

Leisure participation, substance abuse disorders, and recovery

By: [Justin Harmon](#)

Harmon, J. (2017). Leisure participation, substance abuse disorders, and recovery. *Annals of Leisure Research*. doi: 10.1080/11745398.2017.1326157

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Annals of Leisure Research on 10 May 2017, available online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/11745398.2017.1326157>

Abstract:

The purpose of this paper was to explore the lived experiences of people with substance abuse disorders over the course of their lengthy participation in a music scene. When the use of drugs and alcohol either begins or is enabled in a leisure context and progresses to a state of dependency, the leisure activity often becomes secondary to the use of those substances. As will be displayed, the participants of this study maintained a high level of participation during their period of indulgence and then sustained that high level of participation after overcoming their addiction. This paper challenges a commonly held assertion that the type of leisure people with substance abuse disorders engage in is different from those of people without drug or alcohol dependencies.

Keywords: Leisure | substance abuse disorders | recovery | sobriety | music

Article:

On December 31, 2013, the rock band The Gypsy Handshake² were playing the fourth night of their annual New Year's Eve run in a large Western city in the United States. As is customary for many people celebrating the turn of the New Year, not to mention doing so with a rock band, an air of hedonism encapsulated the festivities. After three shows had been played building up to the grand finale, many fans in attendance had indulged and celebrated over the course of the extended concert series, but for the most part had done so responsibly. There were others, however, who had let their proclivity for mind alteration overcome their better senses. One fan, Janet,³ had become so intoxicated from a mixture of alcohol and drugs that she was catatonic and slumped over in a chair in the corner of the venue. The bouncers attempted to throw her out – they did not want anything to do with a potential overdose scenario in their club – but fortunately Janet's friends came to the rescue and were able to get her out and home safely. The following day there was much abuzz about a general concern for Janet's state of affairs. She was always known to push the boundaries of consumption at the band's concerts, but this time she went a little too far. Many people were genuinely, and rightfully, concerned. (From the author's journal)

Introduction

In 1977, Ian Dury wrote a song called Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll, but to be fair, the pairing of rock & roll and drugs (including alcohol) long preceded its release. It is almost ubiquitous that the use of alcohol and drugs occurs in one's leisure (Simpura 1985), which can include the consumption of music and participation in music scenes or subcultures. Carruthers (1993) said that individuals expect alcohol and drugs to add to their experience in three ways: to help one disengage from responsibilities; to increase one's level of self-confidence; and to increase the level of enjoyment of the immediate experience. In previous research it has been documented that many preferred leisure activities, such as the use of drugs, are illegal (Rojek 1989). In fact, this type of leisure has its own categorization, 'purple' leisure, because of its lack of acceptability in societal practice (Curtis 1988). Others, though, have questioned the norms associated with drug use and suggested that consumption should fall under the category of 'leisure's other side' so as to not make sweeping condemnations on others' morals or sense of right and wrong (Rojek 1999).

Whether or not the consumption of drugs and alcohol is acceptable, however, was not of central concern to this study. The purpose of this paper is to present the lived experiences of music fans who were trying to sustain sobriety or working towards becoming sober while continuing their participation in a music scene where alcohol and drug use was common. When the use of drugs and alcohol begins in a leisure context and progresses to a state of dependence, it has been said that leisure often becomes secondary to the use of alcohol or drugs (Faulkner 1991). McCormick and Dattilo (1995) stated that the types of leisure people with substance abuse problems engage in are different from those of people without substance abuse problems, thus suggesting that continuity in preferred leisure activities cannot be maintained after achieving sobriety. What this study sought to surmise was: How is participation in a music scene for a person with a substance abuse disorder affected as they work to maintain or achieve sobriety?

Review of literature

Wesley was a jovial fellow, very friendly and very generous. I4 didn't know him well, but he was always quick to buy me a beer and share a story. He was from rural Mississippi and his accent was as thick as swamp water. By the time he was 4–5 drinks in, you could barely decipher what he was talking about. By 12–15 drinks he was often leaving the show. This was usually a few songs into a three-hour performance. The last time we were at a concert together was this past New Year's Eve (2015–2016) at the annual New Year's run on the West Coast of the United States. That's a long way to fly just to get drunk and pass out. Wesley loved to start drinking early in the day. He loved to complement his drinking with cocaine. This is a dangerous combination, mixing uppers and downers. But Wesley didn't care. He was in it for a good time, even if it ended up being on his own because nobody could understand what he was talking about. Wesley was known for something he said on a fan message board one time that became a sort of mantra for him: 'I've been to the edge ... There ain't much to it!' Wesley loved pushing it to the limit. (From the author's journal)

In the earliest work on leisure and substance abuse, it was suggested that those with substance abuse disorders preferred activities that did not require much commitment (Sessoms and Oakley 1969), and that once the substance abuse problem hit its peak, participation in leisure declined (Young and Kronus 1977). Other studies have linked participation in certain leisure

activities to a higher chance of relapse for those working on maintaining sobriety (Tuchfeld, Lipton, and Lile 1983). Cook (1985) concurred, suggesting that leisure activities must be chosen carefully in order to foster safe environments for sober individuals. And while in many cases it may be true that a person with a substance abuse disorder needs to break ties with a certain activity or group of friends in order to have the best chance of recovery, this is oftentimes easier said than done. When those with substance abuse disorders are passionately involved in a leisure activity, as much as their substance abuse may be negatively affecting their lives, there can still be elements of participation that are positive and beneficial to the life of a person with an addiction (Harmon and Kyle 2016).

