'Real Ale' Enthusiasts, Serious Leisure and the Costs of Getting 'Too Serious' about Beer

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'I first got involved on a local level in terms of doing things like membership and then encouraging people within the branch, trying to get them to come along to things and then I also went on to being local branch chairman, I've been a social secretary, I've been a news letter editor, I've run numerous beer festivals both at a local level and at national level. At a national level I spent quite a lot of time on strategy and marketing side because that's my professional background...so I got into positioning research doing market research' (Bridget, National Executive CAMRA)

This article explores how the concept of serious leisure (Stebbins, 1992; 2005; 2007) can be applied to the case of beer appreciation which, in recent years, both in Britain and beyond, has become an increasingly meaningful and complex pursuit for many participants. Specifically, the British consumer movement the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) has, since its formation in 1971, advocated and promoted a form of beer consumption based around a knowledgeable informed consumer who is passionate about beer and demands quality, choice and variety over easily consumed and mass-produced alternatives (Thurnell-Read, 2014; CAMRA, 2011). For Bridget, her love of good beer and her involvement with CAMRA has meant several decades of commitment, effort and 'work' in a range of roles leading to her current position on the National Executive of the organization. As this article will demonstrate, Real Ale appreciation involves considerable investment of time, effort and money as, beyond purchasing the beer itself, appreciation necessitates a leisure career developing skill, knowledge, expertise and particular experiences.

Serious leisure is defined as 'the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centred on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience' (Stebbins, 2007: 5). In contrast to this now well established definition, Stebbins considers eating and drinking as mere sensual stimulations that fall not within the category of serious leisure but instead feature only fleetingly as 'casual leisure', defined as being an 'immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy' (Stebbins, 1997: 18). However, studies of the consumption and appreciation of Scottish whisky (Spracklen, 2011), gourmet coffee (Roseberry, 1996) and fine wine (Charters, 2006; Demossier, 2010), as well as ethnic cuisine (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2005) and local and organic food (Cairnes, Johnson & Baumann 2010) have all demonstrated that such leisure pursuits involve considerable degrees of skill, expertise and knowledge and the expenditure of significant amounts of time, effort and money to pursue.

Following a conceptual outline of the serious leisure perspective and a review of the methodological context of the research, this article will demonstrate how the leisure practices of CAMRA members specifically, and Real Ale enthusiasts and beer connoisseurs more generally, do indeed amount to a form of serious leisure. Once this is established, the article will then utilize the case of CAMRA and Real Ale appreciation to explore the 'costs' of serious leisure pursuits (Stebbins, 2005; 2007) which, as Lamont, Kennelly and Moyle (2014) have recently asserted, remain an underexplored facet of the perspective. The article shows how commitment to an organization such as CAMRA can burden members with pressures and obligations. Further, the article notes how a still persistent cultural stereotype of the CAMRA 'beer snob' offers a rare empirical illustration of what Stebbins (2007) has fleetingly referred to as the 'marginality' sometimes associated with serious leisure pursuits. In the concluding discussion, this latter observation is related to the notion of the 'cultural omnivore' (Peterson & Kern, 1996; Warde, Martins & Olsen, 1999; Warde, Wright & Gayo-Cal, 2007) who rejects detailed knowledge of one consumption or leisure practice in favor of

competencies in a broader range of tastes. Such is deployed to explain the stigma of serious leisure and the dangers of being 'too serious' about beer.

Defining Serious Leisure

The concept of serious leisure 'heralded a conceptual shift in how leisure was studied' (Gillespie, Leffler & Lerner, 2002: 286). Thus, the concept has emerged in response to the dominance of academic and lay conceptualization of leisure as antithetical to work (Spracklen, 2013) which have meant many leisure activities that involved considerable expenditure or time, effort and resources to pursue and become proficient at commonly fell outside of the analytical focus of leisure scholars and, hence, had remained under-explored (Stebbins, 1992). While some leisure scholars have long noted the fluidity of the boundaries between notions of 'work', 'non-work' and 'leisure' (Moorhouse, 1989; Rojek, 2005), there remains a residual tendency to associate leisure with a lack of effort and 'work'. In contrast, serious leisure has proved influential in 'problematizing the artificial binary of work and leisure' by 'speaking to and from the experiences of those who undertake the commitment to long term leisure forms' (Raisborough, 1999: 67). A serious leisure activity or pursuit, therefore, involves considerable effort which marks it out from its conceptual opposite, casual leisure, which is characterized by the ease or simplicity of actions and activities. Rather than a shallow distraction from work and the ennui of life under modern capitalism (Clarke & Critcher, 1985), serious leisure can be seen to add meaning and value to the lives of participants and can readily become a significant source of personal or group identification in ways which casual leisure does not (Cohen-Gewerc & Stebbins, 2013). The serious leisure perspective has been applied and tested in a range of empirical studies (Shen & Yarnal, 2010). These include activities as diverse as long-distance hiking (Littlefield & Siudzinski, 2012), 'living history' historical re-enactment (Hunt, 2004), belly dancing (Kraus, 2013), rock climbing (Dilley & Scraton, 2010), volunteering in community projects (Gallant, Arai & Smale, 2013) and grassroots organizations (Bendle & Patterson, 2009) and English folk 'morris dancing' (Spracklen & Henderson 2013).

