

SOCIOLOGY FOR OPTIMISTS

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ENJOYMENT

It is curious how hard it is to capture or describe the simple enjoyment that can be found in doing something that gives you pleasure. Novelists sometimes manage quite well. Take for example, D.H. Lawrence (1914: 196) describing a young woman's enjoyment of a rose garden in his story 'Shadow in the rose garden':

Slowly she went down one path, lingering, like one who has gone back into the past. Suddenly she was touching some heavy crimson roses that were soft as velvet, touching them thoughtfully, without knowing, as a mother sometimes fondles the hand of her child. She leaned slightly forward to catch the scent. Then she wandered on in abstraction. Sometimes a flame-coloured, scentless rose would hold her arrested. She stood gazing at it as if she could not understand it. Again the same softness of intimacy came over her, as she stood before a tumbling heap of pink petals. Then she wondered over the white rose, that was greenish, like ice, in the centre. So, slowly, like a white, pathetic butterfly, she drifted down the path, coming at last to a tiny terrace full of roses. They seemed to fill the place, a sunny, gay throng. She was shy of them, they were so many and so bright. They seemed to be conversing and laughing. She felt herself in a strange crowd. It exhilarated her, carried her out of herself. She flushed with excitement. The air was pure scent.

This beautiful description captures something of the sensual experience of enjoyment, of how someone might feel when enjoying something: the exhilaration, the excitement, the being carried out of oneself. Sociologists seldom even try to convey the quality of enjoyment or pleasure. Even sociologists with an interest in emotions such as Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning (1986: 204) seem to skirt around what pleasurable feelings

might actually feel like. In their book *The Quest for Excitement* they note that ‘games are largely ends in themselves. Their purpose, if they have a purpose, is to give people pleasure’. They write about how players might move or flow together, and about tensions and conflicts, but little is said about how that pleasure might be experienced. What about, for instance, the sense of frisson experienced when as a football player you head the ball just right and it floats perfectly to an ideally positioned team mate? What of the thrill of a goal keeper who finds herself cradling the ball after a split second reaction has sent her the right way in response to a free kick? And what of the welling up of tears of joy when you see your beloved football, netball, cricket or other team win a tough game?

Much sociology pessimistically ignores evidence that people sometimes find enjoyment in their lives (Bennett 2011: 305); it assumes pleasure is due to false consciousness. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2006), pleasure is defined as ‘the condition or sensation induced by the experience or anticipation of what is felt to be good or desirable; a feeling of happy satisfaction or enjoyment; delight, gratification’. As we will see, there are powerful threads in sociology, such as those spun out from the Frankfurt School (see, for example, Adorno and Horkheimer 1979/1944), which are sceptical about to what extent people can enjoy themselves or are merely fooled by commercialised forms of entertainment into thinking that they can. These explanations account for enjoyment as false consciousness. They propose that working class people in particular, misunderstand movies or pop music or other cultural products as fun, instead of seeing them as reinforcing their domination. Although important in trying to understand how mass culture might contribute to reinforcing class inequalities, this dismisses feelings of pleasure as mistaken. It is as though working class people do not know how to appreciate ‘proper’, supposedly more fulfilling, cultural products like paintings or classical music or foreign films with subtitles. As well as being rather elitist and arrogant, it tends to dismiss what working class people say they enjoy without trying to understand what that enjoyment is like.

As part of the critical optimism I am advocating as key to fuller sociological knowledge, it is vital to understand how people experience pleasure, even under difficult conditions. In considering the balance between structure (how society is organised) and agency (people’s ability to shape their lives) in formulating an explanation it is especially important to avoid attributing agency only to the more privileged. In acknowledging the agency of the underprivileged there is the danger of romanticising poverty and oppression, but this danger does not justify ignoring the part that capabilities play in the quality of life that humans in various parts of

the globe experience (Nussbaum and Sen 2004). However, some thinkers find the methodological individualism (a focus on the experiences of individuals) of Sen and Nussbaum's approach problematic, especially in its neglect of the importance of the state in ameliorating or exacerbating inequalities (Devereux 2001). Sen (1987) does not entirely ignore the state, but his ideology, despite his being influenced by Marxist thought, can sound remarkably liberal because of the focus on the capabilities of citizens, even if he uses these to judge governments. Although the attention the capabilities approach gives to people's well-being may seem important in efforts to think optimistically about pleasure, I will contend that a less individualised approach is more promising for creating a sociology for optimists.

