SOCIAL WORLDS AND THE LEISURE EXPERIENCE

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PREFACE

Anselm Strauss (1978) wrote the following 40 years ago:

> *But we have not developed a general view of social worlds as a widespread, significant phenomenon, nor have we developed a program for studying them systematically. Nor do we have an adequate appreciation of what a social world perspective might signify for classical sociological issues. There is also too little awareness of the significance for interactionism itself of social world analysis. (p. 121)*

This indictment is still valid, even though some progress has been made in improving the situation. Notably, various scholars in leisure studies have amassed an impressive number of field studies bearing on the social worlds of a range of serious pursuits.

Still, this sphere of modern life needs a coherent statement about what social worlds consist of, what they do, and where they fit in social theory. That social worlds frame the leisure experience hints at the answers to these three questions. The core activity(ies) lying at the base of the leisure experience are pursued within the social world that encompasses such activity. To understand more fully why people are attracted to and continue with a serious pursuit, we must also understand its social world.

Furthermore, the concept of social world is anchored in social theory and, in the case of the worlds of leisure, that of the serious leisure perspective (SLP) has become an exemplar. This link is explained in Chapter 1, where it is noted that the social world and its accompanying ethos are centrally implicated as one of the six distinctive qualities of the serious pursuits. This theoretic marriage is in keeping with Strauss's (1978, p. 128) advice that social world research should "build general theory about social worlds rather than merely to aim at substantive research on particular ones." That said, some research should also be done to generate emergent theory, to discover new elements in heretofore never-studied social worlds.

Chapter 2 focuses on the members of leisure social worlds and the activities that the first so enthusiastically pursue. David Unruh's four-fold typology of members is the basis for this discussion. Chapter 3 provides a window on the culture and communications of these worlds, drawing on for the second Unruh's observations. Chapter 4, which concludes this book, returns to the issue of the differences separating the casual and serious leisure social worlds. Next, the contributions to this area made by Strauss and Unruh are considered. Both have underscored the salience of activities in the study of social worlds, which are so well highlighted in research on leisure.

CHAPTER 1

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Interest in the social worlds of leisure is substantial, though one largely expressed along lines of the serious leisure perspective (SLP). This book is based on what has been learned since 1973 about those worlds as acquired through the research efforts of the author and many others. In the present book, I set out a variety of hypothetical generalizations about the social worlds of amateurs, hobbyists, and career volunteers, each extrapolated from the relevant studies among the 30 conducted within the conceptual framework of the SLP since 1973.[1]

This book is an exercise in the study of the social organization of modern leisure at the meso-level of theory and analysis. Although the social world first appeared in the serious leisure literature in Stebbins (1982), I have only undertaken in-depth conceptualization of this kind in two other publications (Stebbins, 2002, Chapter 6 and Stebbins, 2017, Chapter 5). In both of these publications, the social world was but one of many concepts on the table for consideration. In the present volume, it is, by contrast, the principal plate on

the menu. Exclusive and detailed analysis is in order for this idea, it being a concept imported from symbolic interactionist sociology and therefore in need of some conceptual modification when applying it in the domain of leisure. In other words, unlike some other concepts in leisure studies, the social world is not native to this discipline; it did not emerge from exploratory fieldwork on leisure activities.

1.1. THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL WORLD

The idea of the social world is a scientific construction, albeit one that members of such a formation seem to recognize easily once given a simple description of their own. The social world is not, therefore, a folk term, even though it is exciting to be in one that will be described later in this chapter as "complex." That is, there is in such involvement a feeling of belonging to a distinct social entity, of identity, and a sophistication about how that entity functions and about one's place in it. Moreover, a given complex social world is dynamic, often changing as members come and go, improving (or declining) in the core activity, while the nature of its tourists and strangers can vary for better or worse.[2]

Social worlds may be studied with reference to a demographic category as Unruh (1983), for example, did with the elderly or to a social status such as a variety of deviant (e.g., Bradley-Engen & Ulmer, 2009) or of ethnicity (e.g., Taylor, 1983, Chapter 1). Yet, these applications of the concept are rare compared with those centered on "something palpable like activities, sites, technologies, and organizations typical of particular social worlds" as Strauss (1978, p. 121) urged. Moreover, these conceptions of the social world differ substantially from that presented in the many books using the social world as a rough equivalent of society. The latter

conception centers on broad social worlds, or social environments, in which most people interact on a routine basis framed in a shared culture and social organization (see Amazon.com/books/search term "social world").

