

Disrupting Confined Boundaries: Creating Spaces of Safety and Play through Leisure

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Abstract

Women's autonomy over their time and body continues to be informed by the intricate intersections of structural inequalities in terms of class, caste, geography, religion, etc (Butcher, 2018; Datta, 2020; Demirbaş, 2024). This study specifically examines how 'play' and 'pleasure' juxtapose socially constructed ideas of womanhood in India. By focusing on leisure as a space for play, I attempt to explore the different ways in which women navigate, negotiate and reclaim urban and domestic spaces. Photo elicitation interviews were used to collect 8 cis-gendered, middle-class women's leisure experiences in Pune City. They were part of groups like a silent reading community, a kitty party (a group of women that meet to save money and party together) and a paid movie club. Braun and Clarke's (2019, 2022) reflexive approach to thematic analysis was used to analyse interviews and photographs. This study highlights how leisure may allow women to temporarily access exploration, wonder, divergence, and play, which contrasts with the confined, convergent and well-defined nature of gendered responsibilities they navigated in public and private spaces. These findings complicate the assumption that leisure and spaces are inherently liberatory, showing how play, while holding the potential to temporarily blur historical boundaries of power, remains entangled within structures it seeks to resist.

Keywords: Women's rights in India; Leisure and play; Gendered geographies; Empowerment through play; Intersectional feminism