Stebbins (2007) has developed six distinguishing qualities with which to identify serious leisure. Thus serious leisure means that those involved *persevere* in their pursuit or proficiency in the activity through both highs and lows along what amounts to a *career* of learning and developing one's abilities and skills. This requires considerable *effort* but, importantly, because of this serious leisure pursuits also confer notable rewards and *durable benefits* in terms of feelings of satisfaction and self-actualization. As a result, a *unique ethos* can develop around serious leisure activities where context-specific terminology, meanings and values are likely to demarcate the community of practitioners from non-practitioners and, as a result, practitioners see their position in relation to serious leisure as being important for, and indeed for many central to, their *identity*. The rewards of serious leisure are therefore numerous, and can include personal enrichment, improved self-image, feelings of accomplishment and belonging, forging of new and intense social connections, and contributing to the maintenance of group affiliations (Stebbins, 2005; 2007).

One aspect of serious leisure which has been relatively underexplored, and therefore where this article will devote the bulk of its analysis, is the 'costs' of serious leisure. Few have picked up on his indication of the 'costs' of serious leisure beyond rather literal explorations of financial and time expenditure in pursuit. Beyond these 'costs' of serious leisure, Stebbins (2007) has alluded to 'charges of selfishness', obsessiveness and 'marginality'. As will be explored in greater detail below, the concept of the marginality of serious leisure requires greater elaboration. In particular, how the fixation with a particular serious leisure activity is viewed by those outside of the activity is only explored in a few instances. In their recent study of 'morris dancers' in the English folk leisure scene, Spracklen and Henderson (2013: 235) have referred to dancers' self-awareness of the image of folk dancing as being 'uncool' while Gillespie *et al* (2002) have shown that serious leisure practitioners of dog sports are only too aware of how their activities are viewed as strange and obsessive by friends, family and colleagues. Similarly, Wallace (2006) explores how railway heritage volunteers are aware of and seek to negotiate how their leisure activity is perceived negatively by non-participants and wider society more generally. In the current case of CAMRA, a long held stereotype of the CAMRA

member as bearded, unfashionable, elderly and boorish has served as a ready referent with which those outside the field can marginalize those within it (Thurnell-Read, 2013).

Research Context and Methods

Founded in 1971, the Campaign for Real Ale is a British consumer social movement that campaigns to promote and protect Real Ale, a style of beer largely unique to Britain that, in contrast to mass-produced beers that dominate the global beer market, involves a secondary fermentation prior to dispense from a barrel, or 'cask'. CAMRA boasts a membership of over 160,000, each member paying an annual subscription and receiving various CAMRA publications including the long-running monthly campaign newspaper *What's Brewing*. The organization, which was infamously founded by four friends from the North-West of England who initially kept membership cards in a battered shoe box (CAMRA, 2011), now has an annual turnover in excess of £5m and a professional head office staff engaged in lobbying parliament on issues relating to the beer and pub trade (www.camra.org.uk). At its heart, however, are the thousands of members who volunteer by running one of over 200 local branches, organizing tours of local pubs and breweries, and staff local and national beer festivals. Tellingly, there appears to be no clear and stable distinction between leisure, volunteering and paid work as participants take on and move between roles and duties as they become draw into the 'social world' of CAMRA (Unruh, 1980). Decision making is lead by a National Executive made up of twelve, un-paid, voluntary National Directors with motions debated at an AGM held at the annual Members Weekend. As with other such organizations, members of such voluntary associations are motivated to join for a number of personal, social and intellectual reasons (Dennis & Zube, 1988); importantly, a genuine sense of enthusiasm and passion is a key driver of voluntary participation (Roberts, 2004). A significant core of the membership is therefore made up of individuals who feel strongly enough about Real Ale to devote at least some of their personal time to events and activities which sustain and further the campaigning initiatives of CAMRA as an organization. This commitment may lead into a range of roles and responsibilities within the organization. Indeed, even in the case of interviewees holding salaried positions a love of beer appeared to pre-date the occupational involvement with the organization.

Qualitative methods are particularly suited to the study of serious leisure (Stebbins, 2005). Ethnographic methods have therefore been deployed with good effect by a number of scholars in serious leisure contexts (e.g. Gillespie *et al*, 2002; Kraus, 2013; Raisborough, 1999). This paper is based on qualitative research conducted between August 2012 and May 2014. At the centre of the research are 53 semi-structured qualitative interviews with a range of relevant participants including: CAMRA members from local branch to National Executive level; salaried members of the CAMRA headquarters staff including the Chief Executive and those with senior roles relating to campaigning, publicity and publications; two of the four founders of the organization; a number of beer writers, bloggers and others involved with the promotion of beer who, importantly, expressed varying degree of association with CAMRA; brewers from microbreweries (see Thurnell-Read, 2014 for an analysis); and ten members of a university student ale appreciation society. Complementing these interviews, and stretching across nearly two years of the research undertaking, is a range of 'ethnographically inspired' methods including extensive participant-observation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). At a local level, this included involvement in the author's local branch of CAMRA by attending regular socials and events, two branch AGMs and several beer festivals both as a volunteer and as a customer. Further, at a national level, the researcher attended two national CAMRA AGMs, two 'Super-Regional' conferences and, again both as volunteer and as customer, the *Great British Beer Festival*, CAMRA's flagship event held in London each August. Further archival and textual research was conducted involving the analysis of CAMRA documents and publications from its 1971 foundation to the present day. Participant-observation was also conducted over the course of the two years with a local university student ale appreciation society which involved attending regular socials in nearby towns and cities and making trips further afield to beer festivals in Oxford and Manchester. The youthful membership of the society, many of them relative novices in their recent entry into both the field of Real Ale appreciation and, for the many who had joined, their membership of CAMRA, provides an interesting counterpoint to the interviews and observation conducted with more established long-term CAMRA membership of the local branch.

All interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The resulting transcripts, along with ethnographic field notes and archival materials were analyzed for emergent themes relating to leisure, personal and group identity, social status, cultural capital as well as the benefits and costs of leisure participation. In order to preserve their anonymity, all participants are referred to using pseudonyms with other distinguishing characteristics such as reference to specific organizational roles and titles being minimized where possible.

Real Ale Appreciation as Serious Leisure

The purpose of this section of the article is to demonstrate that Real Ale appreciation, as pursued by CAMRA members, qualifies as serious leisure. In contrast to drinking as a fleeting 'sensory pleasure' typical of casual leisure (Cohen-Gewerc & Stebbins, 2013; Stebbins, 2007), Real Ale appreciation is a long-term activity where participants regularly and consistently develop their knowledge of beer and pubs, explore new tastes and seek out new beers and breweries and, for some, progress along a career of steadily increasing involvement and responsibility within CAMRA itself. Indeed, in many cases there was a readily identifiable track of progression from initial casual membership to a more committed association involving volunteering and sometimes paid roles. Taking each of Stebbins' (2007) six characteristics of serious leisure in turn, this section demonstrates that while the 'core activity' of Real Ale appreciation is a simple one, drinking beer, it is the associated tasks and activities which really identify it as serious leisure.

First, in what we might refer to as connoisseurship, or that quality which participants might more colloquially refer to as 'knowing your beer', Real Ale appreciation involves considerably *effort* in learning about beer styles, breweries and brewing heritage and, importantly, acquiring and performing knowledge and taste. Participants must take time to learn the 'shared standards' of beer appreciation (Lynch, 2007: 51) and learn how to successfully embody what Schwarz (2013) has referred to as the 'techniques' of taste and appreciation. Thus, while new entrants to the field could easily be identified for their relative lack of knowledge more established members stood out for having extensive knowledge of local and national breweries and more developed preferences for beer

informed by understandings of quality, style, production process and provenance. Participants spoke of drawing on books, tasting notes, beer and pub guides, expert tutorials, and an increasing number of online beer tasting and reviewing websites (for a discussion of the latter, see Clemons, Gao & Hilt, 2006) to enhance their knowledge and expertise. Tristan, a member of the student ale society noted in an interview that 'there's a knowledge aspect of Real Ale that you don't get with lager…you learn about the fermentation, the process, there's so much to learn about Real Ale'. Similarly, second year student Eliot, reflected that:

> A year ago I didn't know a thing! I'd order *Guinness* thinking I was being quite classy [laughs]. Embarrassing really… Right now, I'd say I'm considered to be a bit of a beer geek, I know my stuff [laughs]. I have a good knowledge of ales, having read up on it I know about the process where it comes from and how it's made

A second area in which *effort* was observed during the research was in the range of voluntary and organizational roles and tasks undertaken by participants. While the organization does undoubtedly boast a significant casual membership, for many, involvement with CAMRA has been a long-term and significant activity in their lives. Many had been members for decades and were able to trace their involvement, as Bridget does in the interview extract which opens this article, across numerous roles. Real Ale appreciation can therefore be understood in relation to a second serious leisure characteristic in offering a *career* both in terms of ascending the organizational hierarchy and in becoming a more knowledgeable and experienced Real Ale enthusiast who is able to draw on the requisite terminology, understanding and opinions. During the course of the research, for example, one interviewee from the student ale society was elected first to the role of Social Secretary, with responsibility for planning and leading the fortnightly social trips to local pubs and beer festivals, and then to society President, with overall leadership of the society.

Perseverance, the third serious leisure characteristic to be identified here, is apparent in the way that individuals pursue their interest in Real Ale across both highs and lows. Examples of the former include discovering new beers, learning to identify and appreciate a new style of beer or

promotion to a new role in the local branch committee. In contrast, the latter might include the closure of a cherished local brewery or pub, being caught misapplying brewery terminology or seeing long planned events not go as planned. Reviewing early CAMRA publications, for example, reveals numerous reports of CAMRA successes and achievements. In an issue of *What's Brewing* from October 1979 a senior committee member wrote how 'once the future looked bleak' but 'now the trend away from quality and variety has been reversed'…'what strides have been made'. A more recent example of success constituting a 'high' of involvement in CAMRA would be the 'momentous' success of the scrapping of the hated beer duty escalator by Chancellor George Osborne following 2012 CAMRA's Save Your Pint campaign (http://saveyourpint.co.uk/) which culminated in a petition of over 100,000 signatures, and a mass lobby at the Houses of Parliament in December 2012 (Smithers, 2012), which the author participated in.

