


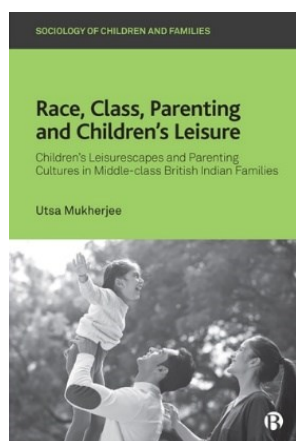


CHILDHOOD STUDIES AND LEISURE STUDIES: A CALL FOR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION AND RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN

Estudos da infância e estudos do lazer: um chamado para participação ativa e pesquisas com crianças

Flávia Martinelli **FERREIRA**
Faculdade de Educação Física
Universidade Estadual de Campinas
Campinas, Brasil
flaviamartinelli@uol.com.br
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2539-6262> 

A lista completa com informações dos autores está no final do artigo ●



MUKHERJEE, Utsa. **Race, Class, Parenting and Children's Leisure** – Children's Leisurescapes and Parenting Cultures in Middle-class British Indian Families. Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2023. E-book. Disponível em: <https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/race-class-parenting-and-childrens-leisure>. Acesso 30 mai. 2023.

ABSTRACT

The reviewed book offers an innovative study of British Indian middle-class families, drawing upon the voices of children and parents, and establishing an original dialogue between childhood studies, family studies, and leisure studies to theorize children's leisure from a fresh perspective. The great originality of the work is concentrated in the approach to these issues also from the point of view of children. To understand them only as followers of their parents' instructions is to deny their agency. In this sense, the book, apart from being a quality work in itself, serves as an invitation to reconsider academic productions in the field of education and physical education when it comes to leisure. It prompts a reevaluation of existing academic literature and invites authors to critically examine their approaches to studying leisure within the context of education and physical education.

KEYWORDS: Childhood studies. Leisure. British Indian. Race. Class.

RESUMO

O livro analisado oferece um estudo inovador sobre famílias de classe média indo-britânicas, baseado nas vozes das crianças e dos pais, e estabelece um diálogo original entre os estudos da infância, estudos de família e estudos de lazer, a fim de teorizar o lazer das crianças a partir de uma nova perspectiva. A grande originalidade do trabalho está concentrada na abordagem dessas questões também a partir do ponto de vista das crianças. Entendê-las apenas como seguidoras das instruções de seus pais é negar sua agência. Nesse sentido, o livro, além de ser uma obra de qualidade em si mesma, serve como um convite para reconsiderar as produções acadêmicas no campo da educação e educação física quando se trata de lazer. Isso estimula uma reavaliação da literatura acadêmica existente e convida os autores a examinarem criticamente suas abordagens para o estudo do lazer no contexto da educação e educação física.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Estudos da Infância. Lazer. Indo-britânicos. Raça. Classe social.

INTRODUCTION

The reviewed book offers an innovative study of British Indian middle-class families, drawing upon the voices of children and parents, and establishing an original dialogue between childhood studies, family studies, and leisure studies to theorize children's leisure from a fresh perspective. Utsa Mukherjee's research interests center on childhood and youth studies, as well as social inequality, leisure, and migration. After listening to the research presentation¹, one notes his commitment to social justice and an ongoing interest in uncovering the way social inequalities are reproduced across time and place and the way structural inequalities interpellate the lived experiences of minority subjects (such as racial minority children in the UK and sexual minority youth in India). His first published monograph, **Race, Class, Parenting and Children's Leisure** – Children's Leisurescapes and Parenting Cultures in Middle-class British Indian Families, is capable of offering new possibilities for reflection and motivations to understand leisure from different perspectives. For the field of education and physical education, it is furthermore extremely necessary to consider the inexistence of productions regarding the dialogue between childhood and leisure studies. The author has based their research, which will be presented below, on the underlying assumptions

¹ The authors reference is to the author's presentation at the seminar *Loisir Enfance: Regards croisés de quatre enquêtes*, at the University of Sorbonne Paris Nord (Paris 13), in June 2023.

that children in contemporary times are primarily engaged in activities within their homes, there is a noticeable decrease in unsupervised leisure pursuits conducted outside their residences, and children are increasingly immersed in screen-based leisure activities and adult-guided endeavors.