McCormick and Dattilo (1995) stated that ‘leisure and sobriety exhibit distinct similarities both as conditions of freedom from compelled activities and as freedom to engage in meaningful action’ (27). For the person with a substance abuse disorder, then, the choice to pursue a path of sobriety comes at the expense of sacrificing a component of their identity (Hill and Leeming 2014). To have to sacrifice a second significant component of one’s identity in the form of the preferred leisure activity could then be detrimental to long-term recovery (McCormick and Dattilo 1992).

One area that has been examined in terms of how people find and maintain sobriety is the beneficial role of friends, family, and peer support (Epstein, Fischer-Elber, and Al-Otaiba 2007; Fals-Stewart, Lam, and Kelley 2009; Henderson and Gardner 1996; Rowan and Butler 2014). Epstein, Fischer-Elber, and Al-Otaiba (2007) found that formal and informal peer support groups provide needed social interactions that can reduce feelings of loneliness and can serve as sounding boards for those with substance abuse disorders to feel as if they are not in it alone. Fals-Stewart, Lam, and Kelley (2009) examined the importance of family support in maintaining abstinence.⁵ Emphasizing the family disease approach, these authors stated that alcoholism and drug abuse is a disease of the entire family unit, not just the individual, and therefore requires buy-in from the entire social/familial network. Further, Rowan and Butler (2014) build on the importance of social networks in achieving and maintaining sobriety. They reinforced the idea that formal groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, which allow the substance abuser to hear others’ stories to craft their own meanings about their addiction and behaviours, and informal support from family and friends, which offer the very important aspects of continuity in life and unconditional love, are essential to living a more rewarding and substance-free life.

Henderson and Gardner (1996) intimated that when the lines of friendship, leisure, and substance abuse are blurred, it becomes tough to distinguish where the meaning and value is in life for those suffering from addictions. In some instances it may mean cutting ties with those who also indulge in substance use and finding, or perhaps returning to, more stable relationships that are not founded or focused on drinking or drug taking. Henderson and Gardner outlined four steps along the alcoholics’ leisure timeline: leisure as a precondition where substance abuse is secondary and done in conjunction with the primary activity (poker, golf, dancing, etc.); false leisure where the substance abuse takes the lead in perceived importance and the original activity (poker, golf, dancing, etc.) is demoted; the transitional leisure stage is when the user is confronted with the detrimental effects of their substance abuse on their lives and those of others; and finally, reclaimed leisure where the person with a substance abuse disorder takes back control of their life, and thus their leisure, from their substance abuse disorder. The application of this life course evolution of a person with a substance abuse disorder in leisure will be used to structure the results and discussion section.

Methods

The band and the music scene

The Gypsy Handshake have been performing for over 20 years and have acquired a cult following amongst their fans. They tour heavily, often playing up to 150 concerts a year, primarily in the United States, but also all over the world. While attendance at their concerts is not significant in number of fans present, they have a core group of several hundred fans who participate at high levels, anywhere from 10 to 30 concerts a year on average. This attendance is not limited to their hometowns or regions, either. Rather, it is quite common for these fans to travel all over the United States or the world to see the band perform. It was commonly stated that there are about 100–150 core fans in the scene that can be counted on to be at the larger events that are typically annual ‘festivals’ centred solely on the band and take place in one location over three or four consecutive days.

The topic explored in this study was derivative of a larger study that examined the music scene and fans of The Gypsy Handshake in a larger snapshot, taking place over two years and focusing on issues related to secular spirituality, community formation and maintenance, positive psychology, and identity development. The community for this study was drawn from the larger project that included 35 participants. As I continued to conduct interviews, I noticed that there was a high number of fans who were either sober or had discussed wanting to become sober, making this topic worthy of exploration.

Of particular interest to this study is the lead singer, Carlos Danger.⁶ While he has been sober since Halloween of 2008, he was a heavy substance abuser for decades. Much of his music catalog refers to his past transgressions through indulgence and the collateral damage it caused. Even though he is now sober, he still writes and sings about his past life as a substance abuser, making it easy for fans with sobriety issues to relate to the music.

Study participants

There were three participants (Matt, Tom, and Dani) who were newly sober at the time of interview (less than three months prior to the first interview), four others (Tex, Barry, Janet, and Keith) who became sober after the initial interview, and one participant (Wesley) who never achieved sobriety, but wanted to. The participants who had become sober prior to the initial interview talked extensively about their relationship with the music both while abusing substances and sober, fellow fans who were helpful in their attempt to become sober (and were commonly referred to as family), and their participation in the music scene in general while they were using drugs/alcohol as well as after becoming sober.

Additional follow-up interviews were conducted with Matt, Tom, and Dani roughly one to two years after the initial interview. Tex, Barry, Janet, and Keith, who had all attained sobriety after their initial interviews, were interviewed between their six-month and one-year anniversary of sobriety. Data were generated from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the eight participants between December 2012 and July 2015. Participants were chosen through convenience sampling (Patton 1990) based on the participants’ attempts to become sober and maintain their sobriety. At the time of interview for this sub-sample the youngest participant was 29 and the oldest was 51, with a mean age of 42 years old. All participants except for one had

been attending the band's performances for a decade or more. All fans attended more than 10 shows a year.