Noticeable *durable benefits* can be observed (Stebbins, 2007). As would be expected, the appreciation of the taste of good beer itself was the most notable benefit and evidently a great pleasure in and of itself. For example, Martin spoke reverently of 'that magic moment when you try a new beer for the first time, that's in perfect condition, and it's just lovely'. Similarly, Gale, a member of the student ale appreciation society spoke of his first trip to a beer festival, saying 'and that was it, I was hooked, I really enjoyed it'. However, it is in the various tasks and challenges of taking on voluntary roles within CAMRA that the *durable benefits* of serious leisure were most apparent. At an organizational level, many of those interviewed spoke with evident pride about the impact of their efforts in a particular role. Craig, a CAMRA Regional Director, for instance, reflected on his prior role as a branch President where he 'picked the branch up, shook it off and when I left we had 760 members three years later'. A similarly sentiment was expressed by Donald whose, in his own words, 'Damacean moment' of conversion from 'fizzy lager' to Real Ale came over 20 years ago. Referring to his role involving selecting the beers to be ordered for the local branch's annual beer festival, Donald observed that while 'in the first year there was obviously a steep learning curve, I think the beers I got weren't as imaginative as some people would have liked which is probably why we only sold 82% of them last year'. He then, however, 'got so many plaudits' for a more imaginative beer

order in the second year meaning he 'probably cemented my reputation as a result of that'. Overcoming the apparent disappointment in the previous order not selling out – again, another example of *perseverance* – Graham takes pride in the following year's order in which his selection of beers and breweries received widespread acclaim in attributing to the success of the festival and through which his reputation as an expert was recognized. While serious leisure pursuits often involve 'a pursuit of detailed knowledge' (Hunt, 2004: 402), that knowledge still needs to be performed and embodied for it to be recognized by others and of real worth to both the individual and the group (Cohen-Gewerc & Stebbins, 2013). Here and elsewhere we see how Real Ale enthusiasts derive pleasure regarding themselves as competent connoisseurs and also benefit from status when this is recognized by others. As Lee and Scott (2006) have observed in relation to American bird watching enthusiasts, with greater proficiency and specialization comes greater rewards in being recognized as a consummate expert.

While such *durable benefits* involve the achievements or recognition of a particular individual, throughout fieldwork both with CAMRA and with the student ale society, it became apparent that the implicitly sociable nature of both was a significant benefit to participants. Indeed, CAMRA makes much of the benefits to members of active involvement in a range of voluntary roles, listing benefits such as 'satisfaction' of helping preserve beer and pubs, gaining specific 'skills and experience' through volunteer roles, as well as 'sociability' and 'fun' in materials aiming to encourage volunteering within the organization. Indeed, it is this emphasis on fun and rewards of volunteer involvement that indicate that no clear distinction can be drawn between leisure and volunteering. Henry, National Director sitting on the 12 person National Executive, for example, observed in an interview that 'It is a fantastic campaign in the way it gets volunteers involved and people are passionate about that and in terms of the good it does, in terms of bringing people together'. Further, Pete, a salaried staff member interviewed observed the importance of sociability as both a motivation and a reward for volunteering: 'volunteer at a festival and you meet like minded people, you volunteer for the Great British Beer Festival and you work with a thousand people, you socialize with them, you have a good time'. Thus, whilst a serious commitment to volunteering might resemble 'work' it is

more readily spoken of as 'leisure' in the frequent reference made to social benefits and connection it entails. Such concurs with observations made by both Hunt (2004) and by Kyle and Chick (2004) whereby the 'camaraderie' and social connections forged through particular serious leisure pursuits are often amongst the most significant and longest lasting of benefits. The shared and mutually reinforced values relating to what participants find important and what is worth being serious about, in this case the appreciation of well made beer, might not be shared by outsiders but here bring social benefits and feelings of group loyalty.

The final two characteristics of serious leisure, *unique ethos* and *identity*, were observed during the research. Participants in the research identified with ale and thought of and spoke of themselves as 'ale drinkers'. As Spracklen *et al* (2013) have noted, CAMRA members are identifiable by their specific performance of beer appreciation where their behavior, attitude and mannerisms are identifiably different from those of more casual beer consumers. Indeed, one only had to approach the bar with a fellow CAMRA member to observe a familiar routine; that of stopping to apprise the beers on offer, often accompanied by some discussion of the options before making a final selection and then, once served, holding the glass to eye level before taking a first sip always accompanied by a slight pause in order to mentally note the flavor and quality of the beer. While the particularities of this performance are explored elsewhere (Thurnell-Read, Forthcoming), it suffices here to say state that such a practice applied to ordering and drinking a pint of beer is seldom followed by most beer drinkers.

A noticeable feature of many CAMRA and one which further illustrates the *identity*, both individual and collective, and *unique ethos* running through Real Ale appreciation, is the clothing bearing conspicuous and conspicuous CAMRA branding and logos of breweries strikingly predominant at most CAMRA events such as regional and national beer festivals. Such serves to build a collective identity and to herald the subcultural aspects of devoted CAMRA members. During the 2013 *Great British Beer Festival*, in which the researcher volunteered in a number of roles including scanning tickets as attendees entered the festival hall, it was observed that:

Many who enter are wearing CAMRA shirts and sweaters bearing names and branch positions such as 'President', 'Branch Secretary', 'Brewery Liaison Officer'. Many others are wearing brewery branded t-shirts. A distinct regional flavor as many enter in groups which thanks to their shirts can easily be identified as being from a particular town or city. In the space of ten minutes I scan tickets of people whose matching shirts clearly identify themselves as being from particular CAMRA branches in cities and regions from across the UK. Cornwall, London, Manchester. (Field notes, Tuesday August 13th 2013, Great British Beer Festival, London Olympia)

As such, belonging to a CAMRA branch as well as the wider alignment and identification with the campaign and a general sense of being a 'Real Ale drinker' all can be seen to offered members a sense of belonging and identity.