REGARDING LEISURE AND CHILDREN

The book is structured in seven parts: 1. Introduction, 2. Critical Sociology of Children's Leisure: A Framework, 3. Concerted Cultivation the Indian Way? Organised Leisure and Racial Parenting Strategy, 4. The Fun, the Boring and the Racist Name Calling: How Children Make Sense of Their Leisure Geographies, 5. Negotiated Temporalities: Leisure, Time-Use and Everyday Life, 6. Relating, Place-Making and the Cultural Politics of Leisuring, and finally, 7. Concluding Thoughts.

The book's introduction presents the author's testimony about similar patterns of leisure consumption and educational strategies among parents who were guided by a dominant middle-class ideal of childhood, in which children's future success depends directly on the skills and abilities systematically cultivated through immersion in various leisure activities. According to the author, these leisure-oriented child-rearing practices are part of a larger context of social inequalities and fluid notions about childhood that interfere with how middle-class parents understand their responsibilities to their children. Thus, they emphasize different strategies for organized leisure to ensure that their children have the best chances in life.

The great originality of the work is concentrated in the approach to these issues also from the point of view of children. To understand them only as followers of their parents' instructions is to deny their agency. The author presents several kinds of research on children's leisure activities in which only the parents' concerns are understood. The notion of children's agency corresponds to a theoretical position: children as social actors and childhood as a social construct (Garnier, 2015; James, 2009). Therefore, the author suggests a deeper understanding of these processes from a critical engagement with the perspectives of parents and children, entrenched in the socio-spatial context in which they function.

To this purpose, the author presents in Chapter 2, Critical Sociology of Children's Leisure, a holistic framework to analyze the different types of leisure activities that fall within children's everyday geographies. Mukherjee (2023) develops a tripartite framework to study middle-class children's leisure: structured, family, and casual

leisure. The book, in this sense, not only establishes a parallel between the sociology of leisure and childhood studies, but also, over and above all, rethinks leisure practices as space and time for the reproduction of inequalities, identities, and cultural politics. The author elects to investigate everyday leisure practices at the intersection of race and class issues in middle-class British Indian families. Chapter 2, therefore, establishes the central conceptual theoretical premise for a critical analysis of the leisure geographies of British middle-class Indian children.

Chapter 3 is responsible for presenting leisure-based parenting strategies concerning the organization of leisure activities among British Indian middle-class children. The data were collected using multiple qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations. He conducted one-to-one interviews with both fathers and mothers in eight families and with mothers in two additional families due to the unavailability of fathers. Consequently, mentioned strategies demonstrate that these practices carry classist and racial connotations. Additionally, it is concluded that changes in children's lives and leisure activities have been influenced by evolving ideologies of parenting.

To acknowledge children as independent social agents and value their perspectives, experiences, and viewpoints, chapter 4 presents children as participants in the study (8 – 12 years old). To facilitate their active involvement, Mukherjee (2023) has made certain adaptations to the data collection methods, such as engaging children in drawing activities. The author also spent time with parents and children in their living rooms and toy rooms. The chapter focuses on how children engage in negotiation with their parents regarding leisure choices and the language they employ in categorizing and prioritizing different activities. Additionally, the chapter explores how race and class intersect to impact children's structured leisure experiences.

In Chapter 5, *Negotiated Temporalities*, the author adopts a temporal perspective to examine the role of time within participating families in leisure. While time is commonly referenced in defining leisure, our understanding of how time is subjectively perceived and utilized for leisure in racialized middle-class contexts is limited. This chapter addresses this gap by exploring significant aspects of time and leisure within these families, focusing on concepts such as busyness and family time, the management of "screen time" concerning children's digital leisure, and the significance of "alone time" as a form of solitary leisure. As children expressed their thoughts and feelings about cross-generational family leisure, they frequently touched upon the challenges posed

by the time constraints faced by each family member, which hindered their ability to engage in shared activities.

For the author, screen-based leisure should not be considered in isolation; rather, it is essential to recognize that it is embedded within a larger ecosystem of media technologies prevalent in modern households and consistently integrated into the daily routines of parents and children. Children's alone time, drawing on Goffman's conceptualization can be seen as a period when they are "backstage" (Goffman, 1959), away from the public gaze. This alone time offers a fertile ground for exploring their subjectivities and lived identities, as it provides a space for personal reflection, self-expression, and the development of narratives and experiences. Once again, each of these dimensions highlights how race and class intersect to shape time experiences within families and influence the allocation of leisure opportunities across different categories.

