Deviant Leisure Book Review

Dr Jenny Hall - 2 March 2020

Thomas Raymen and Oliver Smith draw upon a diverse range of cutting edge research, challenging readers to rethink the impact of twenty-first-century consumer capitalism embedded in our treasured and coveted leisure experiences. The volume broadens Raymen and Smith's (chapter 2) theory of the 'deviant leisure perspective' by blending conceptual analysis with case studies which comprehensively expands the scope of their framework. The largely ethnographic case studies illustrate, through a range of experimental methods, the harms that are normalised and embedded in our everyday leisure pursuits. The book makes an important contribution to both criminology and leisure by applying a criminological lens to problematise the commonly held notion that all leisure is good (Rojek, 2010). By encompassing a wide milieu of perspectives, the research analyses how the fitness industry, tourism, digital pastimes, pornography, clubbing, gambling, parkour and even leisure within prison life are experienced through a range of power geometries. Questioning what leisure can produce, brings into view how harms are hidden, yet pervasive, in contemporary consumer leisure cultures. Raymen and Smith conclude by offering an alternative conceptualisation of a leisure-world that is prosocial that moves us beyond the capitalist drivers of hedonistic consumption underpinning our global crisis (chapter 2).

The book explores deviant leisure scholarship through several under-researched themes. Firstly it robustly challenges the consumption of leisure as an assumed right, demonstrating that by elevating leisure beyond the status of a 'social good', to being an inalienable right (Rojek, 2010) we have created a leisure-world of harm that affects social, environmental and economic security. Raymen and Smith (Chapter 2) critique the unworldly idealism that continues within leisure studies scholarship and ask what leisure spaces would look if they were decommoditised, deindividualised and co-constitutive. Through demonstrating how harm is present within the most familiar forms of commodified leisure, they show through examples such as the 'Bucket List' or the 'The Big Night Out', how such leisured desires persistently fail to deliver the hedonism that commodified leisure spaces promote (Chapter 2). This illustrates how we relentlessly pursue the individual project of leisure to see and do all those things that we believe will provide fulfilment in life, yet consistently fail to realise them. Moreover, they illustrate how individualism is deficient and can only lead to dissatisfaction in the things we *lack* in life and ultimately favours private citizenship over the public good, thus showing how we are committed to the norms and values of late-capitalist consumer culture (Chapter 3). Winlow (chapter 3), applies the lens of ultra-realism to argue that the decomposition of civic society is where the academy should focus attention to consider how the continuation of capitalism and the problems of democracy should be tackled to build a sustainable future. Theorising the commodification of leisure as a form of deviancy is a foundational theme enabling the interrogation of the pervasive and embedded harms this process produces in consumer culture. 2

A second core theme centres on how harm is consumed through the pursuit of what Hayward and Turner (Chapter 6) and Ayres (Chapter 7) refer to as 'cool individualism'; where creating a sense of individual authenticity is founded in past mythologies, hallmarked by hedonistic abandon in the all-out, rampaging, no prisoners taken, hedonism of Ibiza or any pub and club filled high street in the United Kingdom. Veblen's concept of 'conspicuous consumption' illustrates how the drive for personal distinction is manipulated by the ideological dominance of consumer capitalism and phoney counter culturalism. Ayres' (Chapter 7) insightful exploration of the concept of the 24hr city night-time economy (NTE) demonstrates how harm is produced, symbolically charged and re-engineered via the institutional controls that both infantilise and commercialise excess associated with demonstrating conspicuous luxury and differentiated consumer status. Moreover, NTE is a space of 'riskless-risk' where intoxication of substances licit or illicit is hyper-normalised and homogenised through the aggressive marketing of city leisure spaces. Demonstrating how institutional and regulatory powers both create special spaces *for* and turn a blind eye *to* harmful behaviours that treat intoxication as a leisure activity in itself. Ayres (Chapter 7) argues that excludes those who exist on the margins of society and are often blamed when alcohol and illicit drug misuse spill out of these spaces of control. She shows how structurally embedded harms of exclusion are initiated through processes of social-cleansing that exclude and criminalise non-consumers such as rough sleepers and sex workers that discriminates across the lines of race, gender and class. In contrast, spatial exclusion can also lead to a paradox where criminal or socially deviant behaviours produce 'cool transgressive' identities such as young people who participate in city-based free running or Parkour. Raymen explores how transgressive activities feed an ever-hungry consumer culture looking for the next cool brand and is a vital and a deliberate component of consumerism's cultural-economic apparatus (Chapter 16).

Thus, the theme of individualism and hyper-individualism is central to the identity of the leisure-seeker, where the taking of drugs, sports participation and surgery to enhance body image and status are bound in selfhood and semiotic markers of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977). This is acutely illustrated through how technology is harnessed in pursuit of self-expression and identity-making. Hall (chapter 8) discusses how social media tools, such as Instagram, mirror society's neoliberal valorisation of the unattainable ego, where we constantly reconstruct self-image in a co-created technologically facilitated process of capital accumulation. The production and digitisation of leisure spaces within gaming, gambling, pornography, urban trespass, parkour and fight clubs in prisons that facilitate thrill-seeking, Hall argues, produces a denial of harm, emotional glaciation and diminishment of the recognition of humanity (chapter 8). Atkinson suggests that digital miniaturisation and connectivity has enabled an unbounding of taboo and produced new economies predicated on harm and gender-based violence (Chapter 10). He asks an important question of how this will change our emotional life in the hyper-masculine world of gaming, which is a point that could be applied more broadly to our wider digital worlds. It also raises new questions of social control, regulation and censorship within media more broadly (chapter 10).

Foundational to individualism is our anthropocentric approach to the pursuit of self-fulfilment that White argues is leading us to kill the thing we profess to love – the natural environment. He posits that tourism is deviance on a grand scale and that the environmental harms tourism produces is human harm (White Chapter 13). The deviant leisure approach offers tourism scholars a new lens to explore sustainability in the context of a rapidly growing and increasingly damaging global tourism industry. White argues that our denial of the harm tourism creates and drive to 'consume, be silent and die is the mantra of twenty-first-century global capitalism' epitomises a possessive individualism that leads to systemic damage that no one wants to claim responsibility for. Luxury, cheap flights 'see it before it's gone' and 'getting off the beaten track', ecotourism and volunteer tourism create 3

moral economies where westerners find security in finding problems they feel they can do something about all produce harms as a result of pursuing leisure through travel (Large, Chapter 15).

Thoughtfully weaving a breadth of theory with rich case studies and academic concerns with the commodification of leisure, Deviant Leisure offers a comprehensive framing for academics and students to critically think through the harms that our leisure activities produce across criminology, leisure and the wider social sciences. There is work to be done to further establish experimental methodological approaches for exploring deviant leisure and criminological scholars could benefit from broader interdisciplinarity through drawing on scholarship across the social sciences such as geography. This is acknowledged in Raymen's call for criminology to recommit itself to new cultural, political-economic and psychoanalytical critiques of consumer capitalism which, through harm-based or the deviant leisure perspective, could expand our understanding of the harms that are continuously emerging at the intersection of commodified leisure, technology and consumer capitalism (Chapter 12).

Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Rojek, C. (2010) The Labour of Leisure: The Culture of Free Time. London, Sage.

Veblen, T. (1992) *Theory of the Leisure Class*. London, Transactions Publishers.