

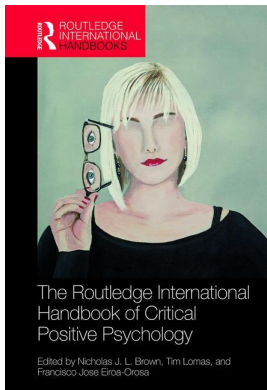
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Pleasure as a form of liberatory practice

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Interlude 2



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Pleasure as a form of liberatory practice

Tod Sloan and Marisol García

Joy, curiosity, awe, compassion, love, pleasure. . . . These are among the many “positive” states of being and experience that people enjoy and, in turn, proponents of positive psychology advocate their cultivation. These experts adamantly summon us to understand these states, to create conditions that will foster them, to seek them out, build on them, and be happier as a result. For example,

we believe that there is good reason to celebrate and encourage positive emotions. . . . If we were to make a recommendation based on the current state of the research, it is that people should cultivate positive emotions as a regular feature of their lives without giving up their ability to react to good and bad events as they come. Negative emotions help us respond to threats, avoid risks, and appropriately mark losses, while positive emotions help us take advantage of everything life has to offer.

(Cohn & Fredrickson, 2011, p. 21)

Note here that, contrary to overly quick assessments, positive psychology proponents acknowledge that achieving well being is not a matter of avoiding the negative emotions and related states, because the ability to enjoy is connected to the ability to feel our way through the dark emotions and even to suffer (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2015). Clearly, however, the main thrust of the positive psychology movement, especially as it received by the public in contemporary consumer societies, is on working directly to maximize positive states (Lomas, Hefferon, & Ivtzan, 2014).

Many sociologists would accuse positive psychology of fostering individualism, ignoring social contexts such as poverty, marginalization, and violence that can seriously interfere with happiness. It is indeed striking that *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Lopez & Snyder, 2011) lists none of the following terms in its index: poverty, racism, sexism, violence. . . . Positive psychologists do occasionally acknowledge that societal factors mediate well being. For example, Cohn and Fredrickson, in the very last sentence of their chapter on positive emotions, asked, after wondering why we don’t experience more positive emotions, “are there potentially remediable features of the modern world that cause many people to experience more worry and distress and less interest, joy, and contentment than would be optimal?” (2011, p. 21). This

last-minute mention of the possibility that social change might improve chances for emotional well being is striking. Critical psychologies, in contrast, begin with the awareness of suffering that is systematically reproduced by social relations of domination and move from that awareness to engage in projects for social transformation.

Nevertheless, positive psychology must be credited for serving as a corrective to rampant pathologizing in mainstream clinical psychology. It is thus unfortunate that its well-intentioned contributions tend to be ignored or summarily dismissed by scholars and activists who draw on the tradition of critical social theory, from Marx to the Frankfurt School and poststructuralists such as Foucault, or the team of Deleuze and Guattari. But it is important to understand why they do so. Critical theorists shy away from the “affirmative” or the positive because these attitudes tend to play a role in masking oppression (“see how good things are under the dictator”) or in denying suffering (“things could be worse”). Critical theorists are also skeptical about reformist strategies that merely tinker with the system, adjusting it slightly in ways that keep enough people happy enough to quell anger and opposition to the status quo. For example, Jacoby (1975), targeting some of the forerunners of positive psychology – 1960s humanistic and existential psychology – makes it clear that ignoring the political economic structures that shape social relations and emotional experience is essentially a form of intellectual blindness as well as collusion with domination:

The more the development of late capitalism renders obsolete or at least suspect the real possibilities of self, self-fulfillment, and actualization, the more they are emphasized as if they could spring to life through an act of will on their own. . . . The modern individual is in the process of disintegration. To forget this is to abet the process not aid the resistance. The existential stress on free and autonomous actions and decisions is a reflex response to a society that is eliminating them.

