

Routledge Advances in Communication and Linguistic Theory

SEX AND LEISURE

PROMISCUOUS PERSPECTIVES

Edited by
Diana C. Parry and Corey W. Johnson



Sex and Leisure

This book uses the emerging and cutting-edge area of leisure research to highlight the importance of sexuality and sexual activity and its relevance to leisure studies. It brings to the fore some complex issues associated with this topic using a range of substantive, epistemological, theoretical, and methodological approaches.

Drawing on international scholarship, the book examines sexuality from multiple, and at times, competing directions, exploring the continuum of sex from work through to carnal pleasure, and across specific sexual practices including BDSM, pornography, stripping, and sex work. Drawing on critical, feminist, queer, and post theoretical perspectives, the book charts a new direction for leisure studies and sex research, including diverse understandings of leisure practice, sex positivity, and fringe and deviant sex practices. Critically, the book moves beyond merely establishing sex as a leisure pursuit to focusing on the compelling and complex intersections between sexuality and leisure.

This is fascinating reading for any student or researcher with an interest in leisure, sexuality, gender, cultural studies, or sociology.

Diana C. Parry is a Professor in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies and the Associate Vice-President of Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion at the University of Waterloo, Canada.

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This book is written in gratitude for those people who continue to push the boundaries of normative, and often oppressive, sexual identities and practices.



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Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>List of contributors</i> | ix |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> | xi |
| Let's talk about sex: Promiscuous perspectives on sex and leisure DIANA C. PARRY, COREY W. JOHNSON, AND JONATHAN PETRYCHYN | 1 |
| 1 Reflexivity and ethical considerations in investigating the links between sex and leisure LIZA BERDYCHEVSKY | 17 |
| 2 Playing with danger: Encouraging research on BDSM as a form of leisure via reflection and confession D. J. WILLIAMS, EMILY E. PRIOR, AND JEREMY N. THOMAS | 38 |
| 3 Some memoirs of a male stripper: An autoethnography of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity JORDAN T. BAKHSH AND COREY W. JOHNSON | 55 |
| 4 Sex, power, and controlling bodies: Incels and pickup artists LUC S. COUSINEAU | 73 |
| 5 "Making myself more desirable": Digital self-(re)presentation on geo-social networking apps for men seeking men HARRISON OAKES, COREY W. JOHNSON, AND DIANA C. PARRY | 91 |
| 6 A porn of one's own: Feminist complexities with women's consumption of online sexually explicit materials BRONWEN L. VALTCHANOV AND DIANA C. PARRY | 109 |

viii *Contents*

| | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 7 | Kinky people need kinky events: Kinkster events and kink/BDSM products in hospitality and tourism CRAIG WEBSTER | 127 |
| 8 | Somewhere under the rainbow: Drag at the Showbar GABBY SKELDON AND BRETT LASHUA | 144 |
| 9 | Sex-on-wheels: The leisure sexscape of scooter-ladies ARISTEIDIS GKOUHAS | 163 |
| | In bed with a stranger: Doing research toward a risky, reflexive, and promiscuous leisure studies JONATHAN PETRYCHYN, COREY W. JOHNSON, AND DIANA C. PARRY | 182 |
| | <i>Index</i> | 195 |

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Let's talk about sex

Promiscuous perspectives on sex and leisure

*Diana C. Parry, Corey W. Johnson,
and Jonathan Petrychyn*

In 1991, American hip-hop group Salt-N-Pepa famously sang out “Let’s talk about sex baby / Let’s talk about you and me / Let’s talk all the good things and the bad things that may be / Let’s talk about *sex*” (Azer, 1991). Sex is indeed the topic of most conversations – especially in pop culture. However, sex (and all associated elements such as practices, actions, and identities) has not been a topic of focused attention and exploration within leisure studies. While certain scholars have made important strides in the area (Berychevsky & Carr, 2020), as a field, sex has not been widely adopted as an area for research despite strong links with leisure. As leisure scholars, our ignorance about sex has made conversations, research, and teaching more difficult and our understanding of sex less complex. “That is a problem” notes Sullivan (2014), “because sexuality is a critical part of how we define ourselves and relate to each other.”

