

## Extended Leisure Experiences: A Sociological Conceptualization

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### **Abstract:**

Our interest in this research reflection is to introduce what we call *extended leisure experiences*—activities that leisure participants engage in following the completion of a primary leisure activity. Our approach is largely descriptive and exploratory as we outline some properties of the concept and then flesh them out using observations gleaned from participation in the social worlds of contract bridge and music scenes. An understanding of extended leisure experiences will broaden our appreciation of how different phases of leisure activity are connected with one another and provide insight into how participants create meaning from their involvement in different pastimes.

**Keywords:** leisure | multiphase experiences | social worlds

### **Article:**

Over the last few decades, the leisure literature has seen a growing interest in what Stewart (1998) and others have described as multiphase experiences. Much of this interest stems from the groundbreaking work of Clawson and Knetsch (1966), who observed that tourism and outdoor recreation activities have five phases: anticipation, travel to the site, activities on site, travel home from the site, and recollection. A preponderance of the research on multiphase experiences is grounded in the idea that people's moods and feelings evolve over the course of a leisure event or trip and are affected by environmental and/or social cues (e.g., Hultsman, 1998; Havitz & Mannell, 2005; Lee & Shafer, 2002). This area of inquiry is decidedly social psychological as researchers have focused on what Stewart described as an "evolving state of mind" (p. 391).

Missing from research on multiphase experiences is a sociological inquiry of how different phases of leisure are socially organized and what they mean to participants. Also missing is a treatment of how leisure experiences are supplemented and enhanced by continued activities that help participants think about and understand their involvement. Our interest in this research reflection is to introduce what we call extended leisure experiences—activities that leisure participants engage in following the completion of a primary leisure activity. The nineteenth hole in golf provides an expedient example. Following the completion of a golf game, many participants retire to a clubhouse to relax and analyze their game. Little has been written formally about this kind of leisure phenomenon. On the one hand, extended leisure experiences resemble the recollection phase of recreation experiences as outlined by Clawson and Knetsch

(1966). As the name suggests, recollection entails thinking about “the total experience ... [and sharing] recollections with friends, relatives, and associates” (p. 34). Although extended leisure experiences include recollections of this sort, they are better understood as activities that participants engage in following a primary leisure activity. They are also linked to ordinary leisure activities that may occur anywhere and anytime. Thus, unlike studies spawned from the work of Clawson and Knetsch, travel is not integral to our conceptualization of extended leisure experiences.

Our approach is largely descriptive and exploratory as we outline some properties of the concept and then flesh them out using observation gleaned from participation in the social worlds of contract bridge and music scenes. An understanding of extended leisure experiences will broaden our appreciation of how different phases of leisure activity are connected with one another and provide insight into how participants create meaning from their involvement in everyday pastimes.

### **Properties of extended leisure experiences**

Examples of extended leisure experiences abound and include the nineteenth hole in golf, ritualistic parties following rugby games, arm-chair coaching after a sporting event, and perusal of photos following a vacation. Each of these examples zeros in on the first property of extended leisure experiences: they are dependent in their meaning on one or more primary activities. By their very nature, extended leisure experiences are ones that are played out following the completion of such events. In Clawson’s and Knetsch’s (1966) conceptualization of phases of outdoor recreation experiences, on-site activities exemplify primary activities. In Zurcher’s (1970) study of a poker group, members routinely engaged in a meal following the game itself. Poker is the primary activity while the meal is the extended leisure activity. Even though an extended leisure experience necessarily follows a primary activity, many participants may regard the extended leisure experience with as much importance as the primary activity.