As the music scene of The Gypsy Handshake is very small (200 people in attendance would be a large turnout), fans' substance abuse issues were well known amongst those who were frequent and intimate participants. Because of this, and the level of comfort that was established between one another over long tenures of participation, fans without substance abuse disorders frequently monitored, supported, and often attempted to help those with addictions to become sober. This took effect through not drinking or taking drugs in their company, attending Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous meetings with them, and speaking to them about the effects of their behaviour on not only themselves, but others in the music scene, when they were sober.

In-depth interviews

A list of open-ended questions was created to serve as a template for interviews. The topic of sobriety was not a predetermined area of emphasis for the initial interviews of participants, but all participants who had either attained sobriety, or had hopes of doing so, brought it up of their own volition. The purpose of the follow-up interviews for the four participants who attained sobriety after the initial interview was to discuss their involvement and attraction to the music scene from a sober perspective. The purpose of the follow-up interviews for the participants who were newly sober at the time of initial interview was to develop an understanding of the evolution of their involvement in the music scene as sober fans.

Participants were encouraged to elaborate on their personal meanings and shared experiences of involvement in the music scene as sober fans, as well as how their perspectives in regards to their involvement had changed. What was of particular interest was how/if the music was helpful in their recovery, what aspects of their involvement were improved after attaining sobriety, and how their interactions with other fans changed now that they were sober. All interviews were recorded with permission of the participants and notes were taken during the interview to document emotions or affect unable to be captured by audio. Interviews lasted for at least one hour. Some of the questions for the follow-up interviews included: Did you use the music of The Gypsy Handshake to help you become sober? Have any of your friends within the music scene been helpful during your transition to sobriety? And, how has your level of involvement changed since becoming sober?

Data analysis and interpretation

This study relied on a phenomenological approach to inquiry that takes as its foundation the idea that participants' understandings are derived from their immediate experiences and used as a means of presenting themselves to others (Pate 2013). As all participants were dealing with evolving identities based on the daily need to confront their sobriety or substance abuse disorder, what is presented here is a 'snapshot' in time of the growth of a collection of individuals as they worked on issues regarding their personal well-being and development. Sobriety is not a static condition or conclusive state due to the high prevalence of relapse (Miller, Walters, and Bennett 2001). Therefore, phenomenological inquiry is especially suited to developing an understanding of the lived experiences of people with substance abuse disorders due to the researcher's immersion in their lives through shared participation, observations, and repeated interviews

while participants navigated their lives one day at a time (Rowan and Butler 2014). Due to the tentative and incomplete knowledge generated by this study because of the simple fact that sobriety is a day-by-day process, aspects of post-intentional phenomenology were adopted as well (Kumm and Johnson 2014; Vagle 2010). This took the form of the tentative representations of diverse perspectives on how sobriety is embodied for each individual (Pate 2013). For these participants, their ‘meanings’ existed in the liminal spaces between their daily existence as sober or sober-aspiring individuals in every facet of their lives, including their participation in the music scene (Vagle 2010).

The analysis process involved the use of primary and secondary coding (Tracy 2013) as well as several thorough readings of interview transcripts. Primary codes were assigned, when possible, using *in vivo* terminology (the actual words of the participants). Data were managed by establishing a hierarchy of relevance to the study’s purpose and research question (Saldaña 2012). Once categories were created themes emerged that were evaluated against Henderson and Gardner’s (1996) four steps in the alcoholics’ life course development. These four themes, leisure as a precondition, false leisure, transitional leisure, and reclaimed leisure, served as the foundation for analysis and interpretation about how substance abusers’ involvement in the music scene changed after finding sobriety.

Results and discussion

When I sat down with Janet for our follow-up interview nearly a year after our initial meeting, she handed me her phone and opened her Facebook account so I could read her post for the day. It read: ‘I’m so happy and so lucky to be alive today. I’m celebrating my six-month anniversary of sobriety and I’m going to share that with The Gypsy Handshake and my crew tonight. Their music has always been there for me, even when I was at my worst and struggling with my demons. Getting to experience this band and my friends as a newly sober person makes me feel so alive and connected to the whole universe. The music played no small part in getting me here.’ (From the author’s journal)

Leisure as a precondition

While speaking with Matt (an avid music fan in general) about his first time seeing the band, he said he had no expectations. He had tagged along on a cross-country trip with friends who were already fans of The Gypsy Handshake solely to see a new city. Upon arrival at his first concert, he was immediately, and positively, overwhelmed by the caliber of the music. Matt said that once the band started playing his ‘jaw dropped to the floor’ out of sheer excitement and inspiration from the music. After the four-night weekend had come to a close he asked his friends with whom he had travelled how long it would be until he got to see the band again. From that initial point of never having heard the band to becoming fully immersed in the music scene did not take very long for Matt; he saw 25 shows in four states during his first year as a fan. For Matt, the music scene of The Gypsy Handshake had become of utmost importance to his life and something that he could not imagine not being a part of. It also was an apt forum for him to indulge his love of drinking.

