

Putting the Social Back in the Social Psychology of Leisure

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INTRODUCTION

The heart of leisure is the constitutive experience in which the concept of self is enhanced symbolically through interaction with others. Rossman (1989) declares that interaction alone is fundamental to recreation, and Iso-Ahola charges that "it seems to be more important to know where volleyball nets are put after a game than to know how to best facilitate enjoyable social interaction...during the game" (1980, p. 42). In Iso-Ahola's words, we lack "systematic theorizing regarding the relationship between social processes and leisure behaviour" (1980, p. 43). To him, leisure meaning arises out of the social situation. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the state of social-psychological research and to propose a Multiple-Method Field Investigation (MMFI) Model to study the interactive process in leisure.

THE STATE OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

What was stated a decade ago still holds true: research on the leisure experience is psychologically rich and socially impoverished (Neulinger, 1980). Similar to what Senn (1989) and Solano (1989) said about the broad scope of the discipline, there is a great deal of literature on psychological concepts in social-psychology such as attitude, attribution, conformity, and self-concept, but there is little to read in regard to social aspects like the face-to-face process of social organization, construction of meaning, and sense of mutuality in small groups. Thus, we know little about the experience in which leisure meaning forms. "This calls for the scientific study of...actions by the individual (verbal and non-verbal) in concrete situations over time" (Sherif, 1976, p. 171). To do this we must engage in in-depth study of the everyday experience of small groups.

THE MULTIPLE-METHOD FIELD INVESTIGATION (MMFI) MODEL

Criticisms of social-psychological research on individuals are its reliance on self report and the use of singular methods (Solano, 1989; Wylie, 1961). According to Sherif, "a combination of independent research methods is, in fact, needed in almost any social-psychological research" (1976, p. 90) particularly because it allows the investigator to view group life over time. Furthermore, research findings are strengthened by the support and confirmation made possible by the multiple-method approach where issues of validity and reliability are treated in the design (Bruyn, 1966; Campbell and Fiske, 1959; Miles and Huberman, 1984). To this end, a two-dimension Multiple-Method Field Investigation Model is proposed to focus on the interactions of a group over time.

The vertical dimension, called *Interactive Experience*, shows methodological proximity to the group in action. The levels of proximity include: direct experience interacting with the group under study; an intermediate level of observed analysis; and a more removed level of primary and secondary record analysis. The horizontal dimension expresses *Time* as a design concept, suggesting data collection can be implemented before, during, and after the study group's interactive experience takes place. Together, the two dimensions form a grid, the central focus of which is the interactive *Sphere of Action* where methods which directly document group process over time are suggested. Use of methods located elsewhere on the grid can elaborate, correlate, and verify findings. For example, observational data are useful as a series of "snapshots" of the group at various times during the investigation. Data available in records yield information about psychological or social phenomena which can be used to support interpretation of directly

obtained information about the group experience.

MULTIPLE-METHOD FIELD STUDIES IN LEISURE SETTINGS

Use of multiple methods is not a new idea. Small and large field studies have been conducted on the social group experience with a focus on the social organization of leisure. One study is a classic field experiment on conflict and cooperation among groups in summer camp (Sherif, 1976). Another involves a five-year investigation of the conflict resolution process involved in organizing a major community arts festival (Little, 1985, 1988, 1989). Other studies include a softball social group (Glancy, 1985), personal goods auctions (Glancy, 1988a, 1988b), gun auctions (Olmstead, 1987), and race track and gambling casinos (Abt and Smith, 1982; Abt, Smith, and McGurrin, 1985). With each study, participant observation was a major methodology; however, interviews, geographic and interaction analyses, sociometrics, secondary data analysis, observation, group appraisal, archive study, and survey were among the overall variety of tools employed, indicating both depth and breadth of scope on the *Time* and *Interaction Experience* dimensions.

CONCLUSIONS

The proposed model extends former multimethod recommendations to provide a strategy for balancing social psychological inquiry of leisure. Just as the discipline of social psychology notes its failure to include the social aspect, we, too, have erred in not maintaining balance in social-psychological investigations of leisure. Leary (1989) identified the problem as a lack of self-monitoring. We are all responsible, as scholars, for the scope of research perspective. Our challenge is to study the social experience of leisure at the moment of conception and in the situation as the centerpiece of methodology. These include participant observation, informal interviews, informant feedback, or personal diaries, for example. Beyond this, depth of interpretation can be gained by adding observation methods and primary and secondary record analysis.

Scope, or breadth of perspective, is created by collecting data both prior to and following the start of the interactive situation being studied. By applying the level of proximity concept (interaction, observation, and records analysis) with time (pre-, during, and post-event), social aspects of a leisure situation can be described, interpreted, and verified empirically. This is not to say that we must now swing the pendulum from the study of psychological aspects of social psychology to the social side. We should, however, move to a more balanced approach to our research. As members of a community of scholars, perhaps we can encourage and/or engage in research which helps us deal with the broad spectrum of inquiry.

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