

21

THE SOCIOLOGY OF ENTERTAINMENT

ROBERT A. STEBBINS

University of Calgary, Canada

In common sense one principal meaning of the verb *to entertain* is to provide the public with something enjoyable, or pleasurable, that holds their attention for the period of time the entertaining object or occasion is perceived. In entertainment that truly entertains (recognizing that some would-be entertainment “flops”), attention is diverted from all other matters, hence occasional usage of one of its synonyms—diversion. In general, these commonsensical terms are employed with reference to what Lewis (1978:16–17) calls “moderately complex” (as opposed to “simple” or “highly complex”) objects and occasions (e.g., a comic strip, television sitcom, popular song, Broadway play). Etymologically the verb to entertain evolved from precursors in Latin and Old and Middle French (*entretenir*) meaning to hold.

Of course many things can hold our attention, among them, pain, fear, serious study, and execution of a finely honed skill such as playing the violin, which in the sense just set out, are anything but entertaining. The breadth of and inherent contradictions in the commonsense idea of entertainment have forced sociologists to narrow substantially the scope of interest here. This they have done in four ways, and, in the process, also more precisely adumbrated the subdiscipline of sociology of entertainment.

First, sociology, under the aegis of entertainment, has centered on that which is largely, if not, purely pleasurable, leaving for other branches of knowledge the study of greatly fulfilling activities that can engender a certain amount of pleasure but are nonetheless founded on substantial skill, knowledge, or experience or a combination of these. Examples of the latter include the joy *and* fulfillment of doing well at skiing, crocheting, dancing, or

collecting plates (see Stebbins 2004a for a discussion of the difference between pleasure and enjoyment, on the one hand, and fulfillment, on the other). Nevertheless, as will be noted shortly, this line is not always easily drawn.

Second, the sociology of entertainment has confined itself to people enacting the role of entertainer—street performers, popular singers, stand-up comics, film and television actors, strippers, pornographic models and actors, and the like. This leaves for other fields of the analysis of roles where entertainment, if it occurs at all, is incidental and peripheral to the main purpose of the role or where entertainment comes from a source other than an entertainer (see discussion below of casual leisure). Examples of incidental/peripheral entertainment include entertaining moments in a classical music concert, scientific talk, or serious drama (experienced here as comic relief).

Third, entertainers, as studied in the sociology of entertainment, have been either amateur or professional, with both holding a commercial orientation toward their art. That is, the professionals develop a product designed to sell to a public and the amateurs, although they often perform without pay, model their products on professional exemplars (Stebbins 1992:8–9). Moreover, the amateurs are not folk artists (see discussion in the section on the nature of entertainment).

Fourth, over the years, sociologists have tended to concentrate on one or two of six distinctive facets of the field of entertainment, classified and discussed in this chapter as (1) nature of entertainment, (2) role of entertainer, (3) public that consumes entertainment (e.g., fans, buffs, audiences), (4) content of entertainment, (5) industry that produces it, and (6) place of entertainment in society.

Two core concepts organize this branch of sociology. One—*entertainment*—may, in light of the preceding discussion, be defined as an object or occasion intentionally provided to a public for their enjoyment, or pleasure, that is meant to hold their attention for the period of time the object or occasion is perceived. That the entertainment may, for various reasons, flop with some or all members of the public, although an unhappy situation for the would-be entertainer, does not contradict this definition. For the *intention* had been to entertain. The second core concept—the *entertainer*—may be defined as a performer who, directly or indirectly (e.g., via film, TV, videotape), from a stage or equivalent, provides entertainment to a public. Given that the sociology of entertainment is largely at the exploratory stage of development, these definitions should be considered tentative, subject to revision as new, open-ended, discovery-oriented research suggests (Stebbins 2001a). Indeed, as we learn more about this area, this conceptual core could be expanded with other basic ideas.

SOCIOLOGY OF ENTERTAINMENT AS SUBDISCIPLINE

This section covers a representative selection of the literature comprising the subdiscipline of the sociology of entertainment, organized according to the six facets. In all cases, the subject of the work reviewed must be primarily about entertainers or entertainment considered from a sociological point of view. This principle excludes wide-ranging works on, for example, the sociology of art, popular culture, or communication in which entertainment is but one of many cultural forms under scrutiny. For instance, research exists on strippers conducted and analyzed in both the feminist and the deviance traditions that, however, says little about such work as being entertaining. Similarly, certain legal questions bearing on entertainment are technical concerns that lie beyond the scope of sociology. Also excluded are works that use a form of entertainment as a springboard for examining something outside of or broader than the field of entertainment.