In Chapter 6, attention is directed toward examining how leisure practices play a mediating role in shaping children's social relationships within their immediate surroundings. Furthermore, Mukherjee (2023) looked into the mechanisms through which community-based leisure arrangements, specifically within the context of British Indian communities, contribute to the creation of a sense of place inside the diverse urban landscape of London. In doing so, the author explored how these leisure practices reinforce the agency of diasporic groups in the process of city-making and the transformation of urban social dynamics. This analysis sheds light on the intricate interplay between leisure, community, and the formation of urban identities.

Concluding Thoughts, chapter 7, underlines the contribution to developing a nuanced understanding of how social inequalities and identities are perpetuated across generations through leisure practices. Specifically, the focus was on examining the interplay between social class and race within the broader context of global geographic disparities, as well as the enduring structures of class and racial inequalities in contemporary UK society. To the author, these conceptual explorations hold significant relevance in a post-COVID world, where there is a growing need to comprehend the impact of social inequalities on the lives of children and families. By gaining a deeper understanding of these dynamics, it becomes possible to develop effective strategies and tools to break the cycles of inequality and foster a more equitable and just society. By addressing these complex dynamics, the book seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of social inequalities and provide a foundation for developing more inclusive and equitable societal frameworks.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS AND FUTURE PROJECTIONS

As previously highlighted, the originality of this book lies in its deliberate focus on examining leisure practices from the children's perspective. The choice to analyze these practices through the lenses of social class and race, which are well-justified throughout the manuscript, ignites the reader's curiosity also to consider leisure relations from the vantage point of gender studies.

Expanding the analytical framework to include the lens of gender would undoubtedly enrich our understanding of leisure dynamics and provide a more comprehensive examination of the intersectionality inherent in individuals' experiences. Gendered perspectives can shed light on how societal expectations and norms shape the leisure choices and opportunities available to children, both within and beyond the confines of social class and race. By incorporating gender as a critical lens, studies would gain insight into how power dynamics, gender roles, and cultural expectations influence the negotiation, participation, and constraints surrounding leisure activities.

By engaging with gender studies alongside the existing exploration of class and race, a more holistic understanding of leisure practices would emerge, one that accounts for the interplay of multiple dimensions of social identity. This multidimensional approach would not only offer a more nuanced analysis of leisure experiences but also foster a deeper awareness of how intersecting systems of power and privilege shape individuals' leisure engagement. Ultimately, the invitation remains to embrace a perspective that would contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of leisure as a complex social phenomenon.

In Brazil, there has been a substantial number of academic research on the topics of leisure and physical education, with a cumulative history spanning over three decades (Amaral, Pereira, 2009; Müller, Arruda, 2012; Rocha, Souza, 2012). These studies have provided valuable insights into various aspects of leisure and its intersection with the educational context. However, one notable gap in this work frame is the limited consideration given to the perspectives and understandings of children themselves.

Acknowledging this gap, Rocha and Souza (2012) undertook a study aiming to comprehend the concept of leisure as children perceive it. Their research delved into understanding not only the theoretical understanding of leisure but also the practical aspects of children's engagement in leisure activities and the social dynamics and companionship that surround these experiences. By exploring these dimensions, the

researchers sought to uncover children's unique perspectives and lived experiences about leisure. However, they suggested that positive psychology, with its focus on promoting well-being, resilience, and positive experiences, could establish meaningful links with the field of leisure studies, disregarding children's agency, as suggested in the book reviewed.

Another example can be found in the article published by Müller and Arruda (2012), who explains that the numerous issues identified by children and analyzed in the article regarding leisure spaces and policies allow us to infer that children's rights to leisure and sports are being violated. The authors argue that children should be actively involved in shaping public policies for leisure and sports specifically designed for childhood in the city.

In summary, the academic production in Brazil on leisure and physical education has made significant progress over the past few decades. Nevertheless, the consideration of children's perspectives and understandings has been relatively limited. In this sense, the book, apart from being a quality work in itself, serves as an invitation to reconsider academic productions in the field of education and physical education when it comes to leisure. It prompts a reevaluation of existing academic literature and invites authors to critically examine their approaches to studying leisure within the context of education and physical education.

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NOTAS


TÍTULO DA OBRA

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Flávia Martinelli Ferreira

Doutorado em Educação
Universidade Estadual de Campinas
Faculdade de Educação Física
Campinas, Brasil
flaviamartinelli@uol.com.br

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2539-6262>

ENDEREÇO DE CORRESPONDÊNCIA DO PRINCIPAL AUTOR

Av. Érico Veríssimo, 701 – 13083-851, Barão Geraldo, Campinas - SP, Brasil.

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CONTRIBUIÇÃO DE AUTORIA

Concepção e elaboração do manuscrito: F. M. Ferreira

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