Nevertheless, a major problem with hitching research on social worlds to the wagon of activity is that the latter, despite Strauss's observation, has until recently been insufficiently conceptualized. To be sure, the idea is a palpable matter, but what does that mean in real life? What is an activity? Nowadays, in leisure studies, it has been defined as a "type of pursuit, wherein participants in it mentally or physically (often both) think or do something, motivated by the hope of achieving a desired end" (Stebbins, 2012, p. 6). Over the years, it has become a foundational concept in the SLP. There it is argued that our existence is filled with activities, both pleasant and unpleasant: sleeping, mowing the lawn, taking the train to work, having a tooth filled, eating lunch, playing tennis matches, running a meeting, and on and on. Activities, as this list illustrates, may be categorized as work, leisure, or non-work obligation. They are, furthermore, general. In some instances, they refer to the behavioral side of recognizable roles, for example, commuter, tennis player, and chair of a meeting. In others, we may recognize the activity but not conceive of it so formally as a role, exemplified in someone sleeping, mowing a lawn, or eating lunch (not as patron in a restaurant).

The concept of activity is an abstraction, and as such, one broader than that of role. In other words, roles are associated with particular statuses, or positions, in society, whereas with activities, some are status based whereas others are not. For instance, sleeper is not a status, even if sleeping is an activity. It is likewise with lawn mower (person). Sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists tend to see social relations in terms of roles, and as a result, overlook activities whether

aligned with a role or not. Meanwhile, certain important parts of life consist of engaging in activities not recognized as roles. Where would many of us be could we not routinely sleep or eat lunch?

This definition of activity gets further refined in the concept of *core activity*: a distinctive set of interrelated actions or steps that must be followed to achieve the outcome or product that the participant seeks. As with general activities, core activities are pursued in work, leisure, and non-work obligation. Consider some examples in serious leisure: a core activity of alpine skiing is descending snow-covered slopes; in cabinet making, it is shaping and finishing wood; and in volunteer firefighting, it is putting out blazes and rescuing people from them. In each case, the participant takes several interrelated steps to successfully ski downhill, make a cabinet, or rescue someone. In casual leisure core activities, which are much less complex than in serious leisure, are exemplified in the actions required to hold sociable conversations with friends, savor beautiful scenery, and offer simple volunteer services (e.g., handing out leaflets, directing traffic in a theater parking lot, and clearing snow off the neighborhood hockey rink). Work-related core activities are seen in, for instance, the actions of a surgeon during an operation or the improvisations on a melody by a jazz clarinetist. The core activity in mowing a lawn (non-work obligation) is pushing or riding the mower. Executing an attractive core activity and its component steps and actions amount to a prominent feature drawing participants to the general activity encompassing it, because this core directly enables them to reach a cherished goal. It is likewise for obligated disagreeable core activities. In short, the core activity has motivational value of its own, even if more strongly held for some activities than others and even if some activities are disagreeable but still have to be done.

Therefore, we may conclude that leisure is a positive activity. Positiveness is a personal sentiment felt by people who pursue those things in life they desire, the things they do to make their existence, rewarding, attractive, and therefore worth living (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Stebbins, 2009). Such people feel positive about these aspects of life. Because of this sentiment, they may also feel positive toward life in general. A primary focus of positive social scientific research is on how, when, where, and why people pursue those things in life that they desire, on the things they do to create a worthwhile existence that, in combination, is substantially rewarding, satisfying, and fulfilling. General and core activities, sometimes joined with role, most of the time agreeable, but some of the time disagreeable, form the cornerstone of leisure. It is through certain activities that people, propelled by their own agency, find positive things in life, which they blend and balance with certain negative things they must also deal with. Activities, positive and negative, are carried out in the domains of work, leisure, and non-work obligation.

Activity as just defined is, by and large, a foreign idea in psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Sure, scholars there sometimes talk about, for instance, criminal, political, or economic activity, but in so doing, they are referring, in general terms, to a broad category of behavior, not a particular set of actions comprising a pursuit. Instead, our positive concept of activity knows its greatest currency in the interdisciplinary fields of leisure studies and physical education and, more recently, kinesiology. And I suspect that the first adopted the idea from the second two. There has been for many years in physical education discussion of and research on activities promoting conditioning, exercise, outdoor interests, human movement, and the like.

1.2. ACTIVITY AND SOCIAL WORLD

The concept of the social world has considerable empirical support, despite the difficulty it presents when under study. Unruh (1980, p. 277) developed the following definition:

> 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.*

In another article, Unruh added that the typical social world is characterized by voluntary identification, by a freedom to enter into and depart from it (Unruh, 1979). Moreover, because it is so diffuse, ordinary members are only partly involved in the full range of its activities. After all, a social world may be local, regional, multiregional, national, even international. Third, people in complex societies such as Canada, Britain, 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 the future the Internet could become the most popular of these.