Note that, with the handful of exceptions noted below, the sociology of entertainment lacks its own theory; that is, no one has proposed a set of abstract principles defining the field, nor has one emerged inductively from research done in it. In harmony with this observation is the fact that very little theoretical or empirical work has been published on entertainers or entertainment per se. Indeed, until now, neither of these two central terms had been defined scientifically, defined beyond their commonsense conceptions discussed above. Weinstein's (1991) observations on the academic discourse on popular music describes equally well that on the sociology of entertainment.

Academic discourse on popular music since the 1980s has been a bricolage. It would have been called a semi-congeries in an earlier time: Popular music studies do not constitute

a discipline; there is no master name to expose, no theory to deconstruct. Most writers focus on the social relations surrounding the production or the appreciation of the music; others are concerned with the being of popular music or at least its system. . . . Study of rock music, popular music or in general floats without benefit or liability of an episteme. (Pp. 97–98)

In the broader field of entertainment, scholars, sometimes guided by theoretical perspectives developed in other areas, have attended much more specifically to one or a few of the six facets and, within those facets or particular facets, on a particular part of them. Much of this work is descriptive, as indeed it must be, to the extent it is intended as exploration. For instance, we shall see later that some researchers are interested in the lives of famous movie stars while others focus on the nature of audience-performer interaction in rock music, with neither generalizing, however tentatively, to the field of entertainment or even the larger facet in which their work is embedded, which are, in these two examples, the entertainment role and the entertainment public.

Given this tendency, a main goal of this chapter is to offer a rudimentary conceptual framework that can help guide research in this area as well as help distinguish the area from its intellectual neighbors, especially the sociologies of art, music, culture, leisure, and popular culture. To this end, I will introduce in certain sections one or more orienting concepts that, contrary to comments just made, have emerged inductively from research on entertainers, even though those same concepts have also been shaped through research on hobbyists, volunteers, amateurs, and professionals working well beyond the realm of entertainment. The literature reviewed here under each heading has been selected as illustrative of sociological work undertaken over approximately the past four to five decades. A full literature review is impossible, given editorial page limitations, for despite its fragmented nature, the sociology of entertainment has an enormous corpus of writing, even within the limits just established.

THE NATURE OF ENTERTAINMENT

In addition to what has just been said about the nature of entertainment, it should be noted that, for its consumers when they are truly entertained, they are immersed in a leisure experience. In this instance, the experience is primarily pleasurable, one of enjoyment and little else. Such leisure is casual. *Casual leisure* is immediately intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it (Stebbins 1997, 2001b). It is fundamentally hedonic, engaged in for the significant level of pure enjoyment, or pleasure, found there. It is also the classificatory home of much of deviant leisure (Rojek 2000; Stebbins 1996a). Of the eight types of casual leisure now identified (listed in Stebbins 2004b), the

180 • THE SOCIOLOGY OF NORMATIVE BEHAVIOR

one labeled “passive entertainment” bears most directly on the sociology of entertainment. This is the classificatory home of sedentary, “couch-potato” leisure that, for its enjoyment, requires little more than turning a dial, pressing a button, flipping a switch, attending a concert, and the like. In the passive type an entertainment device—radio, stereo, television set, DVD player—once activated, does all that is necessary to provide the sought after diversion, as provided by one or more entertainers.

Casual leisure, as an object of social scientific inquiry, is of further importance in that analyses of this use of free time explain all enjoyable diversion, whereas the sociology of entertainment centers more narrowly on the enjoyment made possible by entertainers. For example a display of scenic beauty in a film, videotape, or set of photographs (the type of casual leisure known as “sensory stimulation”) may well be qualified as entertaining by viewers, even though it was not produced by someone they would call an entertainer. The same can be said for enjoyment felt when playing, say a board game (example of the “active entertainment” type of casual leisure), even though the game was likely created not by an entertainer but by an employee working for the manufacturer of the game.

Another theoretic scheme to emerge, in part, from research on entertainment is Lewis’s (1978:16–17) ideal-typical elaboration of folk, popular, and high culture. Entertainment can be considered part of the second, which includes commercially viable folk music, folk dance, and the like (indigenous folk culture being essentially noncommercial, see Lewis 1978:16). Two components of these three types are of interest here: (1) structure and appreciation of the form and (2) orientation of the cultural product. In popular culture, the entertaining object or occasion is moderately complex (structure). The highly complex objects and occasions of high culture, which to be appreciated require training, judgment, analysis, and so on, produce experiences for its public that, for them, are best qualified as primarily fulfilling (even though pleasure may also be experienced). Another component in Lewis’s three types is whether the cultural product is consumer or creator oriented. Entertainment, served up as popular culture, is clearly consumer oriented, unlike the creator-oriented products of high culture.