(Jacoby, 1975, p. 64)

Here we will explore aspects of this encounter between positive psychology and critical social theory in the form of a collegial dialogue. Our starting point, following the critical theorist Herbert Marcuse, is the proposition that greater doses of pleasure and heightened sensuality are intimately linked to empowerment, resistance, and liberation. In the introduction to his *Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse wrote:

The advent of a free society would be characterized by the fact that the growth of well-being turns into an essentially new quality of life. This qualitative change must occur in the needs, the infrastructure of man [sic] (itself a dimension of the infrastructure of society): the new direction, the new institutions and relationships of production, must express the ascent of needs and satisfactions very different from and even antagonistic to those present in the exploitative societies.

(Marcuse, 1969, p. 4)

Marcuse asserted that accomplishing this change would require “a political practice of methodical disengagement from and refusal of the Establishment” and a “break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding so that the organism may become receptive to the potential forms of a nonaggressive, nonexploitative world” (1969, p. 6).

It is the political function of this “new sensibility” we want to explore here. Strangely, many critical theorists, in part because of their asceticism or stoicism, have neglected this dimension of resistance to the industrial growth society and capitalist consumerism. The issues surrounding

Marcuse's (1969) advocacy for increased pleasure and new structures of feeling are complicated and worth unraveling. Complex, dialectical interactions at the intrapsychic, interpersonal, and societal levels of analysis need to be taken into account (Sloan, 1996b). We will not delve deeply into the scholarly infighting around these issues, because our main goal is to keep the "pleasure as resistance" idea alive and to invite readers to engage in everyday dialogues with their friends and communities about pleasure as a key aspect of progressive and radical political projects. (The dialogue below was constructed in an on-line conversation in several sessions, followed by revisions and editing for clarity.)

TS: To start from a common standpoint in critical social theory, I will admit that I fear that, rather than functioning as a form of resistance or liberation, pleasure seeking tends to devolve into individualistic pursuits that directly support our exploitation under consumer capitalism. Thanks to advertising, we tend to want to buy goods and services in the marketplace because they are supposed to maximize our experience of pleasure. Most of us have to work quite hard to earn the money to pay for those goods and services. Pleasure seeking also drains time from participation in organizing for social changes that would increase the well being of those who are exploited, excluded, and suffering. But, now that I think of it, I am not sure how I would even define pleasure. Do you have a handy definition we can work with?

MG: Webster's dictionary definitions for pleasure are "a state of being pleased," "sensual gratification," or "a source of delight or joy." I agree that the dominant discourse on pleasure supports consumerist capitalism because pleasure is marketed as something we deserve after a long day's work. This discourse promotes particular pleasures (massages, gourmet food, candles, exotic travel, expensive cars, etc.) because they create profits for those who provide them. However, there is another discourse in which pleasure is seen as dangerous. Workers who entertain pleasures that are free or inexpensive – such as strolling, sunbathing, napping, games, etc. – do not have to work much to be able to afford them. The discourse favoring simple pleasures is dangerous to consumer capitalism because it threatens the dominant work ethic. Consumer capitalism needs people to value hard work and sacrifice, not only because it increases productivity and provides more profit for business owners, but also because it sucks up the free time during which we could become more aware of systemic oppression and develop responses to it. Consumer capitalism encourages pleasure only in order to incentivize work; it rejects pleasure that would take time away from work without generating profits. Forms of pleasure that help us become more creative and reflect on our lives are portrayed as dangerous or indulgent because they could disrupt our economic/political/social system. This is the type of pleasure in which I am interested: pleasure that connects us to ourselves and to others in ways that encourage creativity and radical social change.

TS: You packed a lot into that answer. Let's take it piece by piece. First, there is the question of how much time is spent at work and how that might get in the way of spending money for pleasure. Next, there are the possibilities that workers might discover that non-commodified pleasures are sufficient and that they do not need to work so much to afford expensive consumer items, e.g., walk in the park instead of working to pay for a new car. Then, there is the possibility that extra free time might be dedicated to reflect on systematic oppression in capitalist society, or to act creatively in disruptive ways. Finally, there is the idea that pleasure can help us connect to ourselves and to others in ways that disrupt domination and alienation. Maybe we should start with that last thought and come back to the others. How can pleasure do that? When I experience pleasure I am usually relaxing, focusing on sensual or cultural gratification of various sorts, and usually not doing anything that would threaten the system, apart from taking a break from my "productivity."