Sex and sexuality skirt the line for many people between taboo and causal leisure, creating a push-pull where sexual activity is both pleasurable and socially acceptable but simultaneously sequestered from public discussion and discourse. The same is true for sex within academic research, where sex is more often addressed in medicalized and/or problematized ways than it is as a natural, pleasurable, recreational or leisure practice worthy of research. Furthermore, many sexual subject matters remain under-investigated because they are seen as topics not worthy of research time and/or funding.

Despite these challenges, sex has been embraced by corporations and consumers as evidenced in the porn industry wherein estimate revenues have grown from about 4 billion dollars in 2001 (“How Big Is Porn,” 2001), to around 100 billion in 2015 (“Things Are Looking Up,” 2015). Those numbers continue to increase every year. The sex toy industry alone was worth about 15 billion dollars in 2013, with increased revenues projected. Even with these massive numbers highlighting the consumption side of sexual activity, sexuality and its related topics remain nearly absent in discussions about leisure, leisure practice, and contemporary understandings about leisure behaviour. This book is meant to begin to address this gap in leisure scholarship. Starting with this chapter, this book will situate sex as leisure practice. But more importantly, it will demonstrate the need for and impact of research on understanding this important element of individual and social leisure behaviour. To do so, we will review the historical roots of sexuality

and leisure studies. Next, we will review barriers to studying the intersections of sex and leisure and then conclude with a brief overview of the contributions in the book.

Before shifting to the next section, we recognize the “concept of ‘sex’ itself is troubled terrain” (Butler, 1993/2011 p. xiv). Specifically, sex is simultaneously an action, a “biological” category, a characteristic (sexual), and an identity (sexuality). Sex also intersects with notions of desire and behaviour (Kivel & Johnson, 2013). Taken collectively, the meaning of sex runs the gamut across various sex acts, sexual characteristics, desires, behaviours, and sexualities, which complicates the ways scholars need to think through how the category of sex can contribute to our understanding of leisure. More specifically, thinking about sex broadly (and beyond a reductive definition of penetrative intercourse), “turns sexuality research into leisure scholars’ playground where we can explore a wide spectrum of sexual pleasures and expressions” (Berychevsky & Carr, 2020, p. 6), which has the potential to shed much light on the complex phenomena of leisure. Despite this opportunity for collaborative work, sexuality studies and leisure studies rarely overlap; this introduction aims to situate these literatures in relation to each other to assess: (1) where they overlap, (2) why they do not overlap, and (3) how the contributions in this book aim to address this gap.

Historical and disciplinary roots I: critical sexuality studies

We begin with critical sexuality studies, which captures a broad field of research that encompasses the study of sex, sexuality, and sexual behaviours (Fahs & McClelland, 2016). For the focus of this book, we have included in the conceptualization of sexuality studies the scientific and medical literature on sexual behaviour and identity, but we excluded that which pertains to sexual anatomy and physiology. We drew this line around the scope of our focus because as leisure scholars, we are interested in how sex intersects with behaviour, not anatomy. Moreover, we draw upon Butler’s (1993) work that posits sex as discursive and works as an ontological and epistemological category that produces bodies, but is not “inherent” to bodies.

Within this scope of sexuality studies, we identify two origins of the field: (1) the “sexology” of Freud, Kinsey, and Hirschfeld of the early 20th century and (2) the LGBTQ2S+ and feminist social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. These origins highlight how sexology has shifted from its psychoanalytic roots and now considers sex and sexuality from a scientific and medical perspective. This shift is linked to the emergence of social, political, and cultural studies of sex, or what we might term “critical sexuality studies” that resulted from social movements, which “fuse both labour and leisure” (Nathan Wright, 2008, p. 446). While the sexological literature may overlap most clearly with leisure studies’ classic concerns over health and well-being, it often lacks a social justice perspective. Given our own investments in research making positive social change (Johnson & Parry, 2016), we instead see more potential in critical sexuality studies to reinvigorate leisure studies and set the agenda for the study of sex and leisure within the field.