As noted already, Strauss has argued that palpable phenomena are what engender social worlds, and I have argued that, in leisure, the core activities of the serious pursuits serve this purpose most clearly. More specifically, all forms of these pursuits are embedded in a social world, with the liberal arts hobbies having the weakest in this regard. The latter are, for the most part, individualistic undertakings. Outside the immensely interpersonal enterprise of learning a language, their acquisition rarely requires these hobbyists to enter a social world (even if, as explained later, some do enter tribes). Indeed, they can seldom find one to enter, a characteristic distinguishing this hobby from other forms of serious leisure. Additionally, some other hobbies and amateur pursuits, among them woodworking, bird-watching, stamp collecting, and piano playing, can be pursued alone, thus isolating a proportion of these enthusiasts from all leisure organizations, social networks, small groups, and social worlds included. By adopting such a lifestyle, these people are denied, or deny themselves, an important social motive for engaging in these leisure activities.

Thus the social worlds of the serious pursuits are complex phenomena, even while some are more complex than others. This excludes most casual leisure and all project-based activities. The first are either individualistically experienced as hedonic pleasure (i.e., play, relaxation, sensory stimulation, casual volunteering, and pleasurable aerobic activity) or enjoyed as an instance of mass consumption (i.e., passive and active entertainment and sociable conversation). The social organization of the second set, where it exists, commonly takes the form not of a social world but of that of a

postmodern tribe (Maffesoli, 1996; see also the next chapter in this book).

Furthermore, since social worlds are enduring phenomena, they cannot by definition be found in project-based leisure, an evanescent interest. This may seem arbitrary, for strangers supplying material and services may be necessary in making something (e.g., a rock garden, a playroom in the basement, and a macramé decoration) and tourists may become involved as appreciators of the finished project. But, critically, there are few if any members (regular or insider) to constitute a social world centered on a project, given that projects are usually one-person undertakings or more rarely two or three other people who just for that project help build a garage, prepare a wedding reception, put on a skit, or take a canoe trip.

1.3. THE PRIMACY OF THE SOCIAL WORLD

We have yet to analyze the social world of a particular serious leisure activity by exploring all the dimensions and entities that make it up theoretically. Thus we are in no position at the moment to say much more about this kind of leisure organization than what has been said in this chapter. Furthermore, small groups (dyads and triads included) and social networks also help comprise the typical leisure social world, but satisfactory analyses of these are missing as well (for an exception see Bendle & Patterson, 2009). The same holds for newsletters, magazines, websites, mass mailings, and similar mediated means of communication. In fact, the culture of the various social worlds of, for instance, amateur science or sport, hobbyist outdoor activities, and social movement volunteering are yet to be properly examined, though aspects of them show up in the Foundational Ethnographies.[3]

Still, the people who make up particular leisure social worlds and the practices, or patterns of behavior, that have emerged there over time have been reasonably well explored. This has happened not because of systematic research on social worlds (of which there has been very little), but because of the large number and variety of ethnographic studies that have been conducted on the core leisure activities around which they have taken shape. Research has also revealed that, in themselves, serious leisure social worlds, when recognized as such, become attractive formations (Stebbins, 1999, p. 267), though they appear to inspire people more to stay in them than to join them in the first place.

Usually, it takes time to learn about the social world of, say, darts or volunteering for the Scouts or the Guides, something that really only effectively occurs once inside that world. Nevertheless, I found that belonging to and participating in the social worlds of theater, entertainment magic, stand-up comedy, and classical music were heady experiences for many of the amateurs I interviewed. For them, membership and participation constituted two additional powerful reasons for pursuing their art, albeit two social reasons. This is true, in part, because belonging to such a world helps socially locate individual artists in mass urban society as well as helps personalize to some extent their involvement there. Today's serious leisure social world is significantly less impersonal than either the modern mass or the postmodern tribe. Moreover, serious leisure activities generate their own attractive lifestyles, which evolve with reference to particular social worlds.

Indeed, nearly every serious leisure activity is anchored in a vibrant social world endowed with the capacity – once recognized – to attract and hold a large proportion of its participants. Although the activity itself is exciting, the excitement it generates is also greatly enhanced by the presence of

networks of like-minded regulars and insiders, important strangers, local and national organizations, spaces for pursuing the activity, and tourists who visit from time to time – the audiences, spectators, admirers, onlookers, and others (these terms are defined shortly). Magazines, newsletters, courses, lectures, workshops, and similar channels of information make up another prominent part of the typical serious leisure enthusiast's social world.