The Costs of Serious Leisure

As noted above, while the rewards and benefits of involvement in serious leisure activities, both for the individual and for the group or community have been explored extensively (Stebbins, 2007), the 'costs' of serious leisure remain notably underexplored (Lamont *et al*, 2014). From the limited literature that has addressed the costs of serious leisure, it is clear that there are costs in terms of finances, time and effort (Bendle & Patterson, 2009; Gillespie et al, 2002), as well as a range of more complicated costs in the form of personal tensions and interpersonal conflicts (Gibson, Willming & Holdnak, 2002; Goff, Fick & Oppliger, 1997). Indeed, a participant may become so engage with a serious leisure activity that they experience a form of dependence on the thrill or pleasure offered by that particular activity (Partington, Partington & Oliver, 2009). This section will first briefly highlight the 'costs' of serious leisure in terms of the expenditure of money, time and commitment before describing a range of organizational and interpersonal tensions and conflicts, particularly those relating to sense of obligation and responsibility. While, as we have seen, the social networks and relationships that tend to form around serious leisure activities bring obvious benefits to

serious leisure practitioner so too do they act as the channels through which obligations, responsibilities and expectations of assistance can be brought to bear on participants.

Costs of Money, Time and Commitment

It has been observed that 'active participation in conducting the affairs of voluntary associations requires availability of mobilizing resources such as time, money, and knowledge' (Dennis & Zube, 1988: 242). CAMRA participation requires money in order to attend social meetings, pay for drinks as well as transport to and from weekly meetings. From general observations during participation it was clear that most of those attending a local branch meeting might drink anywhere between two and five pints of ale as well as purchase drinks for other members and, as such, incur a cost of up to and above £20 not including transport in attending a particular local event. A related concern is that it is evident that many members drink in excess of public health guidelines for 'responsible' alcohol consumption. Yet, as I explore elsewhere (Thurnell-Read, Forthcoming B), the line between dedication and dependency or addiction is fiercely defended by members who locate their drinking within a narrative of safe, sociable and sensible drinking.

Following from this, those with limited time or money may be frustrated by the inability to commit as much as they'd like or feel they ought to. Several members of the local branch only attended socials intermittently and on several occasions were observed expressing embarrassment or apologizing for not having attended in weeks or even months. Roger, for example, confessed to feelings of guilt for his lack of participation in his local branch, his attending being severely limited 'due to work, due to money'. Feelings of guilt may be associated with serious leisure activities, particularly when individuals feel that they are not demonstrating the level of commitment and effort that they feel, whether real or perceived, others expect of them. In the case of both Members Weekends attended by the author as part of the research (in Norwich in 2013 and Scarborough in 2014) only a few members of the local branch were present. Following up this observation at a later branch meeting, it seemed that attending the meetings was prohibitively expensive for many members. Financial cost can, then, be a common barrier to full participation in a serious leisure activity. In the

case of CAMRA, this presents its own problems given that binding decisions relating to the activities and policy of the entire organization are made during the AGM held as part of the Members Weekend.

Involvement in CAMRA often involves a range of quite mundane tasks (such as distributing branch news letters to local pubs) and the most active members may experience a feeling over being overloaded and of potential conflict between CARMA commitments and other aspects of their life, notably their paying day jobs and their familial commitments. This is particularly pronounced with those who take on the more advanced voluntary positions within the organization as the following quotes from, first, a Regional Director and, second, a member of the National Executive indicate:

> Its family first always, then your job, then CAMRA. I suffered when I took on this job, it was to the detriment of my day job because I was running around during the day doing things, and I stopped seeing my kids on the night or some weekends because of CAMRA work, I've stopped doing that. Family first, then the day job, this is my hobby, that's how I'm treating it (Craig, Regional Director CAMRA)

> I felt I could give the campaign more of my skills and expertise by moving up a level. It's quite hard I think being a Regional Director, four regional meetings, twelve branch AGMs, twelve regional beer festivals to go to. Its late nights! When I was Regional Director I used to go out seven in the morning and sometime get home at ten to two at night, and you're driving all around the countryside and the meetings take too long. So I have the upmost respect for the Regional Directors (Emily, National Executive CAMRA)

In both cases the interviewees reflect on their involvement with CAMRA as costing significant amounts of time and energy and as giving rise to conflicts of interest in relation to family and professional commitments. Worth noting here is the tendency for involvement to develop along a continuum where new entrants steadily develop greater commitments and are assigned new duties. As in Scott and Godbey's (1992) study, participants within the setting appear to become 'more serious' as they enter further into the 'social world' (Unrah, 1980) and gain increased responsibilities.

The concern that members might be overworked and that particular members might be over-relied upon was also noted by a senior member of the Head Quarters staff. Pete observed that 'quite often, with the best will in the world, they are still maybe cajoled into it because there is a limit to active members who have the time to do, to be a branch Chairman or a Press Officer'. In the same vein, Craig – who was widely known and respected as a 'fixer' and 'a man to get things done' – went on to reflect on how at the local branch level CAMRA can fall into making unfair demands of people to commit time and effort to participation. Thus, he noted that:

> Some members will say "there's my £25 [CAMRA annual membership fee as in 2013] now leave me alone". What we've been historically really bad at is if someone turns up at a meeting its "Do you wanna be on the committee?!", "No I just wanted to…" "Do you want be on the committee, we really need you!". They're so in their face, a winning horse is flogged to death. If you volunteer then you do that job and everyone else says "Do this job, do this job" (Craig, Regional Director CAMRA)

The prominence of such pressures relating to obligations concur with findings by DiEnno and Thompson's (2013) describing how volunteers can be simultaneously motivated by pleasure-related and responsibility related emotions and by Bendle and Patterson (2009) who note how those taking on committee positions and officeholder roles in voluntary organizations bear a considerable weight of expectation the expected commitment and conduct.