Given the breadth of the field, there are numerous entryways for scholars of sex and leisure to integrate critical sexuality studies into their social justice-oriented research practice. We focus here on three areas within critical sexuality studies that have the most obvious overlaps with leisure studies' historical and ongoing concerns and allow for substantive, theoretical, and methodological innovation. We turn here to studies of community building and activism; theories of homonationalism and colonialism; and methodologies that centre the consumption of sexual material and individual sex practices.

Community building and activism

Much of the early activism and sense of community for LGBTQ2S+ individuals happened because of bars and social clubs. Bars were a safe space where LGBTQ2S+ people first could find others like themselves and begin to organize (Marcus, 1993). In the United States, gay bars were historically often run by the mob, while in Canada, gay bars and community centres were often private members' clubs (Korinek, 2018; Millward, 2015) or railway hotel bars with private members and clever names to mask their niche. All over the United States and Canada, gay bars, clubs, and bathhouses were subject to frequent raids by police. On February 5, 1981, four bathhouses in downtown Toronto were raided by 200 police officers who used excessive force and taunted the sexuality of the patrons. The following night, thousands took to the streets, marching and chanting "stop the cops!" In the United States, the Stonewall Riots happened at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, which was routinely raided by the police, and raided on June 27, 1969. A group of transgender and gender non-conforming patrons, including drag queens, mostly people of colour, decided that they were fed up and that they wouldn't take it anymore. The resulting riot lasted for days and ultimately helped the LGBTQ2S+ community come together to create change (Carter, 2004). In 2016, President Obama designated the site of the Stonewall Riots as the Stonewall National Monument, "the first official National Park unit dedicated to telling the story of 2SLGBT Americans" (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2016, para. 3).

We can also turn our attention to events like the annual Pride parades, a contested site of leisure. Although the origins of the parade were to protest and create awareness around the daily violence and police harassment faced by LGBTQ2S+ people and to celebrate and remember the Bathhouse and Stonewall riots, today these radical marches have morphed into huge commercialized festivals that are attended by thousands. This increased visibility not only validates queer history and experience, but the abundant presence of corporate sponsorship and consumerism leaves many to lament and criticize Pride as straying too far from its activist roots (Beasley, 2014) by being grounded in pink capitalism, the aggressive target marketing of those in the community with purchasing power, namely, white middle class, urban gay men.

Further, the police presence at Pride, often on a celebratory float, is contested, as Indigenous and people of colour face more scrutiny and violence at

the hands of the police. Many Pride parades explicitly exclude police officers in uniform from attending (e.g., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada), but few Pride organizing committees do the labour to address the concerns and lived experiences of the community in its entirety. In 2016, Black Lives Matter stopped the Toronto Pride parade and would not let the procession continue until a series of demands were met, including a promise to increase Queer People of Colour (QPOC) representation within Pride Toronto. Greey (2018) has shown how the sit-in was depicted as separate from Pride rather than aligned with the larger LGBTQ2S+ community's concerns and concluded that mainstream media and the dominant culture equates queerness with being white. Queers in many cities collectively demonstrate in "radical pride", an alternative event that is grounded in the political roots of the original Pride marches, emphasizing protest and queer liberation.

Homonationalism and colonialism

There is no question that there has been progress, but it can be hard to measure how much, not least because progress is typically uneven across different identities. Intersectional identities mean that a white, cisgender gay man will have a different and more privileged experience of the world than a black queer homeless teen (Crenshaw 1989; Knee, 2019). Our multiple identities – race, class, gender, ability – overlap and interact to affect how others view us and treat us (Watson & Scraton, 2013).

