

[On Escapism](#)

Tuesday, October 21, 2008 at 10:15pm

I've been thinking about this for a couple of years now. Recent conversations have prompted me to finally pronounce myself on something I'm seeing more and more of: People escaping from their daily lives, good or bad.

What is escapism?

Wikipedia [defines](#) escapism as mental diversion by means of entertainment or recreation, as an "escape" from the perceived unpleasant aspects of daily stress. It can also be used as a term to define the actions people take to try to help relieve feelings of depression or general sadness. Much can be said about the first forms of escapism that come to mind, such as drugs or alcohol. I think there are other, less vulgar forms to be considered as well, such as media (including, but not limited to video games, movies, internet), eating and procrastination.

What are we escaping from, and why?

As I've [mentioned](#) before, The World Health Organization [predicts](#) that depression will be the second leading cause of death by 2020. I think we are slowly feeling more stress, fatigue, restlessness and perhaps confusion in our lives; I think it's mostly due to what we would otherwise call a "luxury", the Information Age. We are so inundated with information nowadays, it's incredibly difficult to put things into perspective. As the Oxford University Press [describes](#):

Statistics show that we are interrupted every three minutes during the course of the work day. Multitasking between email, cell-phone, text messages, and four or five websites while listening to an iPod forces the brain to process more and more information at greater and greater speeds. And yet the human brain has hardly changed in the last 40,000 years.

Don't forget to include advertisements, and "big news" like the financial crisis, wars, natural disasters or what have you...*If you don't use Crest to get white teeth, you won't get laid. Get a job. Pay the bills. Tax increases, inflation rises, minimum wage remains at \$7.25. My job sucks. Listen to this new single. It's Friday, time to go clubbing! How do I look? What do they think of me? You need this BlackBerry. I need good marks to get anywhere in life...*

Most university students are professional procrastinators. I've seen more video games and poker matches on campus than anywhere else. I'd venture as far as to connect voter apathy with laziness, the automatic escape by non-participation. You see a lot of "politics are too damned complicated, it's all junk", so we take the easy route and ignore it. What we should be doing is sucking it up and actively participating. The same goes for internet abuse at the office, companies pay thousands of dollars to prevent it. The Onion even made fun of this in their latest movie, citing the headline "The Internet went down for

three hours today, plunging the nation into productivity".

No wonder we seek an escape. It really does get rid of my due-next-day assignments. It really does clear my head. I can definitely understand why someone would even become addicted to said escapism.

Priorities

The line between leisure and abuse/addiction is difficult to draw. It's different for everyone. Many successful people I know have done hard drugs, such as cocaine, at some point. Does it mean they're dependant? Not really. Bad people? I hardly think so. However, when it starts to affect others or ourselves (can't do our job properly, for example), I think it's time to examine our habits.

I think it raises deeper questions such as: What do we prioritize? Short term peace at the cost of a possibly more difficult time afterward? Why are some more or less prone to being unhappy? This leads to my strong belief that **happiness is a choice**. I know I can be just as happy with or without any of my writing/video gaming/having a drink. Why? Is it learned discipline? An ulterior motive, such as being better prepared for the next day's work? Can some distractions actually help give people a bit of a break so they can do their work better afterward?

One individual with whom I am close suffers from alcoholism, admittedly because "it's an escape" (from a boring life). I think that this factor would trump any hereditary addiction traits. I have now realized that being unhappy with our current "real" life would be the main cause for most abuses, of all degrees. This will be a big help for me, should one try to help others recover from a need to escape. Some find purpose and appreciation of life through religion, and that's cool - but obviously not my style. I know that I appreciate life more than ever and think I have enough perspective to find and pursue goals.

I hope this one sparks at least a bit of discussion, because it's quite open-ended. I have more thoughts on this topic, but don't feel like writing a 3-part blog (sorry Jon, hehe).

I leave you with a live rendition of my alltime favorite song: Tom Waits' [Step Right Up \(lyrics\)](#). Even back in the 1970's, Waits would have agreed with the middle of this article.

Cheers!



[Sarah Burke](#) at 10:30pm October 21

I'll give this some thought; hopefully we can discuss on it more at a later date.

Haven't heard Step Right Up in a long time... Thank you, YouTube.



[Michael Leukert](#) at 5:50am October 22

the more successful i get in life lately, the lower my desire for booze. just sayin.

IF you can find a way to offer people alternatives, so they can develop success as a lifestyle instead of failure as a lifestyle, THEN alot of sadness, regret, self-pity and waste might disappear.

IF-THEN statements are the basis of computer science. you can make anything with them, like loops, and if youre good even new operating systems/ways of using computers. :)



[Kim Harrie](#) at 7:34am October 22

If only the reams of people practising various forms of escapism now could channel that time into a healthier, active lifestyle.....I know I'd be in peak condition if I spend the time I'm avoiding school work and chores by surfing the net at the gym instead.....



Thandi Sithole at 6:11pm October 22

it's funny how i never really thought of escapism extending to non-deviant activities like surfing the net or watching a movie. does this include reading a book for leisure rather than as research? I guess it does... it's easy to think that you're more in control of the pressures in your life because you're not an alcoholic or drug user, but in fact there's no difference... it's all addictions. they only differ because of social norms: drugs are bad, reading is good. neither of them can save u from the pressures of the world- they just procrastinate what i have to do. I agree about religion as well, it is overwhelming to be born into this "intelligent" human race that has evolved greater than any other known species but we cannot figure out why we're here. its easier to keep a simple mind and blindly believe in religion- despite its credibility- than to search 4 answers, its like having a security net to catch you if u fall. Religion is 2 the religious, what alcohol is to the alcoholic- all forms of escapism



[Michael Leukert](#) at 7:23pm October 22

what credibility?



Thandi Sithole at 10:42am October 23

Responding to your question Michael- that should have read as "lack of credibility" not "credibility", I was writing the note using my phone (out of sheer laziness of having to switch on the computer!) and there's a word limit if you type from a mobile, thus I had to

cut down on a lot of what I wanted to say just to squeeze it all in and didn't realise my error- thanks for the check. And to explain lack of credibility without getting too deep into it; it's simply because religion is based on faith (right?) more than it is facts.



[Michael Leukert](#) at 12:33pm October 23
you had me worried i missed something :)



[Amie Geall](#) at 7:24pm October 23
Nice note. Seriously. Most addictions are an escape from reality....whether they be alcohol, drugs, sex, food. You name it. The addiction has a lot to do with guilt, then desperation, hitting lows, then indulging again to an abnormal, unhealthy degree. Fairly insightful note on the human condition!