In working towards this less individualised, more optimistic sociological understanding of everyday pleasures, this chapter will deal with central sociological concerns about the relationship between structure and agency and social change. Firstly, I will examine the temptations and yet limitations of some views of the failure of pleasure to really escape bureaucratised social structures that restrict individual creativity and maintain the status quo. These views contend that people cannot enjoy themselves in any sustained, authentic way within current social structures. Secondly, it will be argued that where sociologists do think that people find pleasure it is usually in moments of leisure, rather than work. And when leisure is assumed to be the place for life enhancing pleasure, there are those who argue that this neglects how the supposedly unfettered nature of leisure might ally it closely to deviance, some of which may involve harm to self and others. Yet this is not the only way in which pleasure might be transgressive. Thus, the third section considers other forms of subversive and transgressive enjoyment and how they might contribute to social change. The point is to reveal how a critically optimistic view of pleasure might reinvigorate sociological thinking about how agency can facilitate changes in social structures.

Candyfloss Entertainment: Pleasure is Brief and Constrained

Arguably, one of the most pessimistic sociological accounts of enjoyment coheres under the name of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, which argues that most experiences of pleasure are an unsatisfying illusion. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the most celebrated text emerging from the School, Adorno and Horkheimer (1979/1944) argue that the triumph of instrumental rationality first posited by Weber leaves little

hope of human beings authentically enjoying themselves. People are argued to have been pacified by mistaken beliefs that all is well and progress continues, and by an all-powerful cultural machine robbing individuals of the very freedom it promises through a 'flood of detailed information and candy-floss entertainment' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979/1944: xv). In this view, people are 'cultural dopes', blinded to their exploitation and thus unlikely to engage in revolutionary change.

Nevertheless, these writers have things to say about hopefulness, and thus optimism. Although they highlight the enlightenment's promotion of reason as 'the mere instrument of the all-inclusive economic apparatus', they argue that escaping this requires 'not the conservation of the past, but the redemption of the hopes of the past' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979/1944: 30, xv). In other words, by being critical of ideas of progress by recognising the destructive elements it involves, it is possible to be hopeful about more constructive social alternatives. There is some optimism in these hopes for more enjoyable futures.

To the extent that critical theory does appear more pessimistic about the pleasures of their present, this can be explained by these scholars responding to changes in social and intellectual life such as two world wars, post-industrialisation, and (post)colonial violence. The Frankfurt School were mostly German Jews who had fled to escape the holocaust, and were faced with the historical horrors of Fascism and Stalinism. It has also been argued that where they remain pessimistic this was due to a failure to overcome the intellectual limits of traditional Marxism given that they did not fundamentally reconstitute its dialectical critique. Dialectics involves understanding the continual transformation of society and for Marxists this means understanding changes in how human beings work to produce what they need. For critical theorists, instead of labour being the basis for critical thought and for emancipation, production was seen as developing towards domination (Postone and Brick 1982). For others, the pessimism of the school can be seen as centred on their critique of instrumental rationality, that is they were critical of enlightenment beliefs in the importance of using reason to achieve goals efficiently (Bennett 2011: 302). This assumes that rationality becomes all important from the eighteenth century onwards and that emotional and moral justifications for doing things become devalued. However, there is room to debate the triumph of reason over emotions, and indeed a need to be critical of assumptions that they are mutually exclusive. Emotion informs our reasoning and reasoning can produce emotions (Holmes 2010). Reasoning is thus not always instrumental and can involve pleasure (Badiou 2007: 53).