The social world is a diffuse, amorphous entity to be sure, but nevertheless one of great importance in the impersonal, segmented life of the modern urban community. Its importance is further amplified by the parallel element of the special ethos (which is missing from Unruh's conception), namely, that such worlds are also constituted of a substantial subculture. One function of this subculture is to inter-relate the many components of this diffuse and amorphous entity. In other words, there is associated with each social world a set of special norms, values, beliefs, styles, moral principles, performance standards, and similar shared representations.

What makes amateur social worlds truly distinct is the indisputably central role that professionals play in them. In some cases, these people are locally available, where amateurs can rub elbows with them, pattern their serious leisure lives after them, and marvel at their feats made possible by full-time devotion to the activity. Although not all professionals are good role models or blessed with agreeable personalities, a sufficient number come close enough to these ideals to win a place of honor in one of the worlds of avocational leisure. They may only rarely be seen in person, but their influence is both wide and deep, owing in part to their frequent appearance in the print and electronic media of the profession in question and their outstanding reputation there.

1.4. THE SERIOUS LEISURE PERSPECTIVE

The SLP can be described, in simplest terms, as the theoretic framework that synthesizes three main forms of leisure showing, at once, their distinctive features, similarities, and interrelationships (the SLP is discussed in detail in Stebbins, 2012, 2007/2015, 2001b, 1992). Additionally, the perspective considers how the three forms – serious pursuits (serious leisure/devotee work), casual leisure, and project-based leisure – are shaped by various psychological, social, cultural, and historical conditions. Each form serves as a conceptual umbrella for a range of types of related activities. For a brief history of the perspective, see the history page at www.seriousleisure.net or, for a longer version, see Stebbins (2007/2015, Chapter 6).

My research findings and theoretic musings over the past 45 years have nevertheless evolved, coalescing into a typological map of the domain of leisure. That is, as far as is known at present, all leisure (at least in Western society) can be classified according to one of the three forms and their several types and subtypes. Figure 1.1 portrays the typological structure of the perspective. Note that this is a map, since the reader must go to Stebbins (2007/2015) to learn what terms like hobbyist, casual leisure, and career volunteer mean. In other words, this typology is a *theoretic* rather than a *descriptive* construction. The same holds for Table 1.1, which sets out a typology of volunteers anchored in the SLP. The aspects of the theory behind both constructions that bear on the social world are set out in the remainder of this chapter.

1.5. THE SERIOUS PURSUITS

We start with the serious leisure component of these pursuits. *Amateurs* are found in art, science, sport, and entertainment,

Figure 1.1. The Serious Perspective.

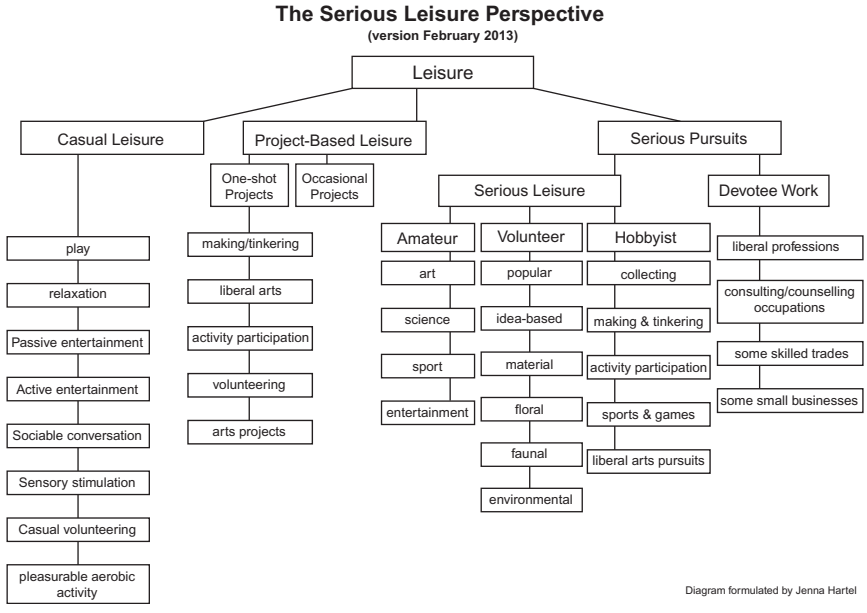


Table 1.1. Types of Volunteers and Volunteering.