This reality closely aligns with Henderson and Gardner’s (1996) first step in the substance abuser’s life course: leisure as a precondition. The authors indicate that drinking (and drug use) is often secondary to the primary leisure activity, but that for some, can lead to abusive

behaviours. For the sub-sample of fans in this study who had developed dependency on alcohol and/or drugs, their initial involvement in the music scene came to being first and foremost from a sincere love of the music and close friendships made through mutual participation. Their participation as a travelling fan of a rock band also, however, gave them license to indulge their addictive behaviours. As indicated by Henderson and Gardner, for some of these participants, drinking/drug taking ‘made the fun better’.

False leisure

For some of the fans who had developed substance abuse disorders, their persona was viewed as one of Jekyll and Hyde by their fellow fans. When those with substance dependencies were sober (typically pre-show), they were genuinely embraced as fun to be around and had many close friendships within the music scene. Once they started imbibing closer to the start of the concert, however, in some instances the perception of them changed to one of a pariah. Tex was a fun-loving, soft-hearted guy who was quick with a smile and always generous with his possessions. But as soon as Tex had his first drink, which always led to another (as well as other drugs), the other fans tended to avoid him or look at him as someone who needed serious help to rise above his disorder. While Tex was well aware of his problem, and openly talked about it with his friends when he was both sober and under the influence, it was just very difficult for him to participate in the music scene without having a drink. Tex said that he ‘didn’t want to miss out on the fun’ that everyone else was a part of which is in line with Rosenberg’s (1978) definition of an alcoholic as one who ‘can’t’ do what others ‘can’ do (33).

I conducted my first interview with Barry in June of 2013. He had fallen on hard times largely due to his disorder and was living with a friend. He slept most of the day and typically did not wake up until dark when he would start his cycle of substance abuse anew. We almost had to postpone our initial interview because of the hangover effects of the pills he had become reliant upon, but at the last minute he felt as if he were ‘up to it’. In terms of his participation in The Gypsy Handshake’s music scene, it had become what Henderson and Gardner (1996) outlined as their second step in the substance abuser’s life course: false leisure. For Barry, much like Tex, even though he had been involved in the music scene for over a decade, the music had been reduced to an acceptable forum for him to indulge openly. Instead of hiding in the basement of a friend’s house and only coming out after dark, the music scene provided a place where he felt he could use drugs in an acceptable environment (Olsen 2009).

For most of the participants of this study they saw many other fans indulge in alcohol and drugs without any significant ramifications, and this may have led those who developed dependency problems to have a false sense of invincibility. By interacting with others who could control their alcohol/drug intake, those who could not feel they were still in close company (Thorlindsson and Bernburg 2006). Evoking the liminality of Turner (1969), the music scene was a place where all fans, substance abusers or not, could escape from the mundanity of life (Crabbe 2006) through the use of drugs and alcohol. Unfortunately for some fans, this provided a false sense of acceptability that further fueled their substance abuse disorders and led to numerous problems in their lives. But luckily, for these fans, each was aware of the negative ramifications of their overindulgence and all hoped to find the strength to overcome their destructive patterns. While Henderson and Gardner (1996) found that their participants began to view leisure and substance abuse as work, the participants of this study saw the substance abuse

as work that impacted their ability to have true meaning and value through their leisure experience of attending concerts of the band.

Transitional leisure

Carlos Danger is quite open about his struggles with substance abuse. In fact, a significant portion of his songs are about living with the dark side of his substance abuse, or his many failed attempts to become abstinent. Danger did become sober on 31 October 2008, and has remained so since. He still plays the songs that are representative of his racy past, and some songs he writes these days still revisit the theme that captivated much of his life. He is, if mostly indirectly, staunchly against substance use and abuse, and that is common knowledge amongst the fanbase. Most fans that indulge make sure to do so out of the sight lines of Danger. Of those that have faced the hardships of substance abuse though, many credit Danger's triumph, and his music, with being a significant aid in their process of recovery.

When I asked Dani if she had any sort of relationship with Carlos Danger, she mentioned that they were both in recovery, and that for them to share something like that was 'huge'. I asked Dani if she perceived him any differently because he was a musician, and she responded, 'He's kind of my hero. I kind of look up to him and respect him.' When I asked what there was to respect about him, she replied that he is 'incredibly talented' and that she '[has] to look up to that. How he carries himself, how he writes his music based on his experiences and overcoming his struggles with addiction'. Dani was not the only interviewee to refer to Danger as a 'hero'. In fact, many were extremely grateful for his presence in their world, and often thanked him for the positive effect he had on their lives as a beacon of hope in attempting to become sober.

I sat down with Keith on two occasions (18 June 2013; 29 June 2014); the second installment came at his request. He called me on his one-year sober date; he had made the decision to stop using the day after our first interview. Keith had been immersed in the scene since roughly 2002, and had managed to become one of the fans that developed some sort of relationship with Danger. At the two-day festival that occurred the weekend before our first interview, he was noticeably struggling with his substance abuse disorder at the event. During our first interview he talked at some length about how much happier a person he was when he was abstinent, and almost serendipitously he had an exchange with Danger the following day where Carlos indicated that Keith needed to get his life in order. This clearly evokes Henderson and Gardner's (1996) third step of the substance abuser's life course: transitional leisure, where the user is confronted with how harmful their substance abuse disorder is to their lives. Keith took this as a call to action, thus leading up to that celebratory call one year after our first interview.