Thinking intersectionally, research on globalization, migration, and colonialism often intersects with issues of tourism (Puar, 2002). As Puar (2007) has shown, homonationalism, which is discourses on "sexual exceptionalism" (p. 3) that position the national acceptance of homosexuality in the West as justification for continued imperialism in the East and Global South, underscore much contemporary thought around tourism. The quintessential example of this is the Israeli state's strategy to use its national acceptance of homosexuality as a way to market itself as a gay tourist destination and "pinkwash" its ongoing occupation of Palestine (Puar, 2017). Closer to home, the Canadian state's own commemorations of queer activism, from Pride House at the Vancouver Olympics (Dhoot, 2015) to their more recent commemorations of the 1969 Criminal Code Amendment (Hooper, 2019) position Canada as a progressive LGBTQ2S+ leisure state and tourist destination to pinkwash over the state's historical and ongoing colonial, transphobic, and homophobic violence.

Crucially, the entire concept of "normativity" (Warner 1991, pg. 16) as it emerges from queer theory, whether heteronormativity (Rich, 1980; Warner; Johnson, 2013, Robinette, 2014) or homonormativity (Duggan, 2014; Johnson, 2013; Johnson, 2005, Johnson, 2008) is based on an analysis of domestic and social leisure practices. Duggan defines homonormativity within the sphere of domestic leisure and consumption. This underscores the relevance for both dominant and non-dominant perspectives in leisure research focused on both sex and sexual identity.

Consuming and enacting sex

Watching TV and movies and consuming media is a leisure activity. Leisure scholars can learn much from media studies, in particular their studies of empirical audiences and media consumption habits (Copeland, 2018; Hansen, 1991; Kuhn, 2002), as well as the burgeoning body of research on pornography. There is a robust tradition of scholarship at the intersection of media studies and sexuality studies that focuses on the consumption of queer media (Dyer, 2004) and pornography (Parry & Penny Light, 2017). Studies of audience viewing habits of this material within the discipline of media studies are studies of sex and leisure.

Lots of us watch and consume not only sexually explicit material – which encompasses everything from *Game of Thrones* to hardcore pornography – but material with sexual overtones, undertones, and that makes sex central to its narrative function. Technology, such as fan fiction websites, e-books, virtual publishers, social networking sites, and online communities of interest, is opening up new avenues for consumption of sexually explicit materials (Milhausen, 2012). Attwood (2007) explains, “It is now possible to create, distribute and access a much more diverse set of sexual representations” (p. 441). These new, diverse sexual representations are more likely to draw in what Attwood refers to as the “ordinary consumer” of sexualized materials. Moreover, newer forms of representation and access are “concerned with formulating a sexual sensibility for audiences that have traditionally been neglected by porn – young people and women” (Attwood, 2007, p. 445).

The *Fifty Shades of Grey* series is an excellent example of the ways that women are able to access sexually explicit stories in their leisure through technologies such as e-readers and discuss them in online communities of interest including book clubs, chat rooms, and blogs (Parry & Penny Light, 2017). For example, the discreet nature of e-reading devices enables women to consume the erotic series privately without shame whenever and wherever they like during their leisure (Chemaly, 2012). This form of consumption facilitates subversive behaviour by enabling women to bypass the gendered judgment associated with activities perceived to be on the fringe of social acceptability (Brown, 2012; Tisdale, 1992). The subversive behaviour is not limited to sexually explicit materials on e-readers, however, as women are also reading and contributing to *Fifty Shades* blogs, participating in chat groups, and looking up *Fifty Shades* inspired sex toys online. For example, Hamilton (2012) reported that based on the *Fifty Shades* series, “sales of crops and whips are up by 15%, blindfolds by 60% and bondage ties 35%. Paddles and handcuffs for spanking scenes made famous in the book have soared 30% – while sales of naughty jiggle balls are up by 200%” (p. 1).

Women are thus using technology to move beyond the individual pleasure of reading the books to create a collective identity grounded in a shared, sexual fantasy world (Sonnet, 1999). Sonnet (1999) explains,

the newly empowered reader of [*Fifty Shades of Grey*] utilizes a commodified form of popular culture to signal alignment with a collective identity which exists only through that form. By connecting women in a shared fantasy

world, the [*Fifty Shades*] philosophy mobilizes a rhetoric of community and collective female identity created around sexual fantasy. Consumption of erotica, then, works to reinforce the cultural identity of...women.