Costs of Organisational Conflict

Unpaid volunteers may feel frustrations at the size and scale of organizational bureaucracy and the relative power of paid professionals (Stebbins, 2005). In his study of American historical re-enactment societies, Hunt (2004) noted that the internal politics with organizations can have the effect of alienating some members. Animosity expressed towards Head Office by local branch members was observed on a number of occasions during participant-observation and, in particular, during the two AGMs attended in 2013 and 2014. As such, at times disparaging references to 'them at St Albans', and sometimes to specific members of the salaried Head Office staff were relatively common. Phrases

such as 'out of touch' or 'too big for their boots' might be surreptitiously used either in general reference to Head Office or specific staff. These tensions have run throughout CAMRA's history. At the 1987 AGM held in Manchester, for example, a number of branches combined in raising a motion to 'express its lack of confidence in the editor of the Good Beer Guide and his staff' who they blamed for the 'wholesale butchering' of the pub descriptions written by local branches for inclusion in the annual CAMRA *Good Beer Guide*.

As outlined in the contextual section previously, CAMRA is a large organization with a growing membership and a complex structure of paid and unpaid staff. Such give rise to a broad range or continuum of involvements from casual member to salaried staff and is, as such, bound to give rise to tensions. Such dissatisfactions can also be traced in the not uncommon occurrence of disaffected members cancelling their membership. For example, in April 1984 issue of *What's Brewing*, a lead letter titled 'Why I am leaving CAMRA' announced cancellation of membership by a long term member saying they were leaving 'as the Campaign slowly grinds to a halt'. Similarly, in the letters section of the October 1997 issues of *What's Brewing* a self-described 'stalwart' of 20 years wrote in to announce their cancellation of their membership over an ongoing dispute relating to the technical specifications of defining Real Ale. While not uncommon, such acts of protest are significant more in their symbolic value in demonstrating the strength of feeling felt by serious leisure practitioners who are prompted by their dissatisfaction to disassociate themselves from the organization, if not the leisure practice. Indeed, though the scope of this article does not permit a full exploration of such, it is worth reflecting that how once committed serious leisure practitioners come to abandon or remove themselves from a particular pursuit is and remains an area ripe for more in-depth research.

Costs of Marginalization and Stigmatization

The quirks and peculiarities of a given serious leisure activity, held dear to participants, may strike outsiders as peculiar, bizarre or undesirable. In his study of railway heritage volunteers, Wallace (2006: 230) notes that participants must negotiate the negative social perception of railway enthusiasts and observes that 'to admit to being a trainspotter in a wider social milieu leaves oneself open to high

levels of ridicule'. Similarly, as Sandhill has observed in relation to devoted fans of a particular television series, such enthusiasm can lead to negative depictions of fans who 'are perceived to overvalue or overestimate the importance of their object of fandom' (Sandfill, 2013: 124). A knowledgeable, passionate beer connoisseur can appear, to many, as boorish and dogmatic in their devotion to beer consumption and technicalities of production, style and taste. Taking beer 'too seriously' can therefore lead to stigmatizing cultural stereotypes of the CAMRA member or Real Ale enthusiast as a beer snob who appears to be far too earnest in their approach to beer.

CAMRA as an organization has long sought to distance itself from a particular persistent stereotype of Real Ale enthusiasts which commonly depict members as bearded, elderly, male and obsessive (Watson & Watson, 2012). Indeed, an extreme rendition of this stereotype is found in a long-running series in the British satirical comic *Viz*, where the *Real Ale Twats* depicted a trio of portly, boring, middle-aged, beer obsessives.

While I have focused in detail on the embodied and gendered aspects of this stereotype in greater depth elsewhere (Thurnell-Read, 2013), in the context of the current analysis of Real Ale appreciation as serious leisure it is the way in which this image is associated with negative behavior and character traits such as obsessiveness and snobbery that is of interest. Thus, in an article in the February 1987 issue of *What's Brewing*, the Chairman of the CAMRA Publicity Committee wrote of the need for branches to be more 'outward looking' and warned against 'preaching to the converted'. Similarly, in the April 1989 issue of *What's Brewing*, one senior CAMRA figure spoke of needing to promote 'an image of CAMRA as fun and likeable, not as a collection of middle-aged defeatist beer-bores'. In one article in the January 2003 issue of *What's Brewing* it was noted:

> If you believe what you read in the papers, you're now one of a tribe of male, middle-aged, physically unappealing obsessives who terrorise innocent pub landlords and bore fellow customers to death with endless dissertations on obscure breweries and thick, warm beers with daft names (*What's Brewing,* Jan 2003, Ted Bruning 'How to make the most of your £16' article for new members).

One influential industry report (Brown, 2012: 21) included a section on overcoming stereotypes around drinkers of cask Real Ale and noted a hypothetical contrast between the 'hard core cask ale man' who is 'a knowledgeable connoisseur' but 'can be snobbish, over-fussy and stuck in a rut' and the 'cask ale dabbler' who is 'social, professional, foodie and thoughtful' and prides himself on 'making interesting product choices'. Such sentiments expose an important tension in serious leisure relating to how a balance can be struck between the intensity of feeling and sense of a community of likeminded individuals, both such integral elements of the *unique ethos* of any particular serious leisure activity, on the one hand, and the need to present an acceptable and welcoming image to the outside world.