In our follow-up I asked him if any of his friends in The Gypsy Handshake's scene (which he referred to as family) were especially helpful in his attempt to become and stay abstinent. He said that, 'Everyone here really cares and tells me they're very proud of me. Carlos tends to tell me he's proud of me when he sees me.' I asked him if it was significant that Carlos would say something like that to him, to which he responded:

Yea, it is. He's one of my heroes. It's a shot in the arm. He's one of the people, besides my mother, father and son, he's one of the people that I feel like I would really let down if I started [using] again. (29 June 2014)

Much as Hill and Leeming (2014) said that feeling shameful of one's identity as a person with a substance abuse disorder is one of the hardest emotions to overcome, it was also critical for most participants to prove to others that they were worthy of respect and had taken the necessary steps to lead lives that were admirable. This closely aligns with FalsStewart, Lam, and Kelley (2009) and Rowan and Butler's (2014) emphasis of the importance of friends and family in substance abusers finding and maintaining sobriety. For Keith, he felt that he was attaining sobriety not only for himself, but also for his family and friends.

Janet (interviewed on 15 June 2013; 31 July 2014) was another one of the participants who was evocative about the role Danger played in her life. I conducted the first interview with her in Logan, Utah⁷ at her 50th birthday party that featured the band. Janet said that, 'This music is what I'm here for. The one thing in my life that's worked is going to shows and letting this [music] go in me and through me.' She said that the 'gift' of the music to the fans allowed for her to 'become a part of everyone in attendance, and feel a shared connection'. I asked her what role Danger played, to which she replied, 'Carlos' music gives me balance. To me it's love. Each song can bring me to tears, or give me the biggest smile that lasts for days.' I asked her if she felt a specific connection to him as a person, and she responded, 'I love him, what he's saying. He's speaking to me. He's my family.' Even though Janet did not have a significant friendship with Carlos, they were acquaintances. Her sense of connection to Danger through his music was so important that the band and fellow fans served as an associative family for her.

The reason behind conducting two interviews with Janet, similarly to Keith, was because she had successfully managed to become sober over the course of the year since our initial interview. We met back in Logan, though she no longer lived there, and while she was there specifically to see the band play, she was also collecting her sixmonth chip⁸ from Alcoholics Anonymous. We sat down before this ceremony to talk about her current relationship to the music. We were speaking about Danger's sobriety and I asked her if she had found the music helpful over the last several months as she attempted to live an abstinent lifestyle. Janet said, 'What he's writing about is what I'm living. Now I'm plugged in. Because he's sober, he's inspirational to me' (31 July 2014). I asked her if what she was getting from the music had changed now that her focus in life was clearer. She responded:

I feel like I've fallen into a big pool of love. That's why he's playing. Whether it's hard to hear or not, [Janet, crying] it's there for me to have. It's his passing on what he's been through. There's another side. I thought I was going to be in pain my whole life. There is good to get to. Carlos shows me through the music that he was dead and now he's alive.

For Dani, Keith, and Janet (as well as many others), Carlos Danger was in some ways a role model for overcoming substance abuse and staying sober. These fans looked to him as someone they could emulate. Even after becoming sober, Danger was able to stay true to his craft and work in a world where the temptations of his past indulgences still abound. Keith may have said it best for those fans who were attempting to live a sober life: 'Music is such a part of my life that of course it's going to be a part of my recovery. It's nice when you have your favourite musician singing about sobriety.'

While speaking with Barry after he had been sober for over a year, I asked him how his participation had changed now that he was abstinent. He had this to say:

I think for me it's been restoring relationships with people, being in a more normal state. A completely different perspective; it has anxiety to it, things are different. It's mostly reforging my connection; I mean the music connection is stronger than it's ever been. It's a lot less clouded. What I'm looking for is still the same, just without the blinders of the pills I was taking. The music connection is great, but the community is the greatest factor. For me it's really experiencing the music fully, reconnecting with friends I don't see that often and looking at people, and the music, in a new and different way.

Barry's statement speaks directly to Henderson and Gardner's (1996) final step in the substance abuser's life course: reclaimed leisure, taking back control of one's life and claiming leisure for themselves, not for the benefit of indulging in drugs and alcohol. Barry said that now he was 'going for the friends and the music' whereas before he was only 'going to rage' (party excessively). As indicated by Henderson and Gardner, being able to make plans for future leisure participation was a critical component of these participants' sobriety. Because the music had been so important to their lives, pre-, during, and post-sobriety, it was essential to maintain that connection and build on it in order to reconstitute their lives through music as a positive outlet for release, not one for destruction.