Leisure Interest	Types of Volunteer and Volunteering		
	Serious Leisure (SL)	**Casual Leisure (CL)**	**Project-based Leisure (PBL)**
Popular	SL popular	CL popular	PBL popular
Idea based	SL idea based	CL idea based	PBL idea based
Material	SL material	CL material	PBL material
Floral	SL floral	CL floral	PBL floral
Faunal	SL faunal	CL faunal	PBL faunal
Environmental	SL environmental	CL environmental	PBL environmental

where they are invariably linked in a variety of ways with professional counterparts. The two can be distinguished descriptively in that the activity in question constitutes a livelihood for professionals but not for amateurs. Furthermore, most professionals work full-time at the activity, whereas all amateurs pursue it part-time. Nonetheless, the two are locked in and therefore further defined, in most instances, by their place in a professional-amateur-public (P-A-P) system of relations, an arrangement too complex to describe further in this book (for details see Stebbins, 1979, 1992, pp. 38–41; 2002, pp. 129–130).

Yoder's study (1997) of tournament bass fishing in the United States spawned an important modification of the original P-A-P model. He found, first, that fishers here are amateurs, not hobbyists, and second, that commodity producers serving both amateur and professional tournament fishers play a role significant enough to warrant changing the original triangular professional-amateur-public (P-A-P) system of relationships first set out in Stebbins (1979). In other words, in

the social world of these amateurs, such "strangers" are a highly important group consisting, in the main, of national fishing organizations, tournament promoters, and manufacturers and distributors of sporting goods and services. Significant numbers of amateurs make, sell, or advertise commodities for the sport. And the professional fishers are supported by the commodity agents by way of paid entry fees for tournaments, provision of boats and fishing tackle, and subsidies for living expenses. Top professionals are given a salary to promote fishing commodities. Yoder's (1997, p. 416) modification results in a more complicated triangular model, consisting of a system of relationships linking commodity agents, professionals/commodity agents, and amateurs/publics (C-PC-AP).

The new C-PC-AP model sharpens our understanding of some other amateur fields as well. One of them is stand-up comedy, where the influence of a manager, booking agent, or comedy club owner can weigh heavily on the career of the performer (see Stebbins, 1990, Chapter 7). It is likewise for certain types of entertainment magicians and the magic dealers and booking agents who inhabit their social world (Stebbins, 1993). And Wilson (1999) describes a similar, "symbiotic" relationship between British marathon runners and the media. But, for amateurs in other fields of art, science, sport, and entertainment, who are also linked to sets of strangers operating in their special social worlds, we shall see later that these strangers play a much more subdued role compared with the four examples just mentioned. Thus for many amateur activities, the simpler, P-A-P model still offers the most valid explanation of their social structure.

But note here that enactment of the core activity by the professionals in a particular field, to influence amateurs there, must be sufficiently visible to those amateurs. If the amateurs, in general, have no idea of the prowess of their professional counterparts, the latter becomes irrelevant as role models,

and the leisure side of the activity remains at a hobbyist level (e.g., the pros are too rare or too obscure). This is an economic rather than a sociological definition of professional. As a result of this reasoning I have redefined "professional" in (economic rather than sociological, Stebbins, 2007/2015, pp. 6–7) terms that relate better to amateurs and hobbyists, namely, as someone who is dependent on the income from an activity that other people pursue with little or no remuneration as leisure. The income on which the professional is dependent may be this person's only source of money (i.e., full-time professional) or it may be one of two or more sources of money (i.e., part-time professional). Although some of these professionals may be sociological professionals (as described in Stebbins, 1992), many economic professionals are in fields where professionalization is in the sociological sense only beginning.

Hobbyists lack this professional alter ego, suggesting that, historically, all amateurs were hobbyists before their fields professionalized. Both types are drawn to their leisure pursuits significantly more by self-interest than by altruism, whereas volunteers engage in activities requiring a more or less equal blend of these two motives. Hobbyists may be classified in five types: collectors, makers and tinkerers, non-competitive activity participants (e.g., fishing, hiking, and orienteering), hobbyist sports and games (e.g., ultimate Frisbee, croquet, and gin rummy), and the liberal arts hobbies.[4] The liberal arts hobbyists are enamored of the systematic acquisition of knowledge for its own sake. Many of them accomplish this by reading voraciously in a field of art, sport, cuisine, language, culture, history, science, philosophy, politics, or literature (Stebbins, 1994a). But some of them go beyond this to expand their knowledge still further through cultural tourism, documentary videos, television programs, and similar resources.

Volunteering according to the SLP is un-coerced, intentionally productive, altruistic activity engaged in during free

time. Engaged in as leisure, it is, thus, activity that people want to do (Stebbins, 2015a). It is through volunteer work – done in either a formal or an informal setting – that these people provide a service or benefit to one or more individuals (who must be outside that person's family). Usually, volunteers receive no pay, though people serving in volunteer programs may be compensated for out-of-pocket expenses. Meanwhile, in the typical case, volunteers who are altruistically providing a service or benefit to others are themselves also benefiting from various rewards experienced during this process (e.g., pleasant social interaction, self-enriching experiences, and sense of contributing to nonprofit group success). In other words, volunteering is motivated by two basic attitudes: altruism *and* self-interest (Stebbins, 1996b).