MG: I have two thoughts on that. First, it is not what we do for pleasure that disrupts the system (although there is some of that as well) but rather the act of valuing pleasure over work.

When I value pleasure over work, I no longer abide by the work ethic that demands perpetual work and sacrifice. I'm not an economist, but I like to think that if we all valued pleasure over work and took the time to engage in pleasure, our employers would be forced to increase our wages to address the dwindling supply of willing workers. Also, if we all valued time for pleasure away from work, our employers could no longer require that we work overtime. In the end, the costs of goods might increase due to increased labor costs, and profits would decrease, perhaps shrinking income inequality in the process. Furthermore, when we value pleasure over work, we create more space for identity construction separate from our employment. In our non-work identities, we come to know what we want, need, and think separately from the consumerist and workerist discourses that proliferate in work settings and the larger culture. As we engage in counterdiscourses of pleasure, we dismantle the discourses of domination.

This leads me to my second thought. You said that you merely relax and engage in sensual activities when you are engaging in pleasure, but remember that you are also connecting to your body and to others around you in the process. Connecting to others is an obvious path toward resistance – let's leave that aside for a moment. But connecting to oneself may need more explanation as to how it can dismantle oppressive social systems. Do you have any thoughts about how that could be radical?

TS: “Connecting to oneself” does need some clarification, even before we think about how that could play a part in dismantling oppressive social systems. Critical theorists usually talk about the self or psyche as something that is not only constructed through social relations from birth forward, but also saturated with ideologically mediated modes of thinking and feeling that reproduce the status quo. This means that a crucial aspect of connecting with oneself is to become aware of how conditioned the “core” of our self is, conditioned to want more or less what the system wants us to want. As many have pointed out, however, there is always room for reflection on and critique of that conditioning in ways that can lead to resistance and even rebellion and revolt. In general, connecting with oneself refers to experiencing more fully what one is feeling and sensing – that is, “listening to the body” – which opens the possibility of recognizing that overwork, addictions, stress, consumerism, and so on are getting in the way of fuller enjoyment. That leaves the question about connecting with others through pleasure and how that might be a path to resistance. It's not so obvious to me. Can you explain?

MG: I would like to add, before going on to the issue of connecting with others, that connecting to oneself also disrupts dominant and oppressive ways of being because it allows us to step away from automatic and lobotomized modes of life. We tend to go day-to-day from one thing to the next in out-of-body (dissociated) experiences that leave little room for creative thought or deep feeling. Getting people to function in automatic and rote ways is a powerful vehicle of domination. We are easier to control if we are numb and unaware. Once we start to engage with our bodies and our experiential awareness, we step away from this domination.

In response to your question about connecting to others, the experience of strength in numbers gathering around a similar cause has typically been a critical part of resistance, no? Also, when we connect with others we gather resources such as knowledge and opportunities that, given the right focus, can lead us to more effective ways to resist. Critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) is based on the premise that dialogue leads to awareness, which then leads to action toward change. Isolation and silence (due to being disconnected from others) are vehicles of domination. The more disconnected we are from others, the weaker our resistance to oppressive circumstances.