This leads to a second point—extended leisure experiences provide a context for thinking, discussing, and reminiscing about events experienced during the primary activity. On one level, extended leisure experiences provide participants a context for savoring a primary activity (Filep, Cao, Jiang, & DeLacy, 2013). Extended leisure experiences also provide a context for bringing new meaning to the primary activity by refocusing participants’ attention to specific incidents (Patterson, Williams, Watson, & Roggenbuck, 1998). Some incidents have a “referential afterlife” (Goffman, 1976) and become “memory markers” (Fine, 1986) for participants as they interpret and impute meaning to events that transpired during the primary activity. The memory work we are describing here is one that occurs more or less naturally as people strive to make sense of the past (Coleman, 1999; Maines, Sugrue, & Katovich, 1983).

It is important to note that participants in primary activities may be joined by nonparticipants during extended leisure experiences. Stated differently, some people may skip a primary activity and participate solely in the extended leisure experience. Vacationers frequently regale their family, friends, and workmates with photographs and tales of their trip. Likewise, many sport fans, regardless of whether or not they watched or attended a sporting event, read and talk about games with others. All this suggests that non-participants in extended leisure experiences can play an important role in the memory work that occurs during extended leisure experiences.

A third characteristic of extended leisure experiences is they are not limited to specific times or spaces. Extended leisure experiences may occur immediately following the primary activity, the day after, days after, and so on into the future. In some instances extended leisure experiences transcend tangible and temporal individual experiences through a historical connection to past experience, such as returning to the cabin that has been in the family for generations. In some cases, people will have independently attended the same concert or sporting event. Participants will refer to these events therein to orient future collective involvement and bonding. Similarly, extended leisure experiences may occur in spaces that are either divorced or integrated with the primary activity. By implication, extended leisure experiences may be pursued within work contexts, as when work mates inquire about a colleague's blind date the night before. These extended leisure experiences are similar in nature to what Kelly (1987) described as leisure episodes—leisure experiences that “seem to just happen in the midst of a social context with other manifest aims” (p. 127). Although these interactions or episodes are meaningful in themselves, their content is inspired by a participant's involvement in a primary leisure activity.

The emergence of social media has blurred the spatial and temporal distinctions that have historically existed between primary activities and extended leisure experiences. Social media allows a leisure participant to share photos, videos, and comments with people who are “offsite.” Nonparticipants may well provide the participant immediate feedback about what he or she is doing and influence the trajectory of his or her subsequent behavior. Social media may simply speed up the process by which participants think about their leisure involvement.

Finally, extended leisure experiences may be pursued individually or collectively. This is true regardless of whether the primary leisure activity was pursued alone or in the company of others. In instances where extended leisure experiences are pursued collectively, participants can be seen to jointly interpret the meaning and significance of primary leisure activity. In some cases, patterns of activity that follow a primary leisure activity may take on a ritualistic, even sacred, quality. A clear example of this is reflected in rugby football parties, where drinking beer and singing songs have become ritualized post-game activities pursued by competing teams and their respective entourages (Sheard & Dunning, 1981). Importantly, collective extended leisure experiences contribute to group solidarity and the formation of group culture. As we noted above, incidents that occur during primary leisure activities serve as “memory markers” and are used by participants to create what Fine (1983) referred to as a gaming culture.

### **Extended leisure experiences in the social worlds of contract bridge and music scenes**

The remainder of this article focuses on fleshing out our ideas about extended leisure experiences by illustrating briefly how they are manifest within the social worlds of contract bridge and music scene participation. Our observations are based on our respective, and extensive, experiences in each of these seemingly different social worlds and serve to illustrate the myriad ways in which leisure experiences inform future appreciation and understanding of an experience.

#### **Social world of contract bridge**

Extended leisure experiences in the social world of bridge occur principally in the form of post-mortems. A post-mortem is a native term used by bridge players to refer to a discussion of a

hand following the end of play. Although post-mortems are engaged in by most bridge players, they are particularly common among players who participate in bridge games sanctioned by the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL), the ruling bridge body in North America. Our focus here is limited to describing where post-mortems occur and their various functions.