Other sociologists trying to account for pleasure have shared with the Frankfurt School a similarly negative assessment of it as fleeting and

fragile and constrained by structure. In *Escape Attempts*, Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor (1992) offer some brilliant insights into how people manage to extract some pleasure out of the mostly routine nature of everyday life. The book arose out of research they did into prisoners serving life sentences. It took them a while to be able to get the prisoners to explain to them what they found most difficult about their confinement, but eventually they realised that it was not so much the physical, but the mental and emotional privations, the loss of identity that caused the prisoners most suffering. Under these difficult conditions, prisoners had to find a way to 'escape'. Some thoughtlessly accommodated to the prison routine, some mentally distanced themselves from it, remaining cynical about the institution, and others deliberately committed themselves to the work they were given. As part of their escape attempts they might take up studying, filling their heads with their reading and thinking. Prisoners might turn to religion to maintain a sense of self and find 'free' areas. Some perhaps planned actual attempts to escape from the prison. Others built fantasy worlds in their imaginations, day-dreaming their time away. What is so brilliant about Cohen and Taylor's book is that they realised that this finding pleasure, these escape attempts, were not just something that prisoners did. We all find ways to escape from what they call 'paramount reality', from a highly bureaucratised and scripted social world that constrains our actions and dampens our ability to find spontaneity and unfettered fun. Thus, for example, someone might have tried to escape the dull drudgery of their life by abandoning 'a dark haired lithe companion for a muscleman, or have left the sugar works in order to take a job in the car factory, given up golf and squash for karate and ballroom dancing, exchanged Leicester for Sydney' (Cohen and Taylor 1992: 67). However, if someone migrates, from Leicester to Sydney for instance, all might be novel and exciting for a while, but eventually a routine establishes itself. The new job and new life fall into dull repetition and the 'queue at the supermarket in the new city looks the same as in the old' (Cohen and Taylor 1992: 67). They are constrained once again by paramount reality, out of disappointment they perhaps return to the UK, looking to enjoy the life they had left because it was dull and predictable. And they might enjoy it, for a while, until the boredom returns and some migrate again in search of a 'better' life (Holmes and Burrows 2012).

Brilliant as *Escape Attempts* is, to me it loses some of that brilliance at the point that it becomes pessimistic about the transient vulnerability of pleasure in the face of the bureaucratic organisation of society. For Cohen and Taylor (1992: 79), '[h]owever much we may switch our sexual partners, our jobs, our hobbies, our favourite holiday spots, we

may still be faced with the intrusion of former scripts'. I like to imagine a version of *Escape Attempts* which argued that sometimes these escape attempts are 'successful'. However, to stop at saying that people find ways to escape paramount reality and find some pleasure would be thought by many to lack the critical edge that Cohen and Taylor achieve by pushing further, to argue that structural constraint triumphs in the end. This emphasis on structure over agency is fundamental to sociology and even poststructuralism has failed to really challenge the discipline's fundamentally structuralist orientation. This orientation is not a bad thing, but as many writers claim, it often leaves us at a bit of a loss in understanding how agency operates in relation to structure (see Archer 2003). Cohen and Taylor argue that agency does operate, but only in brief spaces. The assumption also seems to be that pleasure occurs only in these brief, spontaneous escapes from structure.