Is entertainment an art? This is a reasonable question, since the entertaining act or activity is simple enough to be understood without significant effort and could therefore be written off as unartistic. Nevertheless, the answer is affirmative, for designing and presenting a product that truly entertains a vast public requires all the essential ingredients of art (see Munro 1957:45). For instance, although some entertainers do provide their audiences with aesthetic or emotionally moving experiences (e.g., soap operas, televised crime shows), laughter seems to be the main emotion they stir. Most of the time, their role is to amuse. And certainly these performers offer something pleasant and interesting. Moreover, there is often considerable personal interpretation inspiring the routining and presentation of an act.

THE ENTERTAINER ROLE

While the public of an entertainment form is enjoying itself in casual leisure, the producers of it are having a quite different experience. In this role they perform, each in his social world, as either amateurs or professionals and, to be described later, as either regulars or insiders. The amateurs, of course, are engaged in a form of leisure of their own, which however, is not casual but serious. *Serious leisure* is systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that participants find substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge, and experience (Stebbins 1992:3). The adjective *serious* (a word Stebbins’s research respondents often used) embodies such qualities as earnestness, sincerity, importance, and carefulness. This adjective signals the importance of these three kinds of activity in the everyday lives of participants, in that pursuing the three eventually engenders deep self-fulfillment. Serious leisure is further distinguished from casual leisure by six characteristics of the former: (1) need to persevere at the activity, (2) availability of a leisure career, (3) need to put in effort to gain skill and knowledge, (4) realization of various special benefits, (5) unique ethos and social world, and (6) an attractive personal and social identity. Stebbins’s studies of amateur magicians ([1984] 1993) and stand-up comics (1990) may be unique in the field of nonprofessional entertainment.

The professionals in entertainment can be viewed as *public centered* rather than *client centered*. The first serve publics in art, sport, science, and entertainment, whereas the second serve a set of clients such as patients or purchasers of a highly skilled service offered by, say, a lawyer, architect, counsellor, engineer, or accountant (Stebbins 1992:22). Furthermore, amateurs and professionals filling an entertainment role regularly provide a particular type of enjoyment for a particular public. We are accustomed to calling these people “entertainers”; they perform by presenting pleasurable material to live audiences or remote ones listening or viewing the same material in a television program, videotape, published photograph, audio recording, or similar media. But as mentioned, there are also people who amuse us in ways other than this. Cartoonists, comic book writers, some poets and novelists and possibly others entertain with their works but do not usually perform, as it were, from a stage. In principle, then, because of this commonsensical inconsistency, the process of entertainment is actually broader than the entertainer role. Be that as it may, sociologists, perhaps taking their cue from such popular usage, have devoted nearly all their attention to the latter, and consequently, only that part of the broader entertainment field is covered in this chapter.

Discussion of the entertainment role goes hand in hand with discussion of the careers of those who fill it. And, since all professional entertainers were once amateurs, the career model embraces both. White (1993, chap. 3) explores the

careers of artists of all kinds, while Stebbins (1990, chaps. 4–5, [1984] 1993, chap. 4, 1996b:47–60) does this for magicians, stand-up comics, and hobbyist barbershop singers. Bennett (1980) examines the early career of the rock musician. Bausinger (1993), in a rare analysis of entertainment in general, gives a historical account of a career in that field. Knight's (2002) study of integrating black performance in American musical film can be interpreted as an analysis of racially based career contingencies in that art. Stebbins (1990:59–60) presents a typology of stages for analyzing career passage in the public-centered arts.

MUSICAL ENTERTAINERS

Musical entertainers—singers and instrumentalists—have attracted a substantial amount of sociological research. Here, where work on rock musicians predominates, we have, for example, Bennett's (1980) research on becoming a rock musician, Regev's treatise (1994) on how this type of performer produces artistic value, and Weinstein's (1991) history and ethnography of the heavy metal scene in the United States—a genre of rock that got its start in the 1960s. Wills and Cooper (1988) studied the pressures experienced by rock musicians, which they argue are often met with excessive use of drugs and alcohol. Moore (2001) approaches rock musicologically, analyzing its unique sounds and exploring the relationship between self-expression and musical style as well as the evolution of rock styles. Sometimes individual stars have been the object of interest, as in Werner's (2004) study of selected American soul artists.