More recently, this has been further complicated with the emergence of 'craft beer' aficionado which, in being typified as younger, more innovative and more aligned to contemporary American culture rather than traditional British heritage (Kelly, 2013) has added new impetus to the cultural stereotyping of CAMRA members as 'beer bores' who dogmatically stick to their traditional ales and pubs. While the conflict between these two formats of consumption is explored by the author in greater detail elsewhere (Thurnell-Read, Forthcoming) it is worth noting here, as Gronow (1997) has in his discussion of changing consumer fashions, that that the practitioners of new and emerging cultural practices within a particular field of consumption will often invest heavily in constructing a stark, antithetical, divide between the tastes, styles and conventions of their predecessors and those of their own group. Thus, while 'craft beer' and Real Ale appreciation bear huge similarities in their appreciation of good quality beer, exponents of the former have readily sought to disparage the latter as outdated and insular. For example, in the reader comments responding to an article about the growth of the craft beer 'scene' in the UK in the British newspaper *The Guardian*, comments, and to an extent the article itself, sought to contrast the contemporary craft beer drinker with 'militant' Real Ale drinkers and 'uber-traditional CAMRA fundamentalists' needing to 'stop their angels-on-a-pinhead sophistry' (Naylor, 2014).

While CAMRA undertakes continued efforts to improve the image of the organization in general, it also became apparent that individual participants were aware of and took steps to negotiate

the potential marginalizing effects of the negative cultural stereotype. Thus, one tension for serious leisure practitioners relates to how they manage their behavior as they pass across the serious leisure community boundary in trying 'to walk between two socially constructed worlds' (Gillespie *et al*, 2002: 300). Tellingly, Bill reflected on how friends and colleagues might perceive his deep and long-held passion for Real Ale:

> You have to watch yourself sometimes. Depends who you are with really, but I've caught myself prattling on at friends who couldn't give two hoots about this or that brewery and I feel like a daft prat for it. I've got colleagues, some of the lads at work and they're into their beers but not like I am so I have to be careful, save it for when I meet up with friends I know get it, the ones who are as into it as I am.

Interestingly, Bill speaks of a need for self-management so as not to let the values, interests and obsessions of his serious leisure life from creeping into his non-serious leisure interactions. Such examples indicate that Real Ale enthusiasts negotiate their serious leisure engagement and are aware of possible stigmatizing effects of being involved in activities that wider society may ridicule.

A further interesting addition to this analysis can be made by considering the concept of the 'Beer Ticker', a sub-set of Real Ale enthusiasts who, in attempting to drink as many different beers as possible, go to great lengths to find and taste new beers and then record their names and the brewery that produced them in a logbook or folder. While some Tickers have achieved a degree of notoriety for their achievements – for example, Mick 'The Tick' Baker has featured in the low budget documentary *Tickets: Beyond the Ale* (Parkin, 2009) as well as being interviewed for the beer and pub trade (Mellows, 2008: 18) and is famous for having tasted and logged over 50,000 beers – many of those interviewed readily referenced Tickers as an apparent means of distancing their own committed enthusiasm from the 'too serious' obsessiveness exhibited by the Beer Ticker. Roger, for instance, joked that:

I love my ale and in many ways I want to try as many as possible, yeah, but if [laughs], if I ever catch myself with a bag full of plastic bottles taking ten dozen beers back from a festival just to tick them off in my little book [laughs], I know I'll have to take a good look at myself!

This reference to Beer Tickers who bottle ales at beer festivals to drink later depicts the Ticker as being a figure of ridicule and attests to what Jones (2010) has referred to as 'in-group favouritism' and 'out-group derogation' in drawing lines of involvement and exclusion with specific leisure groups. The Ticker thus helps 'normal' Real Ale enthusiasts frame their behavior and values as acceptable. Thus, Bridget referred to 'the sorts of people you see going to the beer festivals with bottles' as 'very odd' and 'not what CAMRA is about'. Similarly, Michael felt that Tickers had, in their obsession with the quantity of beers sampled, lost sight of other, more sociable aspects of Real Ale appreciation as a serious leisure pursuit:

Couple of evenings in the pub a week, a good beer festival once in a while yes but I'm not a Ticker by any means. I see that as putting one thing, tasting as many beers as possible, ahead of everything else that's great about Real Ale and British pubs.

Here the Ticker is seen as a selfish obsessive who could, as Michael went on to elaborate, 'drink the best beer in the world once and only once because they want to move on and tick off umpteen other beers'. While in reality it represents only a minuscule minority of Real Ale enthusiasts, the Ticker archetype evidently holds a functional value in being a shared referent providing a ready example of the Real Ale appreciation which has become 'too serious'. Again, there is a resonance here with Sanfill's (2013) study of fans who measured their own behavior against that of a largely hypothetical 'bad fan' who they readily spoke of as taking their obsession too far. While CAMRA devotees might be marginalized they too can marginalize others, real or hypothetical, as a means to negotiate and sustain their own identity.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article began with the suggestion that Real Ale appreciation and membership of CAMRA is one of a growing number of examples of drinking and eating as serious leisure and as far