Serious leisure is rarely significantly remunerative. And this even if a potter sells a vase or two, a racquetball player gets paid for giving a handful of lessons, an archeologist receives a fee for a preconstruction survey of a building site, or an amateur pitches batting practice for a local professional team. In some hobbyist sports, including snowboarding, skateboarding, and cycling, winners in competitions may receive a monetary prize, perhaps money for an endorsement, doing so often enough to make a living of some kind. But as just observed the activity does not then become a profession, since this group of elite performers is small (many participants eschew competition, Stebbins, 2005, p. 65) and limited to the number of paying consumers of such entertainment.

1.6. DEVOTEE WORK

The subject of devotee work and occupational devotion has been to this point only sporadically covered. The two are so

labeled because these devotees feel a powerful devotion, or strong, positive attachment, to a form of self-enhancing work. In such work, the sense of achievement is high and the core activity endowed with such intense appeal that the line between this work and leisure is virtually erased (Stebbins, 2004/2014). In effect, this is serious leisure for which the worker gets paid and which amounts to a significant part or all of a livelihood.

Occupational devotees turn up chiefly, though not exclusively, in four areas of the economy, providing their work there is, at most, only lightly bureaucratized: certain small businesses, the skilled trades, the consulting and counseling occupations, and the public- and client-centered professions. Public-centered professions are found in the arts, sports, scientific, and entertainment fields, while those that are client-centered abound in such fields as law, teaching, accounting, and medicine (Stebbins, 1992, p. 22). It is assumed in all this that the work and its core activity to which people become devoted carries with it a respectable personal and social identity within their reference groups, since it would be difficult, if not impossible, to be devoted to work that those groups scorned.

The fact of devotee work for some people and its possibility for others signals that work, as one of life's domains, may be highly positive. Granted, most workers are not fortunate enough to find such work. For those who do find it, the work meets six criteria (Stebbins, 2004/2014, p. 9). To generate occupational devotion:

(**1**) The valued core activity must be profound; to perform it acceptability requires substantial skill, knowledge, or experience or a combination of two or three of these.

(**2**) The core must offer significant variety.

(3) The core must also offer significant opportunity for creative or innovative work, as a valued expression of individual personality. The adjectives "creative" and "innovative" stress that the undertaking results in something new or different, showing imagination and application of routine skill or knowledge. That is, boredom is likely to develop only after the onset of fatigue experienced from long hours on the job, a point at which significant creativity and innovation are no longer possible.

(4) The would-be devotee must have reasonable control over the amount and disposition of time put into the occupation (the value of freedom of action), such that he can prevent it from becoming a burden. Medium and large bureaucracies have tended to subvert this criterion. For, in the interest of the survival and development of their organization, managers have felt they must deny their nonunionized employees this benefit, sometimes forcing them to accept stiff deadlines and heavy workloads. But no activity, be it leisure or work, is so appealing that it invites unlimited participation during all waking hours.

(5) The would-be devotee must have both an aptitude and a taste for the work in question. This is, in part, a case of one man's meat being another's poison. John finds great fulfillment in being a physician, an occupation that holds little appeal for Jane who, instead, adores being a lawyer (work John finds unappealing).

(6) The devotees must work in a physical and social milieu that encourages them to pursue often and without significant constraint the core activity. This includes freedom from excessive paperwork, caseloads, class sizes, market demands, and the like.

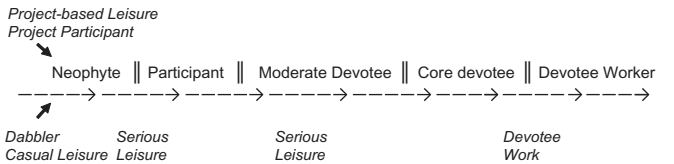
Sounds ideal, if not idealistic, but in fact, occupations and work roles exist that meet these criteria. In today's climate of occupational deskilling, over-bureaucratization, and similar impediments to fulfilling core activity at work, many people find it difficult to locate or arrange devotee employment. The six criteria listed later characterize serious leisure and devotee work, giving further substance to the claim put forward here that such leisure and devotee work occupy a great deal of common ground. Together they comprise the class of serious pursuits.

1.7. SIX QUALITIES

The serious pursuits are further defined by six distinctive qualities (sometimes referred to as characteristics), qualities uniformly found among its amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers. Sometimes, this is a matter of degree. More precisely, *their richest manifestation is found in these pursuits, with diluted manifestation or none at all evident in some casual and project-based activities*. For example, even in the serious pursuits, neophytes are unlikely to put in the levels of effort and perseverance that moderate devotees do (see Figure 1.2).