Gender has been a prominent interest in this area. Clawson (1999) interviewed male and female electric bass players of rock music to learn why the latter are disproportionately attracted to this instrument. She found that the electric bass is relatively easy to learn, although relatively few men are interested in playing it. Groce and Cooper (1990) examined the musical experiences of women in local rock bands in two American cities, embedded as they are in a world centered on and dominated by male musicians. Brown and Campbell (1986) have also studied the gender bias in rock, this time as observed in musical videos.

Research on musical entertainers has centered almost exclusively on professionals, whether parttime or fulltime.

ACTORS IN ENTERTAINMENT

Entertainers working in one or more of the theater arts have also been studied, even more so, it appears, than singers and instrumentalists. Stebbins (1990) examined stand-up comics and, earlier, both Stebbins ([1984] 1993) and Nardi (1984) studied entertainment magicians. Some entertainers in this category are essentially variety artists, including street performers (Mulkay and Howe 1994), British pub entertainers (Mullen 1985), and participants in

any of the multitude of gypsy troupes (Gmelch 1986). Film and television actors have also been investigated, as far back as Powdermaker's (1950) classic study of the Hollywood actor and then, much later, through work by Mast (1986) on actor identity and by Friedman (1990) on occupational culture and career of actors. Zuckerman et al. (2003) have examined the effects on the actor's career of typecasting. Television news personalities belong to this category as well, but there appears to be no sociological research on them. Individual actors have also been the object of sociological attention (e.g., Hayward 2000; Portales 2000; Valdivia 1998).

Additionally, deviant entertainer roles have received some attention, including strippers, topless dancers, and similar performers (e.g., Clark 1985; Thompson, Harred, and Burks 2003). Skipper and McCaghy (1971) wrote the classic study in this area. Mestemacher and Roberti (2004) provide an up-to-date review of the sociological literature on strippers. Meanwhile, scientifically speaking, pornographic actors and models of both sexes seem to have been ignored. Drag performers and male and female impersonators also belong to this category, research on whom dates to the 1970s when Newton (1979) conducted a classic study on the latter. Since then, several papers have been written on both sexes in drag (e.g., Patterson 2002; Rhyne 2004; Schacht and Underwood 2004).

Some kinds of dancers (in addition to the aforementioned exotic variety) may also be classified as entertainers, even though I could find no sociological literature on them. Thus, dancers of the tap, choral, and synchronized variety, among others, remain to be sociologically scrutinized. The deviant trade of "lap dancing" is not dancing at all but a kind of sexual service (the "sensory stimulation" type of casual leisure) not unlike that delivered in some massage parlors.

Many musical and dramatic arts, as well as various acrobatic or gymnastic feats and variety acts (e.g., magic, juggling, pantomime), can be performed in the street, with or without a temporary stage. Yet street performers, who, when itinerant, are called buskers, have not been widely studied sociologically. The main contribution here is Shrum's (1996:pt. II) lively description of the fringe festival, essentially an organized session of street performing lasting several days in one or a few prearranged local venues, which since its origin in Edinburgh, has been copied in several parts of the world.

Furthermore, many street arts are also enacted in the circus. Again, sociological work is scarce in this area. Still, the clown has been analyzed, as by Little (1993) who studied the nature of clownish performance as well as the meaning for clowns of their work and lifestyle (Little 1991). Carmeli (1996a) studied the circus performer's body, comparing acrobatic acts with the sport body as presented and observed in gymnastics. Caforio (1987) interviewed members of several circuses performing in Northern Italy, finding that they form a closed world fraught with numerous contradictions and problems.

182 • THE SOCIOLOGY OF NORMATIVE BEHAVIOR

Television and, today to a lesser extent, radio offer media personalities to their viewers and listeners, who may be newscasters, sportscasters, commentators, interviewers on talk shows, stars in sitcoms, and similar roles. With a few notable exceptions, research is rare on these people. Tolson (2001) compared talk shows in Great Britain and the United States. Grindstaff (2002) described the origin of the American televised talk show as well as how such a show is produced and its appeal distributed according to social class. Smith-Shomade (2002) limits her analysis of the talk show to the images it portrays of African American women, who although now an essential part of this genre, are still often presented in a distorted and deviant light. Abt (1997), covering a decade of viewing, wrote the first book-length study of televised talk shows in the United States. She examined their aesthetics as well as their evolution and cultural significance, concluding that they are anything but a harmless pastime.