Tom was reflecting on his time in rehab and said that he invoked a mantra to get him through it: 'If Carlos can do it, I can do it.' Tom held on to this mantra to this day because Carlos Danger was that much farther along on the course of maintaining sobriety and thus he saw Carlos as a role model of sorts as alluded to earlier in this section. Tom was speaking about one of the band's songs, Nothing Here But Time, 9 and referenced the line: 'Lovers, friends, family, they're coming around again gradually. You've been blessed through it all. Some of these people are willing to risk [taking] your calls.' He said, 'I've been through that where people just don't answer, they don't call back. And now that I'm clean [sic], they do. That feels good.' He went on to say that he felt the band and its music was really what got him sober. By knowing that he can still participate in an activity that he truly loves without having to take drugs and alcohol proved to him the importance of the music in his life as well as the negative impacts of his using on that beloved activity. While some have reported that people with substance abuse disorders are more likely to have negative perceptions of leisure and view it as empty (Berg and Neulinger 1976, Sessoms and Oakley 1969), or are more likely to engage in different activities than those without substance abuse disorders due to the need to focus on their sobriety (McCormick and Dattilo 1995), participants of this study found that continuity in participation was essential to their ability to become abstinent from alcohol and drugs which was the first step on their road to sobriety. For all participants, while the music scene had allowed a space to indulge, it also served as a space to work on themselves and become healthy again (Epstein and Sardiello 1990).

Conclusion

Earlier I mentioned that there was one participant who never became sober, that was Wesley, and there was no follow-up interview with him. Unfortunately, he died in March of 2016 on his 39th birthday of a cocaine-induced heart attack. Upon hearing the news, some of his closest friends in the music scene wore shirts in honor of his absence to the

band's annual summer festival that read: 'I've been to the edge ... There ain't much to it!' Yes, Wesley made it to the edge alright. This time he got a little too close and lost his balance. Because the music scene is so small, word got around to the band about his passing and they played their song Wild, Wild West, which was a favorite of Wesley's, in his honor. (From the author's journal)

While this study was exploratory in nature and comprised a small sample size, the results indicate that Berg and Neulinger's (1976) and Sessoms and Oakley's (1969) earlier claims that substance abusers view leisure negatively and that substance abusers participate in different activities than non-users were found to be potentially erroneous statements. The participants of this study maintained a thread of continuity in participation as they evolved from their addictive lifestyles to one where they were not reliant on drugs or alcohol to enjoy their leisure participation. Following the work of Sessoms and Oakley (1969) who said those with substance abuse disorders prefer activities that do not require commitment, and Young and Kronus (1977) who said that at the peak of substance abuse leisure participation declined, McCormick and Dattilo (1995) suggested that for their participants a break from their leisure while they worked on abstinence and sobriety was imperative. For the participants of this study, however, both assumptions were found to be not true. While the frequency of participation stayed high during their period of substance abuse, it is true that the quality of participants' involvement, especially in retrospect, was deemed low. This did not, however, diminish the importance of the music and their participation in the music scene to their lives, or their desire to continue participation as sober individuals in the near future.

Additionally, Henderson and Gardner (1996) found that their participants needed a period of abstention from leisure participation while they navigated the earliest stages of their recovery. This was also found to not be the case for those involved in this study. In fact, all stated that the music was a key component of their recovery, and without it and their involvement in the music scene, many thought they might not have found the strength to kick their habits. The levels of participation never diminished for the participants of this study, even in the face of great struggle with their substance abuse disorder. Contrary to the findings of Smolensky et al. (1980), the participants of this study's preferred leisure activity, involvement in the music scene surrounding the rock band The Gypsy Handshake, was still just as valuable to their lives as they battled their disease.

While the participants eventually came to lead an anhedonic (unable to derive pleasure from life's activities without using drugs or alcohol) lifestyle (Rosenberg 1977), each desired to be able to participate in the music scene and enjoy their involvement without their dependence on drugs and alcohol and found their participation to be more enjoyable upon the attainment of sobriety. Kleiber (1985) stated that disengagement was a prerequisite for leisure. In this study, disengagement came in two forms for the participants: disengaging from the stresses of life and social mores which led to their overindulgence in substance abuse; and the eventual disengagement from their dependence on substances for the enjoyment of leisure thus leading to the ability to participate with a clear mind and appreciate their involvement without the use of external filters. Kelly (1983) said that the value of leisure is in its ability to help establish identities for the participant. As has been displayed, the participants of this study had an evolution of two aspects of their identity: one that showed their development as a fan of the band and a member of the fan community, and the other as someone who became a substance abuser

through their involvement (though not because of it) only to relinquish that identity through pursuing and achieving sobriety.

For the participants of this study, maintaining a continuous thread of leisure participation was integral to their success in recovery. While the forum of the music scene initially allowed for an acceptable place to indulge their destructive habits, their primary reason for involvement was due to a passionate connection to the music and the friends they had made through lengthy tenures as fans. Numerous factors led to their crippling dependence on drugs and alcohol, and while the end result of those substance abuse disorders negatively impacted their level of enjoyment and interaction within the music scene during their period of indulgence (and beyond), those destructive tendencies were never able to completely dethrone their involvement as integral to their livelihood, no matter how clouded that may have become during their period of excess.