Thus there is the occasional need to *persevere*. Participants who want to continue experiencing the same level of fulfillment in the activity have to meet certain challenges from time to time. Another quality sharply distinguishing all the serious pursuits is the opportunity to follow a (leisure, or leisure-devotee work) *career* in the endeavor, a career shaped by its own special contingencies, turning points, and stages of achievement and involvement (the most extensive treatment now found in Stebbins, 2014). Moreover, most, if not all, careers here owe their existence to a third quality: serious leisure participants make significant personal *effort* using their

Figure 1.2. SLP Involvement Scale (Version February 2014).



Notes: Level of involvement may peak at any point on this scale; some dabblers and project participants never become neophytes; and some neophytes before their involvement neither dabbled nor participated in a project.

specially acquired knowledge, training, or skill and, indeed at times, all three. Careers for serious leisure participants unfold along lines of their efforts to achieve, for instance, a high level of showmanship, athletic prowess, or scientific knowledge or to accumulate formative experiences in a volunteer role.

The serious pursuits are further distinguished by several *durable benefits*, or tangible, salutary outcomes such activity has for its participants. They include self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, self-fulfillment, regeneration or renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction and sense of belonging, and lasting physical products of the activity (e.g., a painting, scientific paper, and piece of furniture). A further benefit – self-gratification, or pure fun, which is by far the most evanescent benefit in this list – is also enjoyed by casual leisure participants. The possibility of realizing such benefits constitutes a powerful goal in the serious pursuits.

Fifth, each serious pursuit is distinguished by a unique and complex *ethos and social world* that emerges in parallel with each expression of it. An ethos is the spirit of the community

of serious leisure/devotee work participants, as manifested in shared context of attitudes, practices, values, beliefs, goals, and so on. The social world of the participants is the organizational milieu in which the associated ethos – in essence a cultural formation – is expressed (as attitudes, beliefs, and values) or realized (as practices and goals). The complexity of this ethos is also a matter of degree, which means that empirical and theoretical cutoff points separating casual leisure and serious pursuits must be established statistically, using for example, the Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure developed by Gould and colleagues (2008) or the 21-item scale of Tsaur and Liang (2008).

According to David Unruh (1979, 1980), every social world has its characteristic groups, events, routines, practices, and organizations. It is held together, to an important degree, by semiformal, or mediated, communication. In other words, in the typical case, social worlds are neither heavily bureaucratized nor substantially organized through intense face-to-face interaction. Rather, communication is commonly mediated by newsletters, posted notices, telephone messages, mass mailings, radio and television announcements, and similar means.

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 leisure/work activity itself, but who nonetheless do something important to make it possible, for example, by managing municipal parks (in amateur baseball), minting coins (in hobbyist coin collecting), and organizing the work of teachers' aides (in career volunteering). Tourists are temporary participants in a social world; they have come on the scene momentarily for entertainment, diversion, or profit. Most amateur and hobbyist activities have publics of some kind, which are, in essence, constituted of tourists. The clients of many volunteers can be similarly classified. The regulars

routinely participate in the social world; in serious leisure, they are the amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers themselves. The insiders are those among them who show exceptional devotion to the social world they share, to maintaining it, to advancing it (see involvement scale in Stebbins, 2014, pp. 32–33 or in www.seriousleisure.net/Diagrams). Scott and McMahan (2017) describe in detail these exceptional participants who engage in "hardcore" leisure.

Unruh's four types of members – strangers, tourists, regulars, and insiders – attest the complexity of this formation, and what therefore must be done to portray decently the social world of any given leisure activity. In other words, these four types are interrelated in diverse and often subtle ways, demanding thus close ethnographic examination of them. Complex social worlds spring up around complex leisure activities, namely, those animating the serious pursuits. The complexity of the latter is evident in the diversity of their groups and organizations, events, facilities for pursuing the core activities, resources, and so forth.

The sixth quality – participants in serious leisure tend to identify strongly with their chosen pursuits – springs from the presence of the other five distinctive qualities. In contrast, most casual leisure, although not usually humiliating or despicable, is nonetheless too fleeting, mundane, and commonplace to become the basis for a distinctive *identity* for most people. Some of the benefits (e.g., sense of belonging and self-gratification), aspects of a social world, and identity are also found in casual leisure, albeit in comparatively watered-down form. In other words, notable perseverance and effort linked to a sharp sense of leisure career and durable benefits all of which are framed in the social world and ethos of the activity underlie the distinctive identity that emerges.