TS: All that sounds very much on track. In fact, I experience pleasure simply in hearing you talk like that! I want to call on Marcuse (1955) at this point to tease out the issue of how to distinguish between pleasure as resistance and pleasure as co-optation. In general, he felt that most

of us need more pleasure and more leisure time in order to be free. Under advanced capitalism, we are subjected to “surplus repression” to get us to buckle down under what he called the “performance principle” (rather than following Freud’s pleasure principle or reality principle). Some repression is necessary for society to function, but industrializing societies really overdo it as they modernize (Sloan, 1996a). To complicate matters, we need to consider one of Marcuse’s popular concepts – “repressive desublimation.” It will take some explaining before we try to employ it. Freud used the concept of sublimation to describe the complex processes through which the energetic drives associated with embodiment, desire, and aggression are muted and find expression in socially acceptable meaning-making activities such as art, politics, scientific inquiry, love, and sports. These activities are associated with forms of pleasure, but the drives that energize them literally miss their target. The original aims – erotic gratification or release of aggressive impulses – are fulfilled only tangentially. So, technically, sublimation is a defense mechanism like all the others (projection, denial, rationalization, repression, etc.), and it serves to preserve the integrity of the ego as it mediates between the demands of the drives and the commands of the conscience. But sublimation is different from the other defense mechanisms in that, instead of aiding the psyche in its refusal to accept reality, it actually helps the individual to take reality into account and engage with it in creative ways, and even transform it (Oliver, 2004).

Overall, workers who sublimate sufficiently can find moderate pleasures in socially acceptable ways and are willing to work hard to have the means to enjoy “finer” things. With the rise of automation in the advanced industrial societies, workers would logically have more free time for pleasure as well as for organizing against remaining exploitation. But consumer capitalism and related cultural forms work to weaken superego prohibitions against pleasure seeking and encourage the use of leisure time and easy access to credit to enjoy “lower” forms of commodified gratification. Simultaneously, a form of “surplus repression” has reinforced the work ethic and militated against the reduction of time at work, especially in the United States. (This is despite the fact that in the early twenty-first century, the case for reduced time at work and for a guaranteed basic income is even stronger, in large part because of environmental concerns [cf. Battistoni, 2016].) In the early 1960s, the scenario for repressive desublimation was firmly in place as subjects began to be caught up in a contradictory experience of oppression in the guise of liberation. So, over the last fifty years, worker/consumers in the United States, in particular, have been working longer hours (Schor, 1992) while experiencing a flood of pornography and violent feature films, gluttonous and drunken leisure travel packages, the sexual objectification of women’s and girls’ bodies in ubiquitous advertising, and the continuous release of must-have gadgets to fiddle with. Confusing the matter is the fact that much of the 1960s counterculture involved a liberation of sensuality and sexuality that was less manipulated by the market, at least at first. For a while, the “All You Need is Love” subculture was linked to and energized the movements for civil rights and against the capitalist imperialism of the Vietnam War. But market co-optation of those sentiments soon disconnected anti-systemic protest from love-making and psychedelics. “Peace” and “love” gradually became gestures of style and fashion with little content or power in connection with progressive social movements.

MG: I agree that the current pacifying trends reduce the aggression and discontent that would lead to resistance. I also see the point in saying that when we engage in pleasure and feel-good activities, we encourage amnesia about what is wrong in this world. At the same time, part of the oppression I have experienced personally is directly related to feeling judged, rejected, and marginalized. In that state, I do feel a strong need to change the system. In the past, however, I have not had the power and strength to do so because I have needed some form of validation and nurturance. When I talk of pleasure, I am not implying amnesia but increased awareness. Valuing pleasure allows us to take more time to have sensual experiences that lead to

more awareness of self in the world. Valuing pleasure also says “fuck you” to subjugation to the work ethic. It also gives us space and time in which to dream and strategize for a better future. I don’t think that having enjoyable experiences means that one forgets about negative things; it merely gives one the opportunity and energy for resistance. Current work and life-style patterns drain the time and energy that are needed to imagine and create a better world. But we need to be careful that pleasurable activities do not alienate us even more from our connection to self and others.

We need to make sure that we don’t use pleasure as another tool for marginalization. I am not saying that those who engage in pleasure are enlightened to systems of oppression and those who do not engage in pleasure are not enlightened. I have suffered due to systems of oppression and I have been aware of those systems. With or without pleasure, I am conscious of the systemic oppression. Pleasure sometimes helps me become more aware, but it is not a necessary condition for increased awareness. Pain and suffering are just as effective and necessary. The difference for me is that adding pleasure to the pain and suffering can aid us in taking action against the oppression we face.