Leisure associations, then, have great potential to serve as positive identity markers during the period of substance abuse and recovery (Hill and Leeming 2014). According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (2015), one in 12 adults in the United States suffers from substance dependency. Because of this, it might serve leisure providers to create opportunities for those with substance abuse disorders to engage in meaningful leisure activities to provide a healthy outlet which allows for the maintenance of a thread of continuity in their leisure careers as well as assists in the reprioritization of leisure in their lives as they work to overcome their addictions. This may have been best captured by Janet during our follow-up interview. As we were sitting back in Logan, Utah on the rear porch of a coffee shop staring at the mountains that reigned over the town, a hummingbird came up to drink from a feeder. She said:

That's joy and hope coming in right there on our moment ... Taking drugs was an escape for me. Music is what I turn to in order to come back to life. To hold on to. It allows me to hold on to life ... I've always been there to hear the music, or at least I thought I was. I was more worried about taking the next drug and maintaining the high ... [The music of The Gypsy Handshake] fills me up now. There isn't a depletion like before. It was never bad, it was just that I felt bad because of the drugs ... Now [the music] fill me up, I'm giddy. I've slowed down enough to pay attention. Now the music fills my soul. And I like that.

Recommendations

While it is not easy for recreation professionals to create the types of emotional bonds that have been cultivated in this fan community, it is possible and necessary to care about the people that use our services and that rely on what we provide for their livelihood, even when life is not always positive. This, of course, is not limited to those with substance abuse disorders; people with serious and terminal illnesses, those who are unemployed or underemployed, those without friends and family to support them, those with physical or cognitive impairments, and those who are working through other transitions in their lives all need something meaningful to latch on to. If we can agree that leisure and recreational activities possess the potential to affect sense of self and meaning making, to help us form bonds with others and come together through shared humanity, and to realize the levelling effect that leisure can have for seemingly disparate or

competing networks, we can further develop our understanding of what it means to grow through leisure.

For leisure providers to realistically do this, it requires creating and sustaining leisure environments that are conducive to not only personal growth and development, but to supporting the development of interpersonal relationships and community, especially for those with substance abuse disorders. Further, it requires the embracing of holistic and inclusive attitudes and practices that seek to limit the potential of stigma associated with substance abuse. As Epstein and Sardiello (1990) chronicled for the sober and passionate fans of the Grateful Dead, the Wharf Rats, many traditional support systems like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous do not align well with the preferred leisure of its recovering members simply for the fact that these organization's ideological mandate is to cut ties with the people and activities where its adherents indulged in substance abuse. As McCormick and Dattilo (1992) outlined, further severing of important aspects of the individual aspiring to become sober could be detrimental to their recovery. Therefore, it could be through the creation of programmes by leisure service providers that are largely secular and void of any attempt to indoctrinate or prescribe specific regiments for those on the path to recovery that there is potential for the leisure industry to have great impact. This, of course, should not be the endgame; full inclusion for those seeking sobriety should be the true goal of all leisure agencies.

While, the music scene did not save Wesley, it was integral to Keith, Janet, and others' health, sobriety, and happiness. Without a communal support network comprised of a leisure activity they truly loved being involved with, there may have been no outlet for them to find sobriety. They, too, might have succumbed to the same fate as Wesley. There is no doubt that at one point they were all on the same path. One in every 12 people (National Center 2015) that walks through the doors of our public recreation centres, steps on our hiking trails, plays in our sports leagues, or comes to our concerts may have a serious substance abuse disorder. In addition to their personal resources, will we take the necessary steps to provide assistance to them so that they might attain sobriety one day? Or will we as a society continue to view those with substance abuser disorders as irresponsible people who cannot control their indulgences? Our charge and our mission as leisure and recreation professionals is to help people grow, to become better individuals and members of our communities. This extends to all people, especially those that need our help. Our programmes and services have the potential to be the guardrails that keep people from going over the edge. We owe it to our communities to invest in them, at every step of the way, through the good and bad. You never know when you will be the one that affects someone's life for the better through the leisure and recreation services you provide. The participants of this study are evidence to the impact that leisure can have on making people's lives better.

Notes

1. Substance abuse disorder is the preferred terminology in place of 'addiction' (Michael Botticelli, Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy).
2. A pseudonym.
3. All names in this manuscript are pseudonyms.
4. The pronouns 'I' and 'me' refer to the author throughout.
5. Abstinent is the preferred terminology in place of 'clean' (as opposed to a substance user as 'dirty').

6. A pseudonym.
7. A pseudonymous location.
8. ‘Chips’ (sobriety coins) are awarded to adherents as milestones of sobriety from day one, onwards.
9. A pseudonymous song title.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Justin Harmon is interested in health and aging broadly, and specifically in the contexts of the use of leisure for coping and identity maintenance for people with serious and terminal diseases, as well as the role of music in life course development.