(p. 178)

In addition, actual sex practices, including cruising (Munoz 2009), barebacking (Dean 2009, Varghese 2019), BDSM (Williams et al., 2016) and many other variants have been examined. This literature critically deconstructs the category of “risk” in so-called deviant sexual practices and aims to reconstitute a politics of pleasure. However, most have been regulated as “novel” or “dangerous” to study without the protection of tenure and/or from outsiders who are not part of that community, as discussed in both Chapter 2 and Chapter 7.

Historical and disciplinary roots II: leisure studies

Within leisure studies, there is a long history of sex and leisure, which situates sex as a core aspect of leisure. Hardwick (2008) notes that “[s]ociability and sexuality have long been acknowledged by scholars as core aspects of leisure” (Hardwick 2008, p. 460). Within leisure studies, we can look to Devall’s (1979) initial work on gay men’s leisure lives as a formative moment in our understanding of sex as leisure, since his claim that gay men’s lives *are* leisure lives implies here that sex and sexuality are core features of leisure. While not exhaustive, some key areas where critical sexuality studies and leisure studies have overlapped were inspired by feminist manoeuvres in the late 1990s to begin to examine LGB sexual identities as it related to leisure (Wearing, 1998; Skeggs, 1999; 2008, 2013). More recently, Davidson’s (2019) genealogy of queer/queering leisure studies, highlights the “shared historical condition of possibility for leisure studies and queer theory. Arguably, both are effects of mid-20th century modernity and emerge from that historical moment in the form that we recognize them each today” (p. 80). She notes that the sexual liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s are leisure activities and that these leisure activities are in part made possible by the increasing distinction between work and leisure time in the mid-20th century.

Given that Davidson notes a shared history for queer theory and leisure studies, you might think that sex and leisure have a closer connection, but the scholarship on sex and leisure is relatively recent. Berdychevsky et al. (2013) argue that

even though sex fits nearly all definitions of leisure, and despite the fact that scholars have recognized that sex in its various practices represents a form of play and leisure, there is a dearth, or even an absence, of research attention to non-commercial sexual matters in leisure studies.

(p. 51)

However, this “gap” between sex and leisure is being overcome: within critical sexuality studies, the journal *GLQ* has published special issues on queer tourism (Puar, 2002) and athletics (Doyle, 2013). Within leisure studies there have

been a few special issues on the intersections of sex and leisure (Caudwell & Browne 2011; Berdychevsky & Carr 2020) and numerous articles on various sexual behaviours ranging from heterosexual and normative to queer and deviant and recognizes many of these practices as everyday. These recent studies of sex and leisure underscore the ways in which sex practices which may seem taboo, deviant, or non-normative are in fact relatively mundane and quotidian. Key areas of current research on sex and leisure in the field are on: spaces, tourism, health, sports, and digital environments.

Leisure spaces, particularly bars, nightclubs, and sex clubs within urban spaces (cf Johnson and Samdahl, 2005; Johnson, 2008; Browne & Bakshi 2011; Pilcher 2011; Hardwick 2008; Bell 1991; Valentine 1993), camps (Oakleaf, 2017), and festivals (Jones 2010) also remain well accounted for in leisure studies. Caudwell and Browne's (2011) special issue of *Leisure Studies* is particularly formative here, and they articulate a framework of "sexy spaces." For them "sexy spaces intend to provoke critical discussion surrounding space, leisure, and the sexual [...] to further consider the possibilities of conceptualising the leisure landscapes of sexual lives and gender, and the sexuality and gender of leisure landscapes." (p. 117). This literature identifies the importance of space and geography to sex and sexuality, helping us think through how sexual leisure practices produce space and inform the construction of place and community (Johnson, 2005; Johnson, 2008).