Is it sociological heresy to suggest that we might find pleasure in orderly and even repetitive or bureaucratised activities? To use an analogy, a swimmer may love swimming in the sea on holiday, frolicking in a playful fashion; but she may also enjoy the feeling of moving through the water as she swims back and forth doing laps in her local pool twice a week. Enjoyment of order and routine does not necessarily entail a misrecognition of structural constraint or a perverse pleasure in one's own domination. If habit guides our actions less than in the past (Archer 2003), then reflexivity may not just be used to distance oneself from predictability but to create some pleasurable predictability. Cohen and Taylor conflate structure and predictable, bureaucratised routine in thinking about escape attempts. However, to assume that 'true' pleasure can only be found in spontaneous 'escapes' from structure/routine, is to imply that there is some outside of social structure, untouched by bureaucratisation and free for authentic, self-directed pleasure. Such a space seems asocial and Cohen and Taylor can be read as saying that there is no way of living for any length of time, enjoyably or otherwise, outside of the social structure which determines our actions. Thus all escape attempts are doomed. Yet social structure is not the same as bureaucratic regimentation. This implies far more deliberate organisation of society than is often the case, where structure means a connected set of orderly rules, hierarchies, schedules and processes. It is possible instead to see structure more as a chaotic assemblage of sometimes conflicting routines, constraints and only partially scripted on-going interactions. In this case, agency is not something exercised and enjoyed in hard to find gaps in structure, but actively key in order for structure to operate. This means that pleasure may be found in imposing timetables, in doing the same thing over and over to become good at it and thus pleasure is not only found in leisure as an escape.

Leisure is Pleasure?

To assume that leisure is the most likely and freest place where pleasure can be enjoyed, is to assume that leisure does not involve work and routine of some kind. Leisure activities can involve various kinds of work. For example, there is the body work involved in going to the gym, playing sport, or attending a beauty salon (Black 2004; Featherstone 1991; Gimlin 2001; Miller 2006). Work done to look good is not confined to Western women, for example young Japanese men now work at being beautiful with the help of an expanding range of products and treatments that men use in, and to support, their leisure time and to produce their desired lifestyle (Miller 2006: 125–158). In the UK there is also the highly gendered body work done in preparing for a night out with friends, women applying make-up, fake tan and styling each other's hair. These young people also work at pleasure by developing elaborate routinised rituals of pre-drinking to get themselves ready for a night out and when they go out young women do considerable 'work' in maintaining their friendship groups by looking after each other. During or after the night out there is also repair work to do, reviewing the night out and trying to use this to avoid worrisome drunkenness and ensure a 'good night' (Bancroft et al. 2014). Enjoying yourself can be hard work.

More optimistically, just as leisure can involve work, work can involve pleasure – even paid work. Marx (1959/1844) thought that meaningful work was essential to being human and that the greater the control workers had over their work the less likely they were to feel alienated and to be oppressed. For him, capitalism is flawed in taking away that control and thus dehumanising workers. The sociology of work has tended to follow this lead and to lament the deskilling of the worker within capitalist labour processes (Braverman 1975). However, even Marxist sociologists such as Burawoy (1979) suggest that workers might find some pleasure in repetitive manual labour, or other forms of tedious work in which workers lack control, like call centres (Taylor and Bain 1999). Burawoy (1979), and Roy (1960) before him, have described the kinds of game playing that might allow factory workers to find some enjoyment amongst the tedium. Enjoyment can come, for example, in creating small variations to the work by changing the colours of material being cut. Or workers may use breaks and interaction with other workers to have fun. Roy (1960) describes this in the now famous instance of the routinely repeated joke of one worker stealing another's banana every day and declaring it 'banana time'. Although these forms of enjoyment might ultimately accommodate to, rather than fundamentally resist, the oppressive capitalist conditions of such forms of labour

(Burawoy 1979), to ignore them is to fail to understand how workers might attain some dignity, sense of humanity and satisfaction, even where their control over their work is limited.

To neglect the enjoyment people find in paid work can also obscure the gendered inequalities that arise in the ways in which paid and unpaid work are related. For example, Hochschild (2001) has argued that the pressures on family life for dual-earner families might make the home a more stressful site of work and conflict than the paid workplace. This is especially true given most men's continued lack of participation in household labour. Thus, in terms of places where people find enjoyment, the workplace may be crucial. It may be less demanding than the never-ending work for women at home and men may feel less criticised in the workplace. Hochschild (2001) notes that the workplace is also important for meeting with friends in and after work. Friendships at work are crucial for maintaining a sense of identity and for finding pleasure in work.