TS: I wonder if we could look at some examples of pleasurable activities and try to apply the alienation criterion. How about tropical vacation trips? Or gourmet restaurants? Spas? Rock concerts? Getting drunk or high? I immediately see that we should not get into the business of deciding what activities pass the test as forms of resistance. For some, experiencing relaxation, altered states, or body care, for example, would not only be respite from the grind of manual work, but could open a space for reflection and even dialogue with others about oppression at work or at home, for that matter (Earnest & Sloan, 2014). Here I have in mind the sort of critical self-reflection and group dialogue that Habermas (1987; Sloan, 1996a) recommends as processes for decolonization of the lifeworld, the space in which we communicatively construct meanings, values, and identities. Perhaps a list of questions one could ask oneself or discuss in a group would be useful. For example, one could ask, does this form of pleasure.

- help us connect with others in ways that increase our understanding of each other and build solidarity and courage?
- disrupt our usual personal ways of avoiding fully feeling our responses to oppression in daily life? Does it help us become aware of those evasions?
- invite us to engage with others in enjoyable, playful, and creative ways?
- disconnect us from our uninspired routines and habits in ways that foster perspective-taking and critical reflection?

MG: I’d like to add a few:

- directly disrupt oppressive systems?
- regenerate our energies to be able to confront oppressive systems?
- liberate us from internalized systems of oppression?

As I think of these questions, I am wondering whether almost any form of pleasure can be a form of resistance, and whether we are scrutinizing pleasures in way that is antithetical to the whole point of pleasure. I question our hunch that there are “good” and “bad” types of pleasure if we have resistance and liberation in mind. Any type of pleasure, in my mind, is liberatory. There are pleasures that disrupt oppressive systems even when they alienate us from self and others. For example, when I go out and drink too much and dance all night, my felt experience of self is very different than when I am sober and productive. In those moments, I am more apt

to challenge my internalized systems of oppression (e.g., gender norms and scripts). Or, when I engage in sex that is rough or aggressive, even though it may alienate me from my partner, I disrupt some of the “shoulds” about sex that are oppressive and marginalizing.

TS: I agree that we have to be careful about pre-judging good and bad pleasures, but I also want each of us to have access to a personally constructed ethical framework to guides us as we wander in the world of pleasure seeking. Pleasures offered on the market can be seductive, especially those that clever advertisers target me for, using the specific codes and symbols that correspond to my generational, gender, and class niches. This is a point where I start to be very concerned about the basic thrust of positive psychology. It starts out saying that psychology has tended to focus on negative feelings and pathology. It says that psychology should instead focus on positive experiences, growth, and creativity. But I want a psychology that starts from a very different place. I want it to say, as do various critical psychologies (Sloan, 2000) something like: Human society on the planet has been rapidly transformed over the last few hundred years in a manner that leaves two billion people destitute and another several billion exploited in the drudgeries of industrial work and consumerism. Psychology must join with the movements that are challenging neo-colonial capitalist globalization as well as the pre-existing patriarchy and racism. It could contribute insights about how to disrupt ideological constraints on people’s sense of life possibilities and also about how to overcome the difficulties of group process that interfere with solidarity, dialogue, collaboration, empathy, and so on. The positive emotions thus have a role, but they are mostly the byproduct of an engaged and committed life, not states to be nurtured directly in a sort of nirvana seeking.

