ERASING THE LINE BETWEEN WORK AND LEISURE
IN NORTH AMERICA

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Some work, called here “devotee work,” is so attractive that it is essentially leisure for those engaging in it. For them, the only important difference between their work and what their counterparts in serious leisure do is that devotee workers get paid for their efforts. This erased line is, of course, only part of the interface between work and leisure, but it is, in fact, an ancient part. Though largely unrecognized in contemporary scholarly circles, the similarity of work and leisure in certain activities dates to, at least, the era when humankind started decorating its tools of work. Why modern academia has failed (with a few notable exceptions) to study this common ground merits examining in its own right. But this is not the object of the present paper.

Rather, my intent here is to explore the common ground itself, as a modern, albeit largely unrecognized, area of life where leisure and work directly influence each other and where, in both spheres, personal enrichment and self-fulfillment are among the primary rewards. In this paper I argue that, for the reasons just mentioned, work and leisure are, contrary to conventional wisdom, neither wholly separate nor mutually antagonistic spheres of North American life. The close relationship, examined in this paper, between serious leisure (Stebbins, 1992; 2001) and occupational devotion (Stebbins, 2004a) demonstrates that there can be profound personal and social rewards in work just as in leisure and that they are, at bottom, experienced in much the same way in both worlds. In other words these rewards are shared, in that the core activities in this work and leisure are equally powerfully attractive, while offering rewards that are highly similar, and in some instances, literally identical.

What, then, are occupational devotion and serious leisure and how are they so much alike as to amount to an identity and thus, in this sphere, an eradication of the line between work and leisure?

Occupational Devotion

Occupational devotion is a strong, positive attachment to a form of self-enhancing work, where the sense of achievement is high and the core activity (set of tasks) is endowed with intense appeal. Note that attention is centered on the core activity of the occupation. It is by way of the core activity and its tasks that devotees realize a unique combination of, what are for them, strongly seated cultural values: success, achievement, freedom of action, individual personality, and activity (being involved in something) (Williams, 2000). In fact, this core of activity is a major value in its own right; the routine activities constituting its core are the principal attraction of their work. An occupational devotee is someone inspired by occupational devotion. This person engages in devotee work, which is centered on a core activity.

Vis-à-vis other kinds of work and leisure, both occupational devotion and serious leisure (discussed later) stand out, in that they, alone, meet all six of the following distinguishing criteria:

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.

4) the individual devotee must have reasonable control over 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.

5) the individual must have both an aptitude and a taste for the work in question.

6) the individual must work in a physical and social milieu that encourages them to pursue often and without significant constraint the core activity.

It should be understood that these six criteria do not necessarily constitute an exhaustive list; for through further exploratory research and theorizing, other criteria may well be discovered.

The intensity with which occupational devotees approach their work suggests that they may at times be in psychological flow there (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow, a form of optimal experience, is possibly the most widely discussed and studied generic intrinsic reward in the psychology of work and leisure. Although many types of work and leisure generate little or no flow for their participants, those that do are found primarily in the devotee occupations and serious leisure. Still, it will become evident that each work and leisure activity capable of producing flow does so in terms unique to it.

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. Occupational devotees and seriously leisure enthusiasts intensely love the same activity, finding there a powerfully attractive work or leisure career.

**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). The *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* (U.S. Dept. of Labor Employment and Training Administration, 1991) presents 13 categories of occupations that qualify as professions using standard sociological definitions of that concept (e.g., Ritzer and Wajcman, 1986, p. 62). They are listed below to demonstrate the scope of devotee occupations available at this high level of schooling:

- Occupations in architecture, engineering, and surveying
- Occupations in mathematics and physical sciences
- Computer-related occupations
- Occupations in life sciences
- Occupations in social sciences
- Occupations in medicine and health
- Occupations in education
- Occupations in museum, library, and archival sciences
- Occupations in law and jurisprudence
- Occupations in religion and theology
- Occupations in writing
- Occupations in art
- Occupations in entertainment and recreation
The professions of accounting, social and welfare work, and airline and ship piloting are also listed, but outside these 13 categories, as are the professions of urban and town planning, graphologist (hand-writing expert), polygraph examiner, and cryptanalyst (expert in secret coding systems).