Globalised workplaces in the majority world, for example India, can also be places of pleasure because they offer some escape from certain structural constraints, at least for more privileged workers. Middle-class Indian IT workers often find themselves in lush Westernised workplaces, shut off from the city around them. It may seem they are trying to 'escape' India via adoption of Western modes of work and leisure. This does not mean workers are uncritical of Western culture, but it can allow enjoyment of pleasures, like drinking and romance, less fettered by family and by cultural traditions. However, these workers do not escape societal concern about them as part of a breakdown in traditional values. The pleasures found at work are not inevitably revolutionary in import, or they may provide apparently greater freedoms, which exchange old forms of domination for new. This does not mean that nothing is gained, and especially for women, the difficulties of navigating a respectable femininity within such work environments may be outweighed by the enjoyment of new forms of fun (Nadeem 2009).

Professional forms of work are perhaps more obviously pleasurable, given the greater agency offered in terms of flexibility, control and self-investment in work identities usually involved. Weber (1970:77–196) noted some of these things in speaking of the sense of vocation that professionals often enjoy. The usual definition of profession is of a line of work, like the law or medicine, regulated by an association that sets out strict training requirements, standards of performance and a code of conduct. Even 'the oldest profession', which does not really fit this definition, may sometimes involve enjoyment, as there are sex workers who say that they enjoy their work because it can allow them to develop more liberated forms of sexual self-expression and some are able to carry this into their private life

(Kontula 2008). Of course this depends upon the conditions under which prostitution is undertaken. Kontula's Finnish sex workers are not 'forced' into prostitution and often exit from it after a few years, compared to the more dangerous conditions under which sex workers operate in other contexts, for example India. However, those 'other' sex workers are not without agency, albeit usually discussed more in terms of their political protests than their individual enjoyment of sex (see, for example, Kotiswaran 2011). This evidence of some sex workers' experiences of their work as pleasurable provides a counter example to claims that sex work is universally alienating and destructive of the sexual pleasure of sex workers both within and beyond the commercial sexual encounter (Kontula 2008). The example of academia as a profession can perhaps more typically exemplify professionals enjoying work. As I write this paragraph, I am currently enjoying my academic work very much because I am on a writing retreat with postgraduate students. The highly supportive atmosphere of sitting in a lovely room together writing, or sharing tips and experiences, has reminded all of us of the joys of academic work. Academics have varying degrees of flexibility in and control over their work, although the latter may have been eroded by the rise of managerialism, of the idea that education is a product and by the demise of the public university (see Holmwood 2011). Yet the sense of pleasure has not been entirely destroyed. Academics doing research might often experience a sense of 'flow', or of action without effort which brings feelings of pleasure or happiness (Csikszentmihalyi 1997; cf. Game and Metcalfe 1996: 31–32). Not only might this more individualised pleasure be experienced, but academic work can continue to provide a sense of satisfaction in a variety of other ways. Despite bureaucratic constraints, many academics do find ways to enjoy their teaching and find it rewarding, and there is joy to be had in the kinds of collegial and community building activities exemplified in the writing retreat I mentioned above (Bentley et al. 2013). I would argue this enjoyment can be a crucial form of resistance to the very managerialism and commercialised rationales of which Holmwood (2001) writes so eloquently.¹ Pleasure is not always an individualised effort to escape from power, it can be key in struggles to challenge domination.

Pleasure and Transgression

Despite the work involved, leisure has unfettered aspects that might involve transgressive forms of pleasure which involve harming self or others (Rojek 1999). Smoking can take this form. Processes of medicalisation

