true objective of the research, whilst still allowing participants to provide informed consent as to their involvement. This was a strategy undertaken by Stewart’s (2012) study of ignorance in managing the Olympic Games. She recalled that, given the perception of ignorance as generally negative, she ‘did not reveal the full intent of my research’ (p.91), and thus reframed the research in terms such as risk, uncertainty and challenge, with participants being aware of the nature of the information that they were providing, but unaware of its specific theoretical application.

Describing ignorance

Here, the work of both Dovers and Handmer (1995) and Dev et al. (2022) are useful in terms of a framework of ignorance that can guide future leisure research. Firstly, the form of the ignorance can be examined whether it is intentional or accidental for example, and who created such ignorance. Secondly the gradient, or degree of ignorance can be explored, for example is it partial, or complete ignorance? Finally, the characteristics of the ignorance can be examined. Here, Dev et al. (2022) build on the work of Croissant (2014) to develop a typology of ignorance with seven characteristics. (1) *Chronicity*—the time scale of the ignorance (2) *Granularity*—the size of the ignorance, ranging from minute to high volume (3) *Scale*—ranging from individual decision making to broad cultural formations or ideologies (4) *Intentionality* - the extent to which the ignorance is intentionally created (5) *Relationality*—the relationship between the ignorant and the object of that ignorance (6) *Spatiality*—the geographical dimensions of the ignorance (7) *Materiality*—the material characteristics of the object of ignorance (i.e. data, events, documents etc). Alternatively, Mueller’s (2020) Theory of Racial ignorance, which we have discussed above, provides a useful framework for the

description of ignorance, with—perhaps—the exception of the idea of corporate white agency, which may not be relevant in all cases of ignorance.

Assessing the causes and characteristics of ignorance

It is important to explore how ignorance is not only created, but also reinforced, and its subsequent effects. Thus, questions can be asked such as who are the actors that create ignorance? Are they individuals, organizations or institutions? What are the power dynamics involved in the creation of ignorance? Is such ignorance actively or passively created? How is ignorance maintained or reinforced? What are the structures and processes that nurture ignorance? In terms of organizational ignorance, Jalonen (2024) provides some key causes that can be used as a framework here, identifying four broad causes (1) personal motives (2) interpersonal relations (3) managerial practices and (4) organizational factors, and five broad characteristics, these being the use of power, flawed practices, fallible people, limited resources and cultural habits.

Assessing the effects of ignorance

Finally, going beyond the framework of Dev, et al, it is also crucial to explore the effects of ignorance, both in terms of who is affected by ignorance, and how. Stewart (2015) suggest that this is perhaps easier than either sensing ignorance, or identifying its motives. The effects on both individual and broader leisure practices could be examined. How, for example does ignorance affect individual participation in deviant leisure? How can ignorance be used to help explain structural racial discrimination in leisure? In terms of organizational ignorance, Jalonen (2024) outlines some of the consequences that may be identified, such as lack of creativity, inertia, emotional stress and knowledge manipulation. Whilst not an exhaustive list, and with a focus on organizational rather than personal ignorance, this framework does at least provide the leisure researcher with an indication of the type of areas that can be examined.

Conclusion

Ignorance has, rather ironically, long been ignored within the field of leisure studies. Perhaps because ‘knowledge’ is highly valued, no major studies of ignorance and leisure exist. Yet understanding ignorance has the potential to further develop our understanding of leisure behavior in many areas, beyond those specifically highlighted here. Together with inequality and deviance, ignorance may help develop our understanding of a broad range of important issues, including, but not limited to, relationships between leisure and climate change, health, migration, politics, technology and gender, to name just some areas. This is not to say that using ignorance as a framework will ever provide a complete understanding of any phenomenon, but ignorance? has the potential to add to our existing understanding of leisure behavior. It can be used to address a variety of questions, for example the role of ignorance in leisure behavior, the use of ignorance to maintain and reproduce inequality in leisure, and the role of ignorance in deviant leisure to name just three areas. It may also have use to explore more broadly why leisure research ignores certain elements of leisure behavior. Methodologically, researching ignorance may present some challenges, but these are

challenges which, with careful research designs, can be overcome, and present a huge number of opportunities.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their support and highly constructive and insightful suggestions. We are grateful for their positive contribution to this work.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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