

Student name: Stav Shoval

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List of illustration

Figure 1: Guernica, Pablo Picasso, 1937, oil on canvas

Website: [Guernica, 1937 by Pablo Picasso](#)

Figure 2 : Luxe, Calme et Volupte, Henri Matisse, 1904, oil on canvas

Website: [Finding Solace: Escapist Art \(artshelp.com\)](#)

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To truly understand what escapism is, further research was executed to explore the subject's linguistic origins, by using etymology as the main source for context. This involves the study of word roots, as well as documenting how they change throughout the historical times that was taught by Plato during the 360BC in ancient Greece.

The term consists of two words escape and ism. It was added to the dictionary in 1930" and its existence was noted only 3 years later in 1933. When breaking down the term

escapism the verb escape is only meant as the "act of running away or the possibility of it happening,". At the time, this was understood from the context of it being something physical rather than in the 'mental or emotional' sense which was then "added to the dictionary in 1853."

For the added suffix to the verb, "ism" signifies the "practice or a system" of something that happens. Therefore, by applying these definitions together and explaining the term in its literal sense, escapism can be understood as the practice or method to how an individual 'escapes.'

In contemporary society, escapism is portrayed in a pejorative manner due to its negative connotation when applied to gaming research. As the result of problematic, excessive gaming, it can result in internet addiction. Despite that, certain aspects of gaming have been proven to be beneficial when it's used as a mood management technique, as it helps decrease stress level whilst developing emotional regulation strategies which reduce anxiety. As gaming takes place in an environment that gives a temporary sense of reality, which exists within virtual space.

According to the Oxford dictionary, the term escapism is defined by a continuous "tendency to retreat or avoid problems that are caused by the harsh demands of reality". By seeking out refuge through pursuit of distractions and occupying the mind, which are commonly expressed in either entertainment or engagement in fantasy, that gratify individuals in giving a sense of control over their feelings, this creates a temporary happy sensation of escapism.

At its core, escapism is an avoidant coping mechanism that is a "set of habitual routines that target avoiding stressful or unpleasant emotions", instead of facing them head on, which can turn maladaptive. Maladaptive behavior is when "unhealthy habits turn destructive" by affecting an individual's mental health, interpersonal relationships and hindering the ability to adapt to new or unfamiliar circumstances. However, when used sensibly it can be adaptive instead.

An extreme case that affects an interpersonal relationship that resembles escapism due to its avoidance properties, is called Houdini syndrome. This is a "psychological phenomenon where children who are mainly adolescence" show an extreme fleeting and "emotional detachment from interpersonal or romantic relationships," to an

extreme degree of “evading life responsibilities.” These are often influenced by “cultural and societal demands.”

The name Houdini is a reference to the famous “19th century Hungarian, American escape artist.” Despite that in this specific context, it has no relation to the method of escape but rather a reference to the extreme detachment from life through the act of evasion.

Pleasure

The word pleasure according to various sources can be summarized as a “state or a feeling that caused us to feel pleased” and make us experience feelings of enjoyment, satisfaction and happiness, while depending on its source that is “classified into either physical, emotional or intellectual type”. Physical pleasure is based upon sensory experiences and sensations such as the sense of smell, touch, taste as well as sexual arousal. Whereas emotional pleasure is found within experiencing positive emotions like happiness and joy. An additional type of pleasure is intellectual, which focuses upon activations that are aimed at engaging the mind by problem solving and learning.

A perspective that can be used to understand pleasure is through relying on biological or neuroscience perspectives, in which in simpler terms focuses on the brain reward system, also known as mesolimbic in scientific terms. Its key responsibilities are aimed at regulating both cognitive and psychological processing of stimuli, that is associated by the release of neurotransmitters such as dopamine, serotonin and endorphin, that are produced when individuals experience things that are deemed to be pleasurable. These play a key role in mood regulation, motivation as well as the reinforcement of both repeating and seeking pleasurable experiences.

There is a popular misconception that people are addicted to dopamine, while it is believed to “not be possible to be addicted” to the neurotransmitter itself, it plays an “important role in motivating us to seek pleasurable experiences.” Whereas the “over increase in dopamine make us participate in addictive behaviors”, as individuals are addicted to the memory of these reinforced positive response causes, that are heightened through learned behavior.