THE PUBLIC

As we are limiting coverage of the entertainment role to entertainers, the public to whom they address their art is always an audience, which usually both views and listens to what is presented (though we can only listen to an audio recording, only view a mime). In the language of the social world perspective, the public includes "tourists," those who occasionally "visit" particular kinds of entertainment. Yet as Adorno (1962:14–17) pointed out for music, only some of this audience is present primarily for the purpose of being entertained. That is, some stage arts are also performed for "experts" or for a variety of other types of listeners whose reasons for consuming the art are other than the pursuit of pleasure. By contrast, the proper focus of the sociology of entertainment is what Adorno calls the "entertainment audience," usually by far the largest segment of any mass cultural audience.

The public is a significant part of the entertainer's social world. Unruh developed the following definition, which I have found fits well (e.g., Stebbins 1996b) as a partial explanation of a field of entertainment as defined here:

A social world must be seen as a unit of social organization which is diffuse and amorphous in character. Generally larger than groups or organizations, social worlds are not necessarily defined by formal boundaries, membership lists, or spatial territory. . . . A social world must be seen as an internally recognizable constellation of actors, organizations, events, and practices which have coalesced into a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants. Characteristically, a social world lacks a powerful centralized authority structure and is delimited by . . . effective communication and not territory nor formal group membership. (Unruh 1980:277)

In another paper, Unruh (1979) added that the typical social world is characterized by voluntary identification, by a freedom to enter into and depart from it. Moreover, because it is so diffuse, ordinary members can only be

partly involved in the full range of its activities. After all, a social world may be local, regional, multiregional, national, or even international. Also, people in complex societies such as Canada and the United States are often members of several social worlds. Finally, social worlds are held together, to an important degree, by semiformal, or mediated, communication. They are rarely heavily bureaucratized, yet due to their diffuseness, they are rarely characterized by intense face-to-face interaction. Rather, communication is typically mediated by newsletters, posted notices, telephone messages, mass mailings, Internet communications, radio and television announcements, and similar means, with the strong possibility that, in future, the Internet could become the most popular of these.

Every social world contains four types of members: strangers, tourists, regulars, and insiders (Unruh 1979, 1980). The strangers are intermediaries who normally participate little in the entertainment activity itself, but who nonetheless do something important to make it possible, for example, by managing a theater, repairing musical instruments, or running the local performers' union. Tourists are temporary participants in a social world; they are the audience or public who have come on the scene momentarily for entertainment. Regulars routinely participate in the social world; in serious leisure, they are the amateurs and hobbyists themselves. Insiders are those among them who show exceptional devotion to the social world they share, to maintaining it, to advancing it. This is also where the professionals in a given entertainment field are found.

Returning to research on the entertainment public, Jones and Harvey (1980) examined interaction between rock bands and their audiences. Frederickson (1989) argues that electronic media are capable of replacing live human performers, thereby dramatically changing the relationship between musician and audience. Carmeli (1996b), after analyzing a fakir act in a British circus, showed how middle- and working-class audiences differently perceive it. Grabe (1997) conducted a demographic analysis of the country music audience that was found to have expanded well beyond its initial rural, working-class base. It is now a mass art. Additionally Brooker and Jermyn (2003) have edited a valuable anthology of audience studies, which includes several chapters on film and film stars. Handelman (1991) analyzes the audience's perception of the circus performer's body (e.g., acrobats, aerialists, contortionists). Cawelti (1997) describes the diverse problems that come with doing research on film and television audiences.

It is also possible to conceive of parts of the generalized public (as opposed to particular audiences at particular performances) as "tribes." This metaphor, elaborated by Michel Maffesoli (1996), identifies and describes a post-modern phenomenon that spans national borders. It is thus much broader and more sociological than its anthropological precursor. Maffesoli observes that mass culture has disintegrated, leaving in its wake a diversity of tribes. These tribes are fragmented groupings left over from the preceding era of mass consumption, groupings recognized today by their unique tastes, lifestyles, and form of social

organization. Such groupings exist for the pleasure of their members to share the warmth of being together, socializing with each other, seeing and touching each other, and so on, a highly emotional process. In this, they are both participants and observers, as exemplified by in-group hairstyles, bodily modifications, and items of apparel. This produces a sort of solidarity among members not unlike that found in certain religions and many primitive tribes.

I have argued that much of postmodern tribalization has taken place in the spheres of leisure and entertainment, where it has given birth to a small number of activity-based, serious leisure tribes and a considerably larger number of taste-based, casual leisure tribes (Stebbins 2002, chap. 5). In entertainment, tribes have formed around, for example, soap opera, *Star Trek*, and heavy metal music. To explain its classification as a tribe, each will be described in some detail.