Other recent, though still under-developed areas of research on sex within leisure studies include research on sex and health, which thinks through the paradoxes of sex as a leisure activity when illness and aging can place constraints on sexual activity (Berdychevsky et al, 2013; Miller et al 2014; Berdychevsky & Nimrod, 2016), as well as LGBTQ participation in sports (Caudwell, 2011; Myrdahl, 2011) and dating (Cousineau et al., 2018; Petrychyn, Parry and Johnson, 2020). It is important to note, with regard to sports and dating, however, that though much of this work is on sexuality, it still only furtively engages with sexual activity. It is crucial for leisure studies going forward, especially research that engages with marginalized sexualities, to pay serious attention to sexual activity and to not simply subsume it under the framework of sexuality.

Barriers

As this brief review suggests, there is a wide body of literature that engages with sex as a leisure practice both implicitly and explicitly. However, when we consider the field of leisure studies narrowly, there still remain significant barriers to the study of sex being fully accepted within leisure studies. Carr (2016) notes two reasons for leisure studies' historical erasure of sexuality: frivolity and stigma.

Within leisure studies, there has been a pervasive fear of being seen as doing "frivolous" research: "What has stopped us looking, to date, at the pleasure of sex in tourism is arguably that as tourism academics we fear, as discussed earlier, to undertake such 'frivolous' work, preferring instead to wrap our work in acceptable constructs related to power" (Carr, 2016, p. 195). Carr is making an important distinction here in how sex has been studied within tourism: sex has been

studied *in relation to power* and not in relation to *pleasure*. In Carr's formulation, pleasure is seen as the frivolous aspect of sex, whereas power is what transforms it into an acceptable academic study. As our review of critical sexuality studies suggests, we do see studies of sex as power as important, especially because they can allow a social justice perspective to be taken more seriously within leisure studies. Scholarship on sex needs to, however, strike a balance between paying attention to both the power *and* pleasure of sex. Here we might amend Oscar Wilde's famous aphorism: Sex is both about power *and* pleasure.

A fear of the pleasure of sex is also a fear that our scholarship on sex may also be seen as not rigorous and solipsistic since it may be presumed that the researcher is studying a particular aspect of sex because they personally partake in it and find it pleasurable. Rigour is often assumed to be synonymous with distance, and to temper sex's salaciousness, scholars might be tempted to distance themselves from the matter at hand. Though it may be difficult to separate the researcher from the subject in studies of sex, this is not necessarily an inherent flaw in the research design (Carr, 2016). Rather, the closeness between researcher and subject that characterizes much of the research on sex and leisure allows for critical engagement with the role of the researcher in research design.

Indeed, fears of being seen as frivolous, not rigorous, or solipsistic emerge from an overwhelming stigma about sex in leisure studies. We continue to write that we have little research on the topic, little ways to get into sex because people are reticent to speak about sex, and so we are stuck in a vicious cycle of not having enough data or secondary research (Carr, 2016). Further, as Williams et al. in this collection note, stigma around sex can lead to the perception that research on sex can be a "career killer," and so people shy away from the study of sex for fear of career repercussion. This stigma leads to the perception that sex is so taboo people will not want to talk to researchers about it. However, even this is questionable given that McKeown et al. (2018) and others have been successful in getting participants to speak about sex in the context of women's porn consumption.

This handwringing over sex leads to censorship at numerous points in the research process, by institutions, researchers, participants, editors, and reviewers (Berychevsky & Carr, 2020). None of this censorship is necessarily insidious – much of it is mundane, emerging from perceptions about what is seen as appropriate research, or what readers want, based on outmoded Victorian assumptions about sex that are little based in grounded empirical research on sex (Foucault, 1990). But recognizing these assumptions as ungrounded is only part of what is necessary to combat the stigma around sex research in leisure studies. Undoing these assumptions takes work, work that this collection enacts and encourages.

Overview

This collection navigates the messy theoretical, anecdotal, and empirical aspects of sex as/and/through leisure. In her opening contribution to this collection, Berdychevsky (2021) argues for a sustained engagement in reflexive research for leisure studies. For Berdychevsky, "the reflexive approach allowed me to look