References

- Berg, C., and J. Neulinger 1976. “Alcoholics’ Perception of Leisure.” *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 37 (11): 1625–1632.
- Carruthers, C. P. 1993. “Leisure and Alcohol Expectancies.” *Journal of Leisure Research* 25 (3): 229–244.
- Cook, R. 1985. “The Alternatives Approach Revisited: A Biopsychological Model and Guidelines for Application.” *The International Journal of the Addictions* 20: 1399–1419.
- Crabbe, T. 2006. “Bingers: The Performativity and Consumption of ‘Deviant’ Leisure.” *Leisure/Loisir* 30 (1): 149–169.
- Curtis, J. E. 1988. “Purple Recreation.” *SPRE Annual on Education* 3: 73–77.
- Epstein, E. E., K. Fischer-Elber, and Z. Al-Otaiba. 2007. “Women, Aging, and Alcohol Use Disorders.” *Journal of Women and Aging* 19 (1–2): 31–48.
- Epstein, J. S., and R. Sardiello. 1990. “The Wharf Rats: A Preliminary Examination of Alcoholics Anonymous and the Grateful Dead Head Phenomena.” *Deviant Behavior* 11: 245–257.
- Fals-Stewart, W., W. Lam, and M. L. Kelley. 2009. “Learning Sobriety Together: Behavioural Couples Therapy for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse.” *Journal of Family Therapy* 31: 115–125.
- Faulkner, R. W. 1991. Therapeutic Recreation Protocol for Treatment of Substance Addictions. State College, PA: Venture.
- Harmon, J., and G. T. Kyle. 2016. “Positive Emotions and Passionate Leisure Involvement.” *Annals of Leisure Research* 19 (1): 62–79.
- Henderson, K. A., and J. M. Gardner. 1996. “Claiming Control: The Recovering Alcoholic Woman and Leisure.” *Leisure Sciences* 18: 241–258.
- Hill, J. V., and D. Leeming. 2014. “Reconstructing ‘the alcoholic’: Recovering from Alcohol Addiction and the Stigma this Entails.” *International Journal of Mental Health Addiction* 12: 759–771.
- Kelly, J. R. 1983. *Leisure Identities and Interactions*. London: Allen & Unwin.

- Kleiber, D. 1985. "Motivational Reorientation in Adulthood and the Resource of Leisure." In *Motivation in Adulthood*, edited by D.A. Kleiber and M. Maehr, 228–235. Greenwich, CT: JAI.
- Kumm, B. E., and C. W. Johnson. 2014. "Becoming-shaman, Becoming-Sherpa, Becoming-Healer: Leisure as Becoming." *Leisure/Loisir* 38 (2): 103–118.
- McCormick, B., and J. Dattilo. 1992. "The Experience of Free-time and Social Interaction among AA Members: Implications for Leisure Education." *Annual in Therapeutic Recreation* 3: 33–43.
- McCormick, B., and J. Dattilo. 1995. "'Sobriety's Kind of Like Freedom:' Integrating Ideals of Leisure into the Ideology of Alcoholics Anonymous." *Therapeutic Recreation Journal* 29 (1): 18–29.
- Miller, W. R., S. T. Walters, and M. E. Bennett. 2001. "How Effective is Alcoholism Treatment in the United States?" *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 62: 211–220.
- National Center on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence. 2015. "Facts about Alcohol." <https://www.ncadd.org/about-addiction>.
- Olsen, A. 2009. "Consuming e: Ecstasy use and Contemporary Social Life." *Contemporary Drug Problems* 36: 175–191.
- Pate, J. A. 2013. "Sympathetic Chords: Reverberating Connection Through the Lived Leisure Experiences of Music Listening." *International Journal of Community Music* 6 (2): 189–203.
- Patton, M. 1990. *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Rojek, C. 1989. "Leisure and Recreation Theory." In *Understanding Leisure and Recreation: Mapping the Past, Charting the Future*, edited by E. L. Jackson and T. L. Burton, 69–88. State College, PA: Venture.
- Rojek, C. 1999. "Deviant Leisure: The Dark Side of Free-time Activity." In *Leisure Studies: Prospects for the Twenty-first Century*, edited by E. L. Jackson and T. L. Burton, 81–94. State College, PA: Venture.
- Rosenberg, D. 1977. "Importance of Recreation Therapy in Alcoholism Counseling." *Alcohol Health and Research World* 2 (2): 35–36.
- Rosenberg, D. N. 1978. "Recreational Therapy: Nondrinking Versus Sobriety." *Alcohol Health and Research World* 3 (1): 32–35.
- Rowan, N. L., and S. S. Butler. 2014. "Resilience in Attaining and Sustaining Sobriety among Older Lesbians with Alcoholism." *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* 57: 176–197.
- Saldaña, J. 2012. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sessoms, H. D., and S. R. Oakley. 1969. "Recreation, Leisure, and the Alcoholic." *Journal of Leisure Research* 1: 21–33.
- Simpura, J. 1985. "Drinking: An Ignored Leisure Activity." *Journal of Leisure Research* 17 (3): 200–211.
- Smolensky, W. R., D. W. Martin, R. J. Lorimor, and R. N. Forthofer. 1980. "Leisure Behavior and Attitudes Toward Leisure of Alcoholics and Nonalcoholics." *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 41: 293–299.
- Thorlindsson, T., and J. G. Bernburg. 2006. "Peer Groups and Substance Abuse: Examining the Direct and Interactive Effect of Leisure Activity." *Adolescence* 41 (162): 321–339.
- Tracy, S. 2013. *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Tuchfeld, B. S., W. L. Lipton, and E. A. Lile. 1983. "Social Involvement and the Resolution of Alcoholism." *Journal of Drug Issues* 13 (3): 323–332.
- Turner, V. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Vagle, M. D. 2010. "Re-framing Schön's Call for a Phenomenology of Practice: A Post-intentional Approach." *Reflective Practice* 11 (3): 393–407.
- Young, R., and S. Kronus. 1977. "Drinking Behavior and its Relationship to Outdoor Recreation Participation." *Journal of Leisure Research* 9: 165–173.