The soap opera, a genre of its own, has been conceptualized at the consumptive level by the author (Stebbins 2002:67–69) as a form of tribal leisure. The dedicated followers of soap operas constitute an organizationally complex tribe operating on an international scale (even though programs tend to differ from country to country). Babrow (1990) studied a sample of American university students who routinely watched “soaps.” He found that sociality—talk with other students about the program as it is being broadcast—is also a motive for watching these programs.

Mary Ellen Brown (1994) interviewed several small samples of female soap opera fans in Australia and the United States. Although some women watch them alone, most have some kind of social involvement with other women who enjoy the same programs. Her interviewees were not members of fan clubs but rather belonged to networks composed of small numbers of family or friends. Brown (1994) also noted a second level of fanship, defined as all people who watch a particular soap. Second-order people, she explains, meet “in buses, at work, at school, or somewhere else in passing, find that they watch such-and-such a soap opera, and discuss the current issues on that soap opera with them” (p. 80). A taste-based tribe to be sure, but one that has been around for decades, predating even television when soaps were available only on radio.

The “Trekkies” and “Trekks” constitute another example, having emerged as the highly dedicated viewing audience of the television series *Star Trek* and related films. Since the 1970s when the series began, they have evolved into an activity-based tribe, consisting of young and middle-aged adults. To be sure, Trekkies are entertained as they watch periodic installments of *Star Trek*, but they also gain considerable fulfillment through identifying and analyzing the many Freudian themes and stereotypic sex roles found in each show (Deegan 1983). Its comparatively more complex level of organization suggests that this tribe can be classified as a liberal arts hobby with its characteristic social world, for Trekkies now have their own fanzine, books, newsletters, artifacts, home page, and even periodic conventions.

Friesen’s (1990) study of fans of heavy metal music in Calgary is part of this small corpus. Although not strictly

analyzed from the perspective of leisure tribes, it nonetheless clearly shows that these fans help comprise one. He found this music was extremely important to his sample of young people; next to friendship it was their greatest source of personal enjoyment. The music was listened to in the company of others who also enjoyed it, who gained their sense of belonging to this tribe, in part, by defending its music to the larger world, which tended then, as now, to marginalize both it and its fans as deviant.

CONTENT

A good deal of attention has been given to the content of some forms of entertainment, while the content of other forms has been virtually ignored. Thus Geraghty (1990) examined the images of women in British and American televised soap operas, noting considerable self-parody and the fact that soaps are now written for both sexes. In the section of her book on production of culture, Crane (1992) addresses herself to televised entertainment and the content of news, concluding from a review of the literature that television is designed to reflect the tastes, interests, and attitudes of the typical viewer. Turner (1999), working along the same lines, finds, in harmony with Crane’s conclusions, that programming in modern television news and commentary on current events has undergone “tabloidization.” Indeed Altheide and Snow (1991:16–18) state, quite bluntly, that radio and television news is first and foremost entertainment.

Taylor (1989) looks at the film *Gone with the Wind*, as a vehicle for exploring how cinematic gender biases are first created and then received by female viewers. Valdivia (1998) studied the construction of Latinas in Hollywood films featuring Rosie Perez, especially with respect to traditional ethnic stereotypes. Finally, returning to the deviant wing of entertainment, Monk-Turner and Purcell (1999) look at the treatment of female characters portrayed in videocassette pornography. They found that there, compared with white women, black women experienced more violence at the hands of both black and white men.

The content of televised sport has also drawn a good deal of attention. Hesling (1986) found that it served three basic functions: (1) providing a fascinating illusion of reality, (2) supplying surplus information (e.g., sports trivia), and (3) transforming the original sport event into an entertainment spectacle. Miller (1998) observed a noticeable narrowness in the United States in the reporting of the 1998 World Cup Soccer Tournament, evidenced for instance in lack of recognition of the World Cup achievements of participants from the southern hemisphere. Tuggle and Owen (1999) learned that the National Broadcasting Company skewed their coverage of the 1998 Centennial Olympic Games in Atlanta, by showing substantially more female individual than team sport events, while coverage of male team sport was much higher. This bias was especially pronounced in hard-hitting team sport. In another sport, Atkinson (2002) found that professional

184 • THE SOCIOLOGY OF NORMATIVE BEHAVIOR

wrestling derives much of its appeal from the ways it stages violence as something its audiences see as both “sporting” and “exciting.” Violence on television often sells well. At least that is what some producers of “reality-based” police shows appear to believe, for Oliver and Armstrong (1995) concluded that, compared with ordinary life, violent crime is overrepresented in these shows.