MG: When we try to impose ethics, we build oppressive systems. What is ethical to some will be oppressive to others. Hence, defining what constitutes a liberatory and ethical type of pleasure can be a form of collusion with oppressive systems. I agree with you that commodified pleasures are vehicles of domination and that they can be destructive of creativity, solidarity, and power to resist. However, the goal of pleasure seeking, no matter what type, is to allow us the room to figure this out for ourselves rather than to be told what and how it is. Engaging *only* in commodified pleasures will probably never lead us to liberation, but if we can raise awareness through the valuing of pleasure in general, we will have the opportunity to reflect on our involvement with market-oriented pleasures. The only thing we can do that is not oppressive is to have dialogue that is not based on ethics. Can you explain further why you believe positive emotions cannot be our primary focus? I’ve never understood why people argue that happiness or other positive emotions should not be sought directly and are merely the byproduct of healthy behavior. In some way it colludes with the dominant belief that behavior and intellect are more important than emotions.

TS: I agree with Habermas (1987) and other critical social theorists that a big chunk of our problems with living in modernity stem from taking an objectifying or instrumental stance toward our psyches. We are induced by behaviorists or pharmacology to take up an external stance from which we can then “operate” on ourselves in order to reinforce compliance with an exercise regime or to inhibit serotonin re-uptake, for example. I’ll admit that these procedures may actually work for some people, but the instrumental stance is fundamentally alienating, and it reinforces the colonization of our psyches by the interests of the market and the state.

MG: I understand that focusing on how to manage positive emotions or any other emotion may be a way to colonize our psyches. But isn’t reflection on self with regard to how we think, feel, and behave always going to involve some colonization, an imposition of a certain discourse? Even adopting Marcuse’s thoughts might be a colonizing act. Although interesting and important, I fear that diving into the complexity of these thoughts might take us away from pleasure.

TS: Could we go back a bit? I want to ask you to clarify that statement, “Anytime we try to impose ethics, we build oppressive systems”? Do you mean that if I say something like, “We

should all strive to act wisely on the basis of deep compassion for our fellow human beings and for all life on earth,” I am actually fueling oppressive systems? I know that postmodern folks question the impulse to make universalizing declarations about what is right and wrong, and I want to avoid that too, but I do want to be able to reflect with others about which directions we might collectively pursue in order to reduce unnecessary and systematic suffering.

MG: Why do we need a list of things to do or rules to abide by? Maybe it is more effective to simply encourage people to choose what they want to do based on what they know and feel. I understand that it is good to have a common cause in order to create solidarity to change a system. In that spirit, may I suggest we simply say that it is important to engage in pleasures that help us become more connected to self and others because engaging in pleasure disrupts several dominant ethics regarding lifestyle and work that are oppressive and because engaging in pleasure gives us the creative space to become aware of oppressive systems?

TS: You may have hit on the hidden radical core of positive psychology there. But it took us a long time to get there! Let me try to restate what I think we are glimpsing: The cultivation of positive states – pleasure, enjoyment, and well being in general – provides a stronger foundation both for fulfillment in individual life and for a community’s capacities for mutual empathy, concern, and compassion. The latter are all essential to the ability to work through the complicated conflicts commonly associated with politics and struggles for social justice (Earnest & Sloan, 2014). So, a critical positive psychology would advocate for the enjoyment of pleasures both for their own sake and for the collective good, rather than starting from a skeptical position about pleasure and worrying so much about their commodification and perhaps alienating effects.

MG: I would make a stronger statement and say that a critical positive psychology would advocate for the enjoyment of pleasures for the collective good because it creates the space and energy needed for people to engage in ways that are disruptive to oppressive systems. By the way, somehow we haven’t mentioned how sexuality can be part of a liberatory praxis. What do you think?