A common coping approach in contemporary society that is linked to escapism is the reliance and consumption of drugs and alcohol. This is due to the results of their “ability

hijack the brain neurotransmitter receptor", which enhances the production of dopamine levels in the system. So, people that have a "deficiency in that hormone are more prone to addiction" but it is not the sole cause.

Motivation can be explained through the concept called the self-determination theory or SDT in short. Its original definition was applied to a "more political and diplomatic context" that was used to describe the process of which a country goes through in the "purpose of asserting independence." Despite that in today's societal perspective, it is taken as "the method of an individual ability to make its own choices and have a feeling of control in one's life", which has a great importance in our psychological wellbeing.

SDT is a psychological structure that is used to understand how human motivation functions. It outlines the connection between personality, human traits and optimal motivation. This was proposed by two psychologists named Edward Deci and Richard Ryan during the years 1970 – 1980 which was then published in 1985 and states that there are "two types of stimuli that affect individuals, which are "intrinsic and extrinsic."

An Intrinsic pleasure is defined by people being "driven by their own personal or hedonistic desires to grow" to reach a sense of fulfilment, that is emphasized by following your internal ambitions to do something for your own sake rather than being influenced by external factors. It is highly regarded by "evolving inner skills for personality development as well as self-regulations."

According to Deci and Ryan, extrinsic motivation is a driven force that makes people behave in a certain way that "doesn't align with instinctual pleasure" that is affected by both external factors and rewards. Key examples can include "grading systems, employee evaluation and employment."

According to the handbook of coping, Sigmund Freud earliest contribution in psychopathology, focused on the notion that there are various methods that were used to "maneuver and distort unacceptable concepts and feelings," which contributes towards Freud's statement, in which the "ego uses a form of defense or repression when is struggling to cope," that is applied interchangeably when discussed in his theories. As his studies advanced, his daughter Anna Freud invented and discovered the concept of defense mechanisms, as she described how these examples manifest themselves in the publication of The Ego and mechanism of defense.

Defense mechanism correlates to escapism because of the ego's inability to cope. It seeks distractions or reasons to protect individuals from demands that are similar to escapism. These can be understood in more depth by looking at Freud's reality, morality and pleasure principles, which explores and provides a perspective to how and why people might behave in certain ways due to their need to pursue pleasure. This correlates deeply to the three important principles within his theory, that are built on the Id, ego and super ego, that are an important component that constructs the human mind.

Firstly, the initial core principle is that all human beings were born with what is called the Id. This is when the mindset is young and immature, where the brain seeks an immediate quick need to fulfill its own intrinsic pleasures without waiting or considering the opinions of others. As time goes on, and individuals reflect on life experiences, minds start to mature and develop something that is called the ego.

This is when the brain comprehends the concept of the external, surrounding world, while mediating between intrinsic pleasure principles to the demand of reality by tolerating societal norms, which is when the reality principle appears. In the end, the goal of the mind delays immediate primal pleasure with long term gratification, to reach what individuals want in a societal acceptable way. An additional crucial concept that applies to it, is the super ego, which is where sense of morality is applied. In this case, its role is being the decision maker that helps individuals to navigate between their Id and ego to match external world demands.

Happiness

It can be inferred from the pleasure introductory paragraph that happiness and pleasure are quite like one another due to the happy sensations that are caused from the experience. However, they are not the same, as pleasure is a short term, temporary feeling that results from external sources. Whereas happiness is a long term personal internal process that is not influenced by outside consequences.

What is happiness then? This is a commonly asked question, according to philosophers there are two "common concepts that are associated towards happiness, they are the hedonism and the life satisfactory theory." In this context, hedonistic ideas link to how balanced pleasurable and unpleasant life experiences are measured next to one another.

A similar concept which is linked to hedonism is emotional state. Rather than focusing on experiencing something pleasant, it is defined of the feelings of emotions. While life satisfaction can be identified through the article, as standard ideals and affirmation that are needed to achieve in life in the objective of reaching fulfilment and satisfaction.

