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INTRODUCTION



## A descent into dark leisure in music

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On 16 September 2016, we set out to explore an important question in leisure studies: how we can, as scholars, approach leisure activity that is performed within non-mainstream, or underground if you prefer, communities. Music was the focus of this enquiry. The symposium held in Leeds at Leeds Beckett University hosted a day of papers discussing ‘dark leisure’ in the context of music cultures within three sessions of ‘Myth and Dark Leisure’, ‘Morality and Dark Leisure’, and ‘Theory and Dark Leisure’. This special issue represents a portion of papers from that day. We also have additional articles related to dark leisure within a music context.

One of the first uses of the term ‘dark leisure’ comes from Spracklen and Spracklen (2012) where they challenge the ideas of deviant and abnormal leisure defined by Rojek (1999, 2000) within the liminal spaces of the Goth culture prominent in Yorkshire, England. Williams’ defines deviant leisure under a more positive light (2009). In the process of doing so, he stated: ‘I believe leisure scholars should rethink how deviant leisure is conceptualized.’ (2009, 207). This statement served as the starting point of the symposium. Dark leisure activity is transgressive, liminal, and alternative. People who partake in these activities can be seen as rebellious to mainstream culture, alternative, non-conformist, and even deviant. The problem with deviant or abnormal leisure theories stems from the words which suggest a narrow point of view on this type of activity. As discussed by Rojek, ‘deviant leisure’ is deviant. It is problematic and detrimental to both the individual and the community. Abnormal (Rojek 1999) or deviant leisure (Rojek 2000) is not seen as something that is valuable but instead it is basically trouble. From this perspective, deviant leisure is more related to crime (Gunn and Caissie 2006; Williams and Walker 2006) than something that is morally instructive or communicatively rewarding. However, this notion of deviance was quickly challenged (Franklin-Reible 2006; Galloway, 2006; Stone in Elkington and Gammon 2013) as authors looked at the ‘good’ in ‘bad’. While the direction of these studies is the correct one, it is not enough. Deviant leisure is still good within the realm of the abnormal rather than simply being taboo or non-mainstream. When one looks at deviant leisure from this taboo perspective, then we are stuck. It is not easy to call an activity transgressive to social norms without importing our own morality onto the idea and calling these activities ‘deviant’ or ‘abnormal’. We need a new term to talk about these activities. Dark leisure fits this role well. Because one of the first occurrences of this term happened within the scholarly framework in a musical context (i.e. the Goth culture) and even though music on its own in relation to leisure activity is largely

ignored by leisure studies, except for scholarship like Lashua (2005) and Riches (2011), music is a prime area to explore what dark leisure can be.

Following this idea, the special issue starts with a critical commentary on dark leisure by Tony Blackshaw. Blackshaw highlights the naming issue in relation to dark leisure. He argues that within these cultures a fascination of death is commonly found; a notion inspired by the studies conducted on dark leisure so far. This idea is challenged by the following articles in this issue.

The first paper is Karl Spracklen's 'Sex, drugs, Satan and rock and roll: Re-thinking dark leisure, from theoretical framework to an exploration of pop-rock-metal music norms'. In this article, Spracklen focusses on the analysis of Rojek's abnormal leisure in a musical context. The application of the new theoretical framework provided by Spracklen is embodied within an examination of the 'alternative' in popular culture within pop, rock, and metal musics.

Harmon and Woosnam accompany Spracklen's theoretical introduction to dark leisure with a discussion on leisure substitutability. Harmon and Woosnam argue that an extension of this concept is needed to better explain how people participating in certain leisure activities decide when they switch leisure activities. This decision heavily depends on what the previous activity was, and this previous activity can introduce newer areas for the leisurist.

In the third paper, Pastoor et al. discuss how Christian youth music festivals (CYMFs) contribute to ideological production. These liminal events, depending on the management of the event, can be event leisure spaces for both mainstream and counterculture Christianity cultures. In this ethnographic comparative study, Pastoor et al. consider the background of the event management as a catalyst for the ideological side of the leisure experience.

Following the first ethnographic exploration of this issue, the fourth paper presents a crucial perspective that is usually missing within leisure studies that focus on music: an ethnomusicological one. Luis-Manuel Garcia's 'Agonistic festivities: Urban nightlife scenes and the sociability of "anti-social" fun' discusses the uses of urban space in nightlife cultures in Europe. Garcia examines the closing down of important nightclubs such as Fabric in London and the recognition of Berghain in Berlin by regional financial courts as negotiations, and thus structuring, of a social identity between the venues, partygoers, municipal authorities, and local residents.

The fifth article of the issue is Spencer Swain's 'Grime music and dark leisure: Exploring grime, morality and synoptic control'. Swain explores grime music through a lens of morality. Grime has been criticized for being violent and representative of gang violence and drugs. However, through a dark leisure perspective, Swain suggests that grime transgresses the contours of power that run through contemporary society in the United Kingdom. Through this opposition to the essentialism that results in the view that grime is 'immoral', a new form of 'respectable' grime music is achieved.

Following these papers, Justin Harmon, with a double feature, considers a case study of how meaningful leisure, as also represented by the cultures discussed in the previous papers in this issue, helps the healing process after a loss in a music community. Harmon takes a community in which a member has committed suicide as his case for this exploration. Rust Forever's music is relied on for healing and catharsis in this community. According to Harmon, close friendships, meaningful leisure, and music provide

support in the healing process of the complicated and ambiguous feelings that inevitably follow a suicide within a community. This is followed by an enquiry on how continued leisure activity by people with previous substance abuse disorders helps the continuity of sobriety. Harmon challenges the idea that people with substance abuse disorders engage in different leisure activity than those without such disorders. He explores the leisure activities that are related to substance use at the beginning of an unhealthy dependency.

When we look at this collection of articles, we can say that the special issue attempts a re-definition of dark leisure through an illustration of how communicative and constructive this type of activity can be for individuals' and communities' lives. The main requirement of dark leisure research, then, emerges as a morally relativistic mindset when analysing these transgressive, alternative, non-conformist, non-mainstream, or underground cultures.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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