have, as Rojek notes, supposedly linked active leisure to good health, but also made medical explanations of deviance dominant. Yet most troublesome forms of deviance occur within leisure contexts because of the way in which leisure culture is closely connected to some degree of freedom from some forms of social control. This can be exciting. Deviant behaviour as well as many forms of leisure, especially sport, are often motivated by a search for excitement (Elias 1986). Nevertheless, there is a good deal of moralising within the sociology of leisure about leisure's proper parameters as excluding aggressive and sexual passions (Rojek 1999: 27). Some forms of leisure are 'invasive' in that they make the individual incapable of forming and maintaining respectful, enjoyable relationships with others and are used to mask this alienation. An example might be drug taking in non-social contexts. There are also mephitic or 'poisonous' forms of leisure; these are the ones involving abuse and harm of others. This might include, amongst other things, the fantasy and preparation work involved in serial killing, which it is difficult to dispassionately consider as a form of leisure (Rojek 1999: 29–31). Rojek suggests that it is important to consider such forms as ordinary, not as somehow extreme or exceptional, because to do so can highlight wider cultural tendencies to privilege our own feelings over those of others. By considering invasive and mephitic leisure as ordinary it is also possible to see that they have routinised aspects to them. In contrast, Rojek (1999: 31, 33) describes 'wild leisure' as about more 'sporadic and opportunity based' transgressions of the limits of everyday life, which only in some cases like joy-riding or trespassing become repetitive. Other examples of wild leisure are rioting, vandalism and computer hacking. Rojek (1999: 31) thinks that some 'margin of wildness is built into the modern social order', but wild leisure only occasionally turns into something that challenges authority, and because of its visibility it is hard to avoid sanctions for long. Thus, the ways in which leisure is transgressive are presented by Rojek as largely to do with forms of pleasure that are harmful to self or others, or fail to be transgressive in ways that bring wider social change.

There is much pessimism about the commodification of leisure as a source of individualising change that can reduce agency. For example, in introducing an edited collection of work on Chinese entertainment, Chan (2014) evaluates to what extent cultural performances of ethnic dances are still enjoyed as an authentic expression of identity, community and shared values and to what extent they must alter and change to pander to tourists and otherwise become commercialised in order to survive. As one instance, Chan and Yung (2014) argue that the commercialisation of pleasure that occurred in relation to Chinese entertainment in Singapore individualised leisure and led to a decline of community and tradition.

This is similar to Western tales of the commodification of pleasure as undermining 'authentic' enjoyment and isolating individuals from each other. Yet, if those 'authentic' forms of enjoyment rely on tradition and community, they may reproduce the inequalities attached to that past way of life. For example, they may contain limited and/or restrictive roles for women. The problem is that because commodification also routinises and standardises such forms of leisure it would seem to undermine opportunities for 'wild' or transgressive forms of leisure. The rather raucous and sometimes authority challenging possibilities of Chinese entertainment are lost, but without necessarily creating space for new expressions of identity and community that might be more equal and inclusive.

There are, however, subversive and transgressive forms of pleasure which rather than harmful or transient can contribute to social change in ways that foster respect for others and thus can cause movement towards more egalitarian relations. I take as an example heterosexual pleasure. Despite considerable efforts to consider the pleasures as well as dangers of heterosex, especially for women, there is little literature that succeeds in taking such pleasure seriously. Meika Loe (2004), for instance, may somewhat challenge the view of older women as sexually disinterested and passive, but because her entry point to sexual experiences is discussing Viagra, sexual dysfunction and sexual frustration tend to continually be centred in the accounts. Heteropleasure appears shyly and with difficulty. However, 'heterosexuality is not inevitably nasty, boring, and normative' and is 'open to enjoyment and social change' (Beasley et al. 2012: 11-12).

Transgressive heterosexual pleasures involve more superficial, temporary and unthinking deviation from the norm (Beasley et al. 2012: 5-6). By insisting on frequent sex with her husband, for instance, a wife might transgress normative ideas about heterosexuality as occurring between active men initiating sex and relatively passive women. As we saw with Rojek, and Cohen and Taylor, transgressive pleasures seldom last; however, I take issue with the implication that they are therefore of little import and make limited contributions to social change.