Popular music has also been examined for its content, as seen, for example, in McKee and Pardun’s (1996) comparative study of sexual and religious imagery in rock, country, and Christian videos. Such imagery is relatively uncommon, however, occurring in approximately 30 percent of the sample ($N = 207$) and about equally across the three types. Abrahamson (2002) found that, when played over transnational media, the Americanness of country music holds up well. And Frith (1987) observed that the central purpose of lyrics in popular song is not their intended impact on the audience but their function as a vehicle for the human voice to convey emotion.

THE INDUSTRY

The entertainment “industry” consists of, among other elements, critics, recording firms, radio and television corporations, film companies, booking agencies, owners and managers of performing venues (e.g., theaters, night clubs, concert halls), personal managers, labor unions, publicity agencies, and a variety of miscellaneous services such as costume shops, magic supply stores, ticket agencies, and musical instrument repair services. In sum, they are the strangers in the social world of each entertainment form, and the tendency has been to study each separately. One exception to this rule is Rusted’s (1999) examination of an entire business firm, including agents, producers, performers, and orchestra leaders, the mission of which was to provide live Vaudeville-style entertainment for Fortune 500 clients. Another is Frith’s (2000) analysis of the entertainment functions of the mass media, which by focusing on its technology and appeal as leisure, he treats as a commodity rather than a form of communication. Meanwhile, some of these elements have, so far as I can tell, never been sociologically examined, while others have received disproportionate scrutiny.

The entertainment recording industry is, arguably, the most studied aspect of the world of entertainment. Furthermore, the diversity and fragmentation of sociological research on entertainment is nowhere as evident as in this area. Here, for instance, Marshall (2004) has looked at the effects of piracy on the music industry, as understood through the meanings people give to the material they steal. Boon, Greenfield, and Osborn (1996) compare the judicial and practical approaches of various kinds of musical contracts. Dowd (2004) examines the diversity of markets in the American recording industry as well as the advantages and disadvantages of concentration and decentralization there. Ryan and Peterson (1993) studied the occupational and organizational consequences of the

digital revolution in making and recording music. New devices such as samplers, sequencers, and synthesizers have not only altered contemporary music but have also shifted some of the power once enjoyed almost exclusively by larger corporations to smaller independent producers.

The Hollywood film industry has also been studied. Scott (2004) examined the favorable effects on television production of the concentration of supplies in the Hollywood area as well as the acceleration of decentralization of certain kinds of television production from that area. In a rare article on labor unions in entertainment, Ames (2001) analyzes the strategies used in a six-month, partially successful strike held in 2000 by members of the Screen Actors’ Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists in a dispute over the mode of payment for ongoing use of actors’ commercials.

The pornography industry has, quite possibly, been sociologically studied as much as any in entertainment. Most recently, Jacobs (2004) examined pornography on the Internet, how such material freely moves across national borders, and how users and artists visit and maintain peer-to-peer networks for producing and sharing sexually explicit films, photos, and literary material. Lane (2000:113) observed that female-owned Web pornographic sites constitute a significant trend, for it is easy for women to establish themselves as amateurs, bypassing expensive editors, producers, and the like. On a related note, Bruckert (2002:chaps. 3–6) provides detailed description of the stripping industry.

Last, but not the least, in the industrial sphere of entertainment is the critics. Shrum (1991) sampled reviews of Edinburgh’s Festival Fringe, to learn that reviews serve mostly to make entertainment visible. The evaluative function of reviews is taken seriously only at the high cultural level of dance, theater, symphony, and similar arts. Allen and Lincoln (2004) found that critical discourse about both a film and its director is a necessary condition for receiving retrospective cultural consecration, operationalized, among other ways, as receiving three or more Academy Award nominations or being selected as 1 of 10 best films of the year by either the *New York Times* or the National Board of Review. Baumann (2001) concluded that the intellectualizing discourse of the modern critic in the late 1950s and the 1960s helped change the audience’s perception of film.

SOCIETY

This is an extremely eclectic area of the sociology of entertainment. For example, Dancis (1978) examined the relationship of punk rock to the political left. Punk, especially in Britain, directly addresses itself to social and economic problems of the working class, among them, its unemployed youth. Collins (2002) argues that television, with its enormous information base, now makes available to a mass audience information previously available only

to a few. On a different note, Carmeli (1991) studied a British circus, finding that the performer's family was the backbone of this traveling organization. A primary theme in Epstein's (1998) collection of papers on youth culture and identity is the way adolescents seek, through entertainment, both a collective and an individual sense of self. Greek and Thompson (1995) describe the battle against pornography in England and the United States, where for some segments of these nations, this form of deviant entertainment has become a major social issue.