Post-mortems take place in ACBL club rooms, bars and restaurants, homes and on telephones, and through public forums. Post-mortems that take place in ACBL club houses occur adjacent to places where the bridge game occurred. Players may talk about a hand after it is played or between rounds. These post-mortems are not sanctioned because of time limitations, and unauthorized information may be inadvertently passed to players who have not played the hand. Post-mortems are much more likely to occur following the completion of a game. These discussions are open and involve both partners and nonpartners. Post-mortems that take place at the completion of play constitute authentic extended leisure experiences because such discussions are clearly demarcated from the game itself. Players in the ACBL club games routinely maintain an ongoing, private score (a native term) of hands played during the game. These private scores help players remember hands discussed during post-mortems.

Following the activity at the club room, some players adjourn to a nearby restaurant, bar, or coffee shop where additional post-mortem discussion occurs. Discussions not only include the hands but also game-related behavior (e.g., an argument that transpires between two players). Such sessions are punctuated by the telling of favorite bridge stories that are part of the bridge group's lore.

Some players engage in post-mortems in the privacy of their homes. For example, married couples who play as partners sometimes go home after the game and review all the hands that they had played that night. Players also engage in post-mortems over the telephone. These generally occur the day after the game although some extend days after a game. Finally, postmortems also take place within the context of public forums. Sometimes players will refer bridge questions to experts in bridge magazines or the internet. Some hands posted on the internet may be discussed and analyzed for days by bridge players. This is an excellent example of an extended leisure experience that includes non-participants (i.e., people who were not present at the time of the actual bridge game).

Post-mortems serve a number of functions for the individuals involved. Three of these—skill development, social interaction, and enculturation—are described below. Bridge players are quick to point out the importance of post-mortem discussions in improving one's bridge skills. Indeed, this appears to be the central or manifest function (Merton, 1957) of postmortem discussions. Players maintain that post-mortems are greatly enhanced with the presence of advanced or expert players because of their ability to remember hands and analyze them. Players also observe that the willingness to talk about hands and learn from one's prior mistakes are important in building a successful partnership. Individuals lacking on either count are regarded by some players as unacceptable partners. It is important to note that post-mortems are not always constructive. Players sometimes criticize their partner for poor bidding and play, resulting in heated arguments. In some cases, overt criticism results in the breakup of a regular partnership.

Post-mortems provide players an important outlet for social interaction because conversation during the game itself is not sanctioned. During play some individuals become annoyed when others talk about matters that are not directly related to the play. During post-mortems, however, players can be seen relaxing as evidenced by talking, laughing, storytelling,

and joking around. As noted by one bridge writer, “many players find going over the scores extends the fun of the game” [italics added] (McCullin, 1988, p. 23).

A latent function (Merton, 1957) of post-mortems appears to be the enculturation of a group’s way of doing things. This is particularly evident in post-mortems that are held in bars and restaurants. As noted above, these sessions are frequently punctuated by the telling of bridge stories. The stories are fun but they also serve to draw newcomers into the group. Storytelling is part of an informal ceremony that displays to newcomers the camaraderie among members that is often overlooked by visitors and outsiders to the club. Stories also contain messages that provide insight into the group’s way of doing things, especially those things that are taken-for-granted by regulars. During the game itself, players have neither the time nor the inclination to teach newcomers about these understandings. The stories, therefore, serve as an informal, albeit important, mechanism for the transmission of this information.

### Music scene participation

Phases of participation within music scenes tend to be far more blurred than they are in bridge. For some music scenes, especially those of “jam bands” (bands such as Phish and Widespread Panic that typically rely on a heavy touring schedule and frequent on-stage improvisation), participation often involves pre- and post-event interactions in “shakedown streets” (parking lots and other open areas) where fans congregate to sell memorabilia, consume food, drugs, and alcohol, and interact with other fans. Many fans follow jam bands on tour, going from city to city, thus truly extending the leisure experience. Participation in music scenes of this sort is truly continuous whereby involvement precipitates future interactions (Straw, 1991)

Jam band participation typically involves tangential consumption. This often takes place in the form of listening to the band’s music outside of concerts, wearing the band’s images on clothing, interacting with likeminded fans on message boards, and planning for upcoming trips to attend more concerts. For the most passionate fans, a good deal of time is devoted to simply reflecting on past experiences and anticipating future experiences. Simply put, tangential consumption extends the concert experience by permeating fans’ everyday lives.