more than the 'creature pleasures' that Stebbins (1997) has, on occasions, categorized them as. This article has demonstrated how the drinking of beer can, for those who engage in ongoing connoisseurship and a range of related activities, amount to more than a simple fleeting sensory pleasure, a moment of 'casual leisure' as typified by Stebbins (2007). Using Stebbins's influential conceptualization of 'serious leisure', and drawing on extensive qualitative research with the Campaign for Real Ale, the article has shown how for participants Real Ale appreciation is a meaningful and long-term leisure commitment requiring ongoing efforts in acquiring knowledge and expertise and acting in any number of voluntary organizational roles and, as such, is a significant element of participants identity. Being a 'Real Ale drinker' offers identity and, through an array of events, socials, beer festivals and local branch meetings, a sense of community and conviviality which bestows considerable social and personal benefits on participants. Such rewards and durable benefits are, however, tempered and counterbalanced by notable tensions and stresses. The article has therefore explored how commitments requiring time, energy and money can occasionally step over into the realm of obligation. Throughout CAMRA's history, and particularly during its more recent growth and period of organizational 'professionalization' from the mid 1980s onwards, tensions between local members and grassroots volunteers, volunteers with regional or national organizational roles of committee duties and the growing salaried professional staff mean committed participants may, nonetheless, experience conflicts and dissatisfaction. Importantly, however, it appears that for those participants interviewed, the benefits outweigh the costs and, indeed, the dominant narrative offered in interviews was one of a holistic sense of how, in spite of such costs, involvement in CAMRA and Real Ale appreciation benefited participants in terms of wellbeing and social integration.

While such 'costs' of serious leisure have long been alluded to within the serious leisure model (Stebbins, 2007) they remain an underexplored aspect of the perspective (Lamont *et al*, 2014). Contributing to the remedying of this issue, and seeking to further explore the complexities of serious leisure practice, the article concludes with analysis of the potential for serious leisure practitioners to be marginalized by others. The article suggests that CAMRA members are at times marginalized or even lampooned because of their committed engagement in a leisure activity that for the majority is

non-serious and casual. Many CAMRA members and Real Ale enthusiasts, not to mention CAMRA as an organization itself, are in fact aware of and reflective on this issue and seek to negotiate, challenge or mitigate against such possibly stigmatizing or marginalizing stereotypes by positioning their leisure as the right kind of seriousness, committed but not overly obsessive.

One plausible explanation for this can be found by drawing on notions of the 'cultural omnivore' (Peterson & Kern, 1996; Warde *et al*, 2007) which suggest that since the 1990s cultural capital based status is increasingly drawn from being consummate in a variety of cultural fields rather than being a specialist in only one. For example, Alan Warde and colleagues (1999: 120), in a study of social class and eating habits in three UK cities, identified a possible 'shift from connoisseurship and refinement – knowing what is best – to having a wide knowledge of all alternatives'. At a time when a variety of cultural tastes is said to be the marker of cultural distinction, individuals who obsessively and exclusively pursue one consumer taste or leisure activity may be conferred with lesser not greater social status. The shift to cultural omnivorousness means that the deep but narrow specialism of the 'serious leisure' can be pilloried as being 'too serious' and insular. Returning to Stebbins' (2007: 21) serious leisure perspective, it is worth nothing that the associated concept of 'recreational specialization' (Lee & Scott, 2006; Scott, 2012), whereby those often involved with serious leisure pursuits might undergo a noticeable 'narrowing' of interests to particular styles or subcategories of pursuit, means that less attention is paid to other forms of leisure.

Scott (2012) thus observes that it is important to acknowledge the gradation of seriousness and specialization in such leisure pursuits. Similarly, both Chris Rojek (2005) and Shen and Yarnal (2010) have warned that conceptualizing serious and casual leisure as a rigid dichotomy, rather than as an index or continuum respectively, can blind analyses to complexities of mixtures of and trajectories between the two. This dynamic has been well evidenced in this article. Participants of this research were serious about their appreciation for Real Ale yet readily distanced themselves from the perceived obsessiveness of the Beer Ticker archetype. At the same time, they might view casual beer drinkers as *not serious enough* in their willingness to, as Michael described, 'make do with mass-produced, tasteless beer even when there's so much amazing beer out there these days just waiting to

be drunk'. It is therefore important to conclude that while research reveals both the benefits and costs of serious leisure activities, the perception of these is contingent upon an individual's relative position within the field and is negotiated in reference to that of others.

Finally, several limitations of the article which indicate potential future avenues of research undertaking can be highlighted. For example, two recent studies of serious leisure by Kraus (2013) and by Dilley and Scraton (2010) have noted that the timing and nature of entry into a serious leisure career is highly influenced by gender. While CAMRA holds a steady 3:1 male to female membership ratio there is some suggestion, at least partially supported by field observations, that the entry of many female CAMRA members is linked to their role as wife or girlfriend. Research exploring the experiences of female serious leisure practitioners in male dominated leisure fields therefore remains an underexplored area within the discipline. Additionally, as the research is tightly focused on the UK context meaning that the points raised in this article await application to the American 'craft beer' scene which although less wedded to organizational and institutional entities like CAMRA perhaps demonstrate in the sheer scale and scope of the American brewing revival a greater potential to generate serious leisure opportunities. Similarly, the emergence of serious beer appreciation leisure activities in countries more typically associated with wine drinking, such as Italy or France (Rowe & Taix, 2014), could hold quite different dynamics of identity, consumption and belonging than those observed here.

With CAMRA entering its fifth decade of operation and gaining new members at a significant rate, many of who will progress to organizational roles as a new generation of Branch Chairs, Regional Directors and National Executive Directors. It is apparent that the serious leisure activity of Real Ale appreciation will continue to offer both benefits and costs and that, further, the balances struck by participants between the two may well continue to adapt and change over time.

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