More everyday subversions, for example living at a distance from one's partner, can upset usual expectations of heterosexual cohabitation and reformulate couples' ways of finding pleasure. Although there may be the danger of infidelity and less opportunity for sex, living apart and then reuniting regularly may sometimes provide a romantic and sexually exciting context for heteropleasure. It might also cause couples to consider the advantages of not becoming overly familiar with each other and help women avoid being stuck with gendered forms of household and emotion work. While not ignoring that intimate violence against women is widespread (World Health Organization 2013), it is also important to

try and understand how more caring and enriching forms of heterosexual relationship can operate in order to consider how social change is possible. Subversive forms of heterosexuality can help diversify constructions of and possibilities for pleasure. This can undermine normative views of heterosexual pleasure as centred on penetrative sex. Alternative accounts of pleasure might involve other pleasures like reading in bed or cooking each other nice meals or making the most of hugs and of the excitement involved in anticipating next seeing each other (Beasley et al. 2012: 71–77). And the enjoyment of small everyday pleasures and acts of kindness, like making a cup of tea for someone, is not confined to privileged couples, but can be found in a range of relationships in a range of social contexts (Brownlie 2014; Gabb and Fink 2015). These are forms of pleasure that are about respect and care for others, and although this does not mean they are without conflict, they can move people towards more egalitarian relationships (see also Holmes 2004a).

I hope that these examples have illustrated that pleasure is not only about individualised forms of desire fulfilment, but is something often enjoyed in relation to and in interaction with others. This is not to idealise relations, relationships and interaction as full of happy harmony. However, to suggest that only a sense of harmony brings pleasure is questionable. The delights of respectful disputation are known to many and the pleasures of leisure activities such as sport often come from physically and/or mentally ‘battling’ against an adversary. Pleasure does not intrinsically serve either the powerful or the dispossessed, but neither does it float free from structures of domination and struggles for political recognition.

Conclusion

Sociology has not dealt well with pleasure, especially neglecting its everyday forms and mostly producing pessimistic accounts of people’s ability to enjoy themselves. Yet people experience pleasure, despite the constraints under which they live. It is thus important for sociologists to better understand pleasures in order to better comprehend how structure and agency interrelate. This chapter has contended that such understanding is best furthered by developing critical optimism. This is necessary to counter dominant sociological ideas about pleasure as delicate and temporary. The orderly and routine may be sources of enjoyment and leisure is not a free space for pleasure but involves work. There is also pleasure involved in work. Even tedious, deskilled forms of work allow for some satisfaction and occasional fun. Where workers have greater control over their work, for example in the professions, it is perhaps easier to see the pleasures of work. This is not to ignore oppressive working conditions

and the ways in which work is key in reinforcing class and other forms of inequality. In fact a critically optimistic view of why and how paid work may be enjoyed, can critically illuminate how its relationship to unpaid work reinforces gender inequalities. Equally, by examining the pleasures that globalised workplaces might offer workers in the developing world, it is possible to highlight inequalities around neo-colonialism, class and again around gender inequalities but also see those workplaces as offering escape from some forms of structural constraint. People are thus agents at work, and their pleasure in work may sometimes challenge entrenched forms of domination. Whilst many of the examples of pleasure given in this chapter seem not to threaten the capitalist social order, or other forms of dominance, they do show the importance of everyday enjoyment in finding ways not only to endure but to resist. Where profit motives extend increasingly into more areas of work, such as education and care, it is vital to see how people might find ways to please themselves and others. Leisure is not always free or harmless in its transgressions and the commodification of leisure globally can undermine the chances for more spontaneous forms of pleasure. However, more respectful forms of transgressive pleasure do exist and shape and shift social life and social interactions. Pleasure is not just an individualised pursuit of happiness, but enjoyment is taken with and through other people. Being critically optimistic allows an analysis of pleasure as not just reinforcing or returning to structural constraints, but as integral to how agency is exercised within the constraints of social structure, sometimes in ways that connect us positively to others and contribute to social change.

ACTIVITY

Interview someone in your class about what kinds of things they enjoy doing. When do they do these things, where and who with? How do they feel when they are doing them?

Compare your findings with those of others in the class. What are the key themes raised and what can they tell us as sociologists about leisure and pleasure?

Note

1. These claims about the pleasures of academic work were developed in conjunction with Chris Beasley and Heather Brook. One day we hope to write the long-planned article on 'The joys of research'.