1.8. CONCLUSIONS

As a summary, social worlds will, in the following chapters, be considered with reference to seven basic features:

- Members coalesce into a social world doing so around a shared leisure interest, leisure-related values, and distinctive core activities.
- Relations among members occur directly in dyads, triads, small groups, organizations, and social networks and indirectly through certain means of communication.
- There are means of communication with like-minded participants.
- Strangers provide, among other things, the necessities for doing the core activities, such as repair services, relevant information, meeting places (in bars, restaurants, coffee shops, club rooms, etc.), and facilities and services for enacting the core activities. In some activities, commodity agents provide certain necessities for enacting a core activity, for example, fishing tackle, magic tricks, sports equipment, and musical instrument needs (e.g., strings, valve oil, rosin, reeds, and amplifiers) [see, for instance, Yoder (1997) and Stebbins (1993)].
- There is a culture consisting of shared values and knowledge. It includes resources such as books, magazine articles, websites, manuals, equipment reviews, and the received history of the interest and its pursuit over the years. Social events are also part of this culture, exemplified in conferences, competitions, exhibitions, concerts, lectures, workshops, and ceremonies. And the culture includes standards of excellence for evaluating performance in the core activities and the goods and services offered by its strangers.

- There are varying levels of participation in a social world. That is, some members are temporarily inactive, while some active members participate only partially.
- Tourists are not essential for all members (e.g., lone pianist, guitarist, collector, carver, hiker, birder, gardener, volunteer serving a non-human target of benefits).

I (Stebbins, 2002, Chapter 6) reviewed the studies up to 2002 that included an SLP-based analysis of the social worlds of various amateur, hobbyist, and volunteer activities. The amateurs discussed were archeologists (Stebbins), actors (Stebbins), fishers (Yoder), runners (Wilson), mushroom collectors (Fine), stand-up comics (Stebbins), and entertainment magicians (Stebbins).[5] The section on hobbyists covered barbershop singing (Stebbins), purebred dog breeding (Baldwin & Norris), gun collectors (Olmsted), genealogy (Lambert; Horne), curling (Apostle), and shuffleboard (Snyder). Volunteer social worlds have been explored among firefighters (Thompson), francophones living as linguistic minorities (Stebbins), and people serving motorsport events (Harrington, Cuskelly, & Auld). Additional research on leisure social worlds is reported in many of the foundational ethnographies.

Finally, a couple of studies were inadvertently omitted from Stebbins (2002), which add still further to the corpus of literature on this distinguishing quality on the serious pursuits. They are Cassie's (2001) research on the social world of older birders and that of Scott and Godbey (1994) on the social world of contract bridge players. Moreover, numerous subsequent works have continued to expand our understanding of this key concept in the study of leisure (see www.seriousleisure.net/Bibliography under Amateur, Hobbyist, Sport, and Tourism). They explored it in classical music (Palmer, 2006), shag dancing (Brown, 2004), beekeeping (Ferguson, 2007), human–canine partnerships (Hultsman, 2015), yoga travel (Patterson,

Getz, & Grubb, 2016), long-distance running (Robinson, Patterson, & Axelsen, 2014; Shipway, Holloway, & Jones, 2013), long-distance running tourism (Shipway, 2008), event and travel careers (Getz & Patterson, 2013), Pacific Crest Trail hiking (Lum, Keith, & Scott, 2018), and a miscellaneous sample of "hardcore" hobbyists (Scott & McMahan, 2017). The research cited in these two paragraphs constitutes the empirical base for the ideas presented in this book.

NOTES

1. Does all research on leisure social worlds fall under the heading of the SLP? Probably not, though I have yet to run across any that fall outside it. The central role that the social world plays in the SLP appears to have encouraged researchers working from this perspective to collect data on it (see later in this chapter).

2. Member, tourist, and stranger will be defined shortly.

3. The Foundational Ethnographies provided initial empirical support for the basic concepts of the SLP, including social worlds, as they have emerged and continue to be shaped inductively. Initially, there were 25 grounded-theoretic, foundational exploratory studies. Nine centered on amateurs, 10 on hobbyists, and 6 on volunteers. Five more have been added to the list since 1996. See Stebbins (in press, Chapter 2) for further discussion and references.

4. These activities are inherently non-competitive, even while individuals might compete as to who reaches the mountain top first, catches the most fish or the biggest one, seen the greatest variety of birds, and so on.

5. Complete references for the authors of the studies noted in this paragraph and the next are available in Stebbins (2002) and, both before and after 2002, in www.seriousleisure.net/Bibliography under the headings of Amateurs, Hobbyists, Sport, and Volunteers.