Happiness is another important factor that is used to explain escapism. By understanding why individuals feel unhappy, they do things to fulfill these needs to achieve this sense of fulfilment and even reach a complete immersion in one's action that is known as a flow state to feel happiness, even when they are not feeling satisfied.

After explaining how escapism is defined and understood, by explaining the logics and theories behind pleasure and happiness through modern, scientific and even philosophical perspectives. Further research was sourced in delving into the historical roots of what forms of escapism might have appeared in art pieces in the past. As art was the original form of escapism before it was developed into the seeking of entertainment, reading and listening to music.

How Escapism appears in Art

Historical escapism is rooted in the fields of mythology, religion, folklore and fantasy art. These encompass several techniques that evoke the human subconscious as well as the use of imagination and narratives that serve as a form of expressing reality. For example, things such as symbolism, surrealism, magical, abstract expression and immersive art that evoke the imagination.

Pablo Picasso was an undisputed master and a key inventor of Modernism, but has often led a turbulent, unhappy and tense personal life (Art a Visual history, 2015). The artist was mainly known for his great showcase of a diverse and bewildering mix of techniques that ranges from Classicism, Expressionisms and Symbolism. Pablo's core inspiration for his art, according to the Author of Art, visual History Robert Cummings (2015), was "never to seek out pure abstraction but rather as a wide-ranging post Freudian response toward both human figure and condition", and depicted references towards themes such as death, as his work portrays either blissful or anguished emotions.

As an example, the iconic modern painting '**Guernica**' (1937) was chosen and kept Basque nightmares alive. As it was commissioned by the Spanish Government, after the Spanish civil war bombing incident at the city on the 26th of April. At the time, Picasso was originally planning to showcase work in Paris but abandoned his original idea, due to how distraught he was on hearing the news.



An aspect that links this work to escapism is people understanding his work, which shows and comments on the extent of how art can communicate to self-assertion and enforces people to protect themselves against forces beyond their control, such as crime, war and death. Even though the artist themselves might not have intended it to happen, the use of visual symbolism and emotional impact that it had on its audience created a heavily inferred message. The artist was using this creation as a means of coping to manage the intense grief and loss that created this impactful political statement, which expressed the extremities of war and the destructive nature and how it affects human lives. This often result in the death of many innocent women and children

Symbolism is often a common means of expression in Picassos work. This links to escapism because in the artwork he uses, iconography of the Minotaur and Harlequin to communicate the themes of irritational power that is combined duality to depict the death within the mural. Symbolism is used as a means to express the complexity of felt emotions though visuals and give the opportunity for introspection to escape into the realm of allegory, while it communicated by juxtaposing the composition through surrealist style art.

A second artist who exemplifies the concept of escapism within his art is Henri Matisse. Matisse is an impressionistic French painter that contributed towards the Fauvist movement. He became a notable artist from his significant and prominent application of joyful and colourful combinations, that according to Cumming's "seems to have a life of its own, without the intention of mimicking nature" (Art a Visual history, 2015).

This links to escapism because of Henri's exploration of colour by separating it from its subject, which gives it a new entity, that makes something that the audience want to engage with it through the senses like touch, which links into abstract expression by using colour to evoke an emotional response.



Another aspect that can be identified in Matisse's ***Luxe, Calme et Volupté*** is its distinguished and deliberate use of open brushstrokes that gives life to the colour, as it juxtaposes with the white spacing to allow for breathing space. This is heavily connected to Matisse's ideals and personality as he does not seek for conflict, and dreams of an art that is tranquil and peaceful, devoid of troubling depressing matters, that gives a sense of fulfilment to the audience that look at his pictures. As it links to the core purpose to why people use escapism to seek out relief through fantasy to face the conflict of reality through transporting themselves to another world to reach a sense of tranquility and happiness.

In conclusion, the main purpose was to discuss the factors that influenced escapism by noting diverse fields of work. Both contemporary and historical perspectives have been discussed that demonstrate well thought out research, rather than providing an argument of what is considered as being right or wrong with escapism. This proposal

offers a perspective on how escapism can be understood by discussing how it can be influenced by pleasure and happiness and showcasing the connection to one another.

For my future objectives to develop this proposal, I would like to showcase how people disagree with escapism as both of the artist that I have included evidence its presence in the work to showcase an opposing viewpoint

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