Many client-centered professionals operate as small businesses, even if some income tax departments may classify them otherwise. The same is true for many public-centered professionals in the fine and entertainment arts. Moreover, I am speaking here of, at most, lightly-bureaucratized enterprises composed of, say, ten employees or less, where the unpleasantness of working in and administrating a complex organization is minimal. The main service of these enterprises and core activity of their entrepreneurs, which is technical advice, is typically provided by people known either as consultants or as counselors.

**Consultants and Counselors**
The term “consultant” is usually reserved for freelance professionals who are paid for technical advice they give to clients to help the latter solve a problem. Occupational devotion is best observed among full-time consultants, in that part-timers and moonlighters (employees of organizations who consult as a sideline) simply have less time to experience the deep fulfillment available in such work. Professional consultants operate in a great range of fields, among them, art, business, careers, and computing as well as nutrition, communications, and human resources. Note, too, that examination of the yellow pages of a typical North American metropolitan telephone book reveals the existence of consulting enterprises that are not, in the sociological sense of the word, professional. If fashion, landscape, and advertising, consultants, for example, are not professionals according to sociological definitions, they are nonetheless freelancers in fields technical enough to be quite capable of generating occupational devotion. Such workers are, however, more accurately classified for the purposes of this book as small businesses.

Such taxonomic confusion does not seem, however, to bedevil the counseling field. Counselors offer technical advice as therapy. Occupational devotion can be most richly observed most among full-time counselors in such professional fields as grief, religion, addictions, and crisis center work as well as family problems, interpersonal relationships, and stress at work. Most counselors are trained as nurses, clergy, psychologists, or social workers.

The yellow pages also contain the occasional reference to “advisers.” It appears that some counselors and consultants prefer, whatever the reason, to call themselves advisers. Still, as near as I can tell, there is no distinctive form of work known as advising, even if some occupations include advising in their job descriptions, as seen in the role of university professor that includes advising students on educational and occupational matters.

**Skilled Trades**
The skilled trades offer the main arena for occupational devotion among blue-collar workers, even though it may also be found among certain kinds of technicians and mechanics. The trades have often been likened by social scientists to the professions, although this “profession-craft model” has been challenged for its lack of empirical support (Silver, 1982, p. 251) and, even as an analogy, it has been shown to have definite limits (Hall, 1986, p. 68). Nonetheless, pride of workmanship, ownership of one’s tools, autonomy of working from a blueprint, and skill and fulfillment in use of tools help establish the basis for occupational devotion, the outlet for which is the construction industry. Today automation and deskilling (Braverman, 1974) of blue-collar work have taken their toll, so that “intrinsically gratifying blue-collar jobs are the exception
rather than the rule, and are found mainly among the skilled trades” (Rinehart, 1966, p. 131). That some of the trades have hobbyist equivalents in, for instance, wood and metal work, further attests the intrinsic appeal of these activities. Finally, fulfillment in this kind of work appears to be greatest at the top end of the apprentice-journeyman-master scale of experience and licensing.

Small Business Proprietors

The aforementioned consultants and counselors, operating as small businesses, are obvious examples of occupational devotion in this area. But what about other types of small businesses, where occupational devotion is also reasonably common? We can only speculate, since data are scarce. But consider the small haute cuisine restaurant open five days a week serving up meals to, say, a maximum of thirty diners, and which thereby provides a manageable outlet for a talented chef. Or the two- or three-person website design service. Or two women who, given their love for working with children, establish a small day-care service. Still, this is a difficult area in which to study occupational devotion, for there are also many small entrepreneurs who feel very much enslaved by their work. The differences here separating devotees from nondevotees revolve primarily around seven criteria, perhaps more: efficiency of the work team and the six criteria of occupational devotion described earlier (skill/ knowledge/ experience; variety; creativity/innovativeness; control; aptitude/taste; social/physical milieu).