A principal form of maintaining a connection to a jam band is through listening to the band’s music outside the concert experience (Adams, Ernestes, & Lucey, 2014). Sometimes this music is produced in a studio, but for those who follow jam bands it is more typically live concert recordings. It is common to this genre for fans to record shows and distribute them on hosting sites, which allow free posting and downloading of shows with artists’ permission. Fans often seek out shows they attended to relive concert experiences. Sometimes they will listen to shows they did not attend at the recommendation of friends or through fan discussion boards. Another way fans maintain a connection to a jam band is through online forums. These forums allow fans to discuss and dissect the anatomy of a concert. They also provide a mechanism for connecting with others via shared musical experiences. While jam band fans enjoy face-to-face social interaction, due to the frequency of geographic displacement and intermittent concert attendance, social media and fan sites have become important vehicles for maintaining relationships, not to mention extending the leisure experience.

For many jam band participants, extended leisure experiences occur on an individual level. Some fans are affected by certain songs based on lyrical content; they may find that certain lines from a particular song serve as a mantra or speak to issues in their lives that are particularly germane. In some instances there will be a specific version of a song played at a concert they

previously attended that is savored. They may play the song frequently to hearken back to the actual experience and crystallize how they felt in that moment, recall whom their companions were, and muse over how a song affects their general personal well-being. Listening to a jam band's music allows fans to anticipate what they are likely to hear in the future. Here we see a clear distinction from the post-mortems of bridge; the extended leisure experience for jam band fans very much involves private involvement outside of concert participation.

Nevertheless, the extended leisure experiences among jam band participants include elements of enculturation that allow them to build fan communities and become more knowledgeable about the intricacies of the music. Outside the concert experience, jam band fans discuss what they heard and saw with other fans. These discussions provide frames around which fans create meaning and lasting impressions. At the same time, friendships made through music scene participation extend the communal experience by allowing for a social thread that is an accumulation of shared interactions over time. It is the intermittent and repeated engagement in a music scene through which fans build and maintain relationships (Harmon & Kyle, 2015). By establishing patterns of sustained interaction, each musical experience is not an isolated event, but a continuation of past involvement.

### **Conclusions and suggestions for future research**

This article began by outlining various dimensions of extended leisure experiences. Extended leisure experiences are activities that are pursued following a primary leisure activity. Extended leisure experiences may be an integral facet of the leisure event, but may also take place in events or episodes that are spatially and temporally separate from the primary leisure activity. Next, extended leisure experiences were examined within the social world of bridge and music scene participation. Extended leisure experiences in bridge take the form of postmortem discussions, and in this music scene, can take place in the form of listening to shows that fans had attended in the past.

Future research may further our understanding of extended leisure experiences by addressing a number of questions. To what extent are the characteristics of post-mortems in the bridge world and listening to recordings of past concerts attended in music communities generalizable to other leisure social worlds? Our choices of leisure social worlds were merely illustrative but our observations may well inform future research. Another line of inquiry is to examine how technology and social media are impacting participants' involvement in primary leisure activities and extended leisure experiences. We noted that the proliferation of social media has increasingly blurred the spatial and temporal boundaries between the two. In some ways it seems that people are using social media to document and stage their everyday experiences for the benefit of others. If so, we wonder if primary activities are increasingly becoming a platform for participants to tell stories during extended leisure experiences. Finally, are some forms of leisure more or less conducive to extended leisure experiences? Stebbins (2007) has documented that enduring benefits are more likely to occur from participation in serious leisure rather than participation in casual leisure. It could be that serious leisure activities provide participants a great deal to think about and share with others.

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