TS: It is amazing that positive psychology advocates have not already delved deeply into the role of sexuality in well being. Perhaps this is due in part to collusion with bourgeois propriety. But sex is indeed a zone of life where liberation can happen and needs to happen, especially because it is where a massive amount of oppression, exploitation, and suffering occurs. This is one reason why leftist movements have historically opposed patriarchy and the treatment of women as property (even if they have often also struggled with patriarchy and sexism within their organizations – cf. Seidler, 2012; Walia, 2016). Sex can help people recognize and enjoy their embodiment, manifest creativity, agency, and voice, explore how their desire plays out in relation to self and others, and achieve mutual recognition (Benjamin, 1988). Unfortunately, the same pressures of commodification, objectification, and economic exploitation that shape the experience of other pleasures also mediate sexuality. The forces flowing from religion, patriarchy, monogamy, heteronormativity, and ageism play out within sexual life, reinforcing out-of-body practices that focus on sexual performance, limited concepts of eroticism, and superficial appearances. On the bright side, contemporary gay, queer, transgender, sex-positive, and polyamory movements and subcultures are opening up very important forms of resistance against those constraining forces. In general, these movements serve a liberatory function by challenging the imposition of normative scripts (heterosexist, ageist, genital-focused intimacy, etc.) on erotic pleasure and inviting individuals to explore the contours of their own pleasure without guilt or stigma.

MG: Sex is another area in which experts have to be very careful not to prescribe what constitutes healthy pleasure. This is a very important point, because in addition to fostering the enjoyment of embodiment and creative play, sex can be paradoxically liberatory even when people enact scenarios of their own oppression. For example, I have often seen in my practice as

a sex therapist that some sexual abuse survivors fantasize or act out sexual scenarios that involve elements of their abuse. Choosing to engage in sex that involves bondage, kink, or S&M, for example, can be healing and liberating because survivors are able to experience the traumatic scenario in a way that demonstrates their control, power, and agency in the present. I think of this as the dark side of sex, in which people transgress boundaries and work through experiences of oppression in the past. Such explorations can, of course, be very difficult and complex, but the liberation of the psyche to enjoy sexual pleasure can play a very important role in overcoming dissociation and developing self-awareness and agency, while opening up the body's capacities for enjoying other pleasures as well.

TS: Such examples remind us that experiences of pleasure, especially in the erotic sphere of life, can have powerful meanings in the context of one's life history (Sloan, 1996b), which again means that we cannot prejudge them. Our ethical task is to do the work of understanding.

So, I am wondering if we can conclude that seeking and experiencing non-commodified pleasure and sexuality is itself a form of resistance against consumer capitalism? And beyond that, such experiences may fuel the imagination of less oppressive social relations and energize action to transform systems of domination? And that therefore, it is critical that all humans have ample leisure time and resources for exploring the realms of pleasure in all spheres of life – arts, crafts, foods, sexuality, dance, nature, cultures, and love? And that eventually, work may be reduced through automation and even transformed – as it already is for a fortunate small minority of humans – into a source of pleasure itself?

MG: That sounds good. I would simply add that that it is not merely through experiencing pleasure itself that we are liberating ourselves but through actively choosing pleasure over drudgery, alienation from our bodies, and mindless consumption. It is our positive relationship to pleasure that will energize liberatory practice.

* * *

We hope to have established several points here in the course of our dialogue.

- Experiences of pleasure can play a central role in the array of liberatory practices in various ways. They can create space for awareness of neglected feelings of suffering, as well as opportunities to reflect on what can be done to address oppression and alienation. They can prefigure forms of living that are not dominated by alienated and exhausting work.
- Questions about what pleasures qualify as liberatory cannot be answered *a priori*. This is due in part to the commodification of pleasures and to Marcuse's repressive desublimation, a process that buys loyalty to the oppressive social order by gratifying sexual and aggressive drives. Given these conditions that mediate enjoyment, the complexities of pleasure seeking are best teased out through critical self-reflection and dialogue with others.
- A critical positive psychology of pleasure would encourage both a recognition of oppression and related suffering, and bold individual and collective pursuits of enjoyment in many forms. Some of these pursuits have the potential to energize social movements toward liberation.
- Critical positive psychology will benefit from further exploration of the liberating powers of sexual pleasure. Because our sexualities are especially burdened by the effects of capitalist patriarchy and related objectification and commodification, this domain of pleasure is particularly complex. Nevertheless, sex can be a pathway to deeper, more intimate connections with ourselves and with others in a manner that prefigures the egalitarian and respectful social relations we would expect in a society less structured by domination.

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