

DEVIANT LEISURE: UNCOVERING THE 'GOODS' IN TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

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Introduction

The thought of 'deviant' leisure titillates the imagination. Popular culture venues in the public social context---film, television, music, electronic and print media---offer daily visual and/or textual forms of deviant behavior as amusement for casual consumption. 'The mob' and 'serial killer' film genres boast gross lifetime revenues in the billions of dollars. The television show "Crime Scene Investigation" which spotlights violent crime and its analysis in detail, receives top Neilson Ratings with nearly 30 million viewers in a given week. The 'hot' Christmas gift for kids, Grand Theft Auto, is a video game that presents opportunities for participation in virtual auto theft, random killing, and rape marketed as 'fun'. Choreographed nightly newscast performances display detached images of the latest spectacle of suicide bombings showing bloody bodies and material destruction. Pornography and sadomasochism are accessible by computer connection to the Internet; 'pornography' receives more 'hits' than 'education' in a Google search. Drug use, gambling and casual violence are popular pastimes. In spite of this evidence, leisure studies researchers have virtually ignored such amusements as valuable areas of study. I take the position that 'goods' exist in 'deviant' leisure, and in a socio-political context, these behaviors are saturated with significance to consciousness of meaning.

Venerated canonical scholars in the field---Aristotle, de Grazia, Dumazedier, Huizinga, Pieper---laud 'good' leisure and the benefits to participants and humanity. Yet, where do the millions of individuals who take part in leisure activities such as drug use, gambling, or sadomasochism fit, when those choices are judged deviant, as well as devoid of any redeeming value? Doxa in the leisure studies discipline concedes to unquestioned beliefs that preclude serious consideration of certain imperceptible leisure activities. It is now germane to look openly at all leisure and to consider a renaming of deviance as adaptive transgression. I aver that sadomasochism is a leisure activity that demonstrates values of community and culture when placed in the context of serious leisure (Stebbins, 1999).

Doxa

Paradigm debates in the 1990's began a challenge to tacit theoretical understandings of leisure that had under girded research to that time, as well as emphasized the importance of debate (Coalter, 1999; Dupuis, 1999; Rojek, 2001; Weissenger, Henderson, & Bowling, 1997). The importance of questioning assumptions related to the leisure researcher's understandings of 'meaning' in leisure within the lived experience is underscored by its continued emphasis in the literature (Coalter, 1999; Green, 1998; Kelly, 2001; Lee & Shafer, 2002; Pieper, 1998; Putnam, 1995; Rojek, 1999b, 2001; Stewart, 1998; Watkins, 2000). However, bias in favor of a positivist paradigm has continued, with adherence to assumptions of disembodied universals that 'prove' the existence of essentializing beneficial characteristics of leisure.

The field remains faithful to a moralizing construction of 'goodness' that renders invisible any leisure pursuit deemed 'deviant'. Inherent in these commonly held

meanings or doxa, are the concomitant assumptions that only 'normal' leisure is beneficial to humanity, essential to wellbeing, a means of providing the opportunity to find freedom, truth, and beauty, and embedded with meaning (Dumazadier, 1967; Kaplan, 1975; Rojek, 1999b; Stebbins, 1999). Leisure activity in this context is concerned with reinforcing social order or improving social conditions (Rojek, 1999a). This has limited questions of individual understandings of meaning, as situated in the experience of daily living, out of the discipline despite knowledge of the popularity of 'deviant' activities. In this context, what is the justification for continuing to limit research to areas that are always already valued as "good" and tacitly understood as being meaningful? What is to be learned of meaning in the 'lived experience' of transgressive leisure behavior?

Deviance

Socially constructed nomenclature and syntax create the text by which leisure is judged 'deviant', thus dispossessing those who choose it. Simply stated, the social construction of deviant leisure rests in the central, underlying assumptions of its origin, the language used to describe and discuss it, the perceptions of the beholder, and the sanctions enforced by those in power. This includes the language of leisure.

Sadomasochism (S/M) is traditionally viewed as a form of deviant leisure. However, SM participants have created a viable subculture. Those who participate choose to step outside of the prescribed norms of sexual behavior (Devon & Miller, 1995). The leisure lifestyle of SM becomes a primary social affiliation and takes on characteristics of serious leisure outlined by Stebbins, (1999) and include: 1) need to persevere; 2) a career; 3) significant personal effort in learning; 4) durable benefits; 5) strong identification; and 6) a unique ethos.

Deviant leisure, when used as a form of resistance to the weight of social pressure, becomes the background for formation of identity, for finding a sense of being and belonging in an otherwise dehumanized existence, for rejecting conformity and creating alternative cultural values in a new community. It serves to flaunt disdain for and rejection of those social controls that would eliminate it, thus highlighting the potential for social criticism and transcendence in the culture of leisure (Rojek, 1999). The choice to engage in deviant leisure pursuits then would require that an individual devalue the pressures of mainstream society and the construct of marginalization in favor of self-awareness and inner meaning.

Practical Applications

"Leisure is not the attitude of the one who intervenes but of the one who lets go, who lets *himself* go, and 'go under', almost as someone who falls asleep must let himself go...is only possible in the assumption that man is not only in harmony with himself...but also that he is in agreement with the world and its meaning" (Pieper, 1998). As *praxis*, it is actively noticing oneself 'being' in a space of existential wonder and *jouissance* (Barthes, 1995), a way of moving about in the reflection of others in places of leisure. As philosophical *theoria*, it is transgression in leisure space that challenges the normative expectations of purpose and productivity that are mandates of a civil society (Rojek, 1997), as well as a mode of ontological receptivity to contemplation and knowing the world (Pieper, 1998).

Recognition of changes in the current postmodern society make it imperative that researchers consider that conventional ethical codes have changed, and that value in differing types of leisure can be found. Forms of deviant leisure possess the qualities of serious leisure and therefore, possess the potential to provide a fulfilling leisure experience as well as the potential to build social capital.

Further research is needed to give a voice to those who participate in the culture of S/M. This inquiry is an initial step in exploration of the potential and value found in transgressive leisure activities, specifically in the culture of S/M. I suggest that illuminating assumptions and challenging traditions is a necessary task in ensuring the continuation of relevance and legitimacy in the leisure discipline. The experience of meaningful leisure comes in all forms and will be understood only when as researchers we let go of the powerful doxa that limits our ability to look at it in the first place.

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