A main area of the societal facet of entertainment is the effects of entertainment on individual and community. By no means is all this material sociological, however, since psychologists have long taken an interest in the ways entertainment influences personal beliefs, attitudes, and actions. Working from a sociological perspective, Andersen (1994) studied the link between televised, reality-based, crime programs and the urban war on drugs. He found the popular image that drug use is uniquely an urban, black problem erroneous, although it is an image that helps justify heavy police presence in black areas of American cities. Quayle and Taylor (2002) concluded that downloaded child pornography facilitates objectification of children, increasing the likelihood that, in the quest for new images, children will continue to be sexually abused. But Linz and Malamuth (1993:61) conclude that scholarly reviews of research on effects of pornography tend to reach conclusions consistent with one of three normative theories, which they labeled "conservative-moralist," "liberal," and "feminist." This calls into question the objectivity of these reviews and allied claims. Abt (1987) argues that, through videotape, the visual dimension adds significantly to the impact of rock music on its audiences (see also Bennett and Ferrell 1987). Clark (2004) sees the modern American city as an "entertainment machine," which, for officials in Chicago (one of the cities studied), includes hotels, tourism, conventions, restaurants, and related economic activities. Because it is a main part of the local economy, this machine can make, in its interest, many a social and political demand.

Another angle from which to view entertainment in society is from its historical base. Some fascinating historical accounts have been published, including Truzzi's (1968) history of the decline of the American three-ring circus. Gillett (1970) and later Ennis (1992) have written detailed histories of rock music in the United States, while Frith (1978) has done the same in Britain. Gillett ties his analysis to the urban nature of rock, while Ennis examines the evolution of this art from earlier forms of popular music. Peterson (1999) provides a fascinating history of country music and how it changed from being a folk art to being a commercially viable form of entertainment. Bufwack and Oermann (2003) trace the growing prominence of female singers in country music from 1800 to 2000.

CONCLUSIONS

It could be argued that the sociology of entertainment is but a branch (a "sub-subdiscipline") of one or more of the recognized subdisciplines of the sociologies of art, work, leisure, and popular culture. After all, entertainers and their entertainment have found a notable place in each. Moreover, maintaining theoretical and empirical ties with each is important for further development of the sociology of entertainment (the reverse holds as well). The same may be said for its ties with related disciplines, particularly history, aesthetics, cultural studies, and communication studies.

None of this need be lost, however, when as has been done here, we treat the sociology of entertainment as a subdiscipline in its own right. Gained in this conceptualization is the arrangement that entertainers and entertainment may take their places at center stage as principal foci of inquiry. No danger here of being forced to play a minor part, as could happen when high art is regarded as superior to all art; casual leisure is defined as trivial when compared with work; and serious history is held to concentrate only on earth-shaking events such as wars, institutional change, and the rise and fall of great political leaders.

Another reason for considering the sociology of entertainment as a proper subdiscipline is to give it a fighting chance to avoid being regarded as "trivial." Sure, it is casual leisure for those who consume it, and the product consumed is only moderately complex. But casual leisure has its profound benefits (Stebbins 2001b), and the entertainment industry provides work for a significant proportion of the population while generating enormous economic returns for society. Furthermore, amateur entertainers and their local communities enjoy all the rewards and benefits (and some of the costs) that come with pursuing serious leisure. In short, the triviality label is a commonsense evaluation, not a scientific one. The social scientific study of entertainment has already demonstrated in countless ways just how profound entertainment and the entertainer roles actually are. Finally, there is a whiff of hypocrisy in the air when people qualify entertainment as trivial and, in the same breath, relish their hours before the television set and spend hard-earned money taking in live performances of their favorite pop stars.

Meanwhile, sociologists studying entertainment need to be more self-conscious about their subdiscipline. That is, they must place their studies of musicians, actors, content, history, and the like—the six facets—in distinctive, entertainment-related theoretic context, which certainly includes the new theory and sensitizing concepts presented earlier in this chapter. In the end, if unable to develop distinctive theory that organizes its central ideas, the sociology of entertainment will fail to make the claim that it is an identifiable subdiscipline. This is the most critical challenge facing sociologists who declare this area their specialty.