Perusal of the yellow pages turned up a fair variety of devotee occupations pursued as small businesses, occupations I then placed in one of eleven categories. This typology should be taken as provisional rather than definitive. For at this, the exploratory stage in the study of occupational devotion, we should expect it to be modified in various ways as suggested by future open-ended research.

The skilled crafts are also capable of generating devotee small businesses. Applying the different distinguishing criteria, the work of the handyman, people who remodel homes (internally or externally), and the stonemason serve as three examples. The handyman and those who remodel homes encounter with each project they take on some novelty and some need to be innovative.

Teaching as a small business is distinct from professional teaching in primary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education. It is also different from teaching the occasional adult or continuing education course, something usually done as a sideline. Rather teaching as a small business centers on instruction of a practical kind, the demand for which is sufficient to constitute a livelihood for an instructor or small set of instructors. Thus small businesses have been established to teach people how to ride horses, fly small airplanes, and descend to earth in a parachute. Many local dance studios fall into this category, as do driver training schools. Innovativeness here revolves around adapting lessons to the needs of individual students and their capacities to learn the material of the course.

Custom work is another type of small business where occupational devotion abounds. Indeed, compared with other small business fields, it may offer the most fertile soil for this kind of personal growth. Here, to meet the wants of individual customers, the devotee designs (in collaboration with the customer) and sometimes constructs distinctive and personalized new products. Examples include workers who make their living designing and assembling on order special floral arrangements (e.g., bouquets, centerpieces) or gift baskets or confecting such as items as specialty cakes, cookies, or chocolates. Tailors, tattooists, hair stylists, makeup artists, and furniture makers, when working to the specifications of individual customers, also belong in
this category. Alternatively, individual customers may be seeking a reshaping or remodeling of something they already possess, such as custom modifications to a car or truck or an item of clothing.

*Animal work,* though less prevalent than custom work and possibly even less so than devotee handicraft, nevertheless sometimes meets the seven criteria of devotee small business. The main examples here, of which I am aware, are the people who make a living training or showing, cats, dogs, or horses. Just how passionately this work can be pursued is seen in Baldwin and Norris’s (1999) study of hobbyist dog trainers.

Evidence that *dealers in collectables* can be occupational devotees also comes from the field of leisure studies, where the love for collecting has been well documented (e.g., Olmsted, 1991). Dealers and collectors work with such items as rare coins, books, stamps, paintings, and antiques. Still dealers are not collectors; that is, their collection, if they have one, is not for sale. But even though dealers acquire collectables they hope to sell for extrinsic speculation and profit, they, like pure collectors, also genuinely know and appreciate their many different intrinsic qualities. Thus, when such collectors face the opportunity to sell at significant profit items integral to their collection (again, if they have one), these motives may clash, causing significant personal tension (Stebbins, in press). Here is an example of a work cost quite capable of diluting occupational devotion.

*Repair and restoration* center on bringing back an item to its original state. Things in need of repair or restoration and, in the course of doing so, capable of engendering occupational devotion include old clocks and antique furniture as well as fine glass, china, and crockery. There is also a business in restoring paintings. This work, which calls for considerable skill, knowledge, and experience, is typically done for individual customers. It offers great variety and opportunity for creativity and innovation.

The *service occupations* cover a huge area, but only a very small number seem to provide a decent chance to become an occupational devotee. One category with this potential can be labeled “research services.” Though most research is conducted by professionals, nonprofessionals do dominate in some fields. Exemplifying the latter are commercial genealogists and investigators concerned with such matters as fraud, crime, and civil disputes as well as industrial disputes, marital wrangles, and missing persons. The accident reconstruction expert also fits in this category. Day care and dating services as well as the small *haute cuisine* restaurant and the small fund-raising enterprise constitute four other services that can generate occupational devotion, as the earlier examples suggest. And here is the classificatory location of such small business, nonprofessional consultants as those in fashion, landscape, advertising, and the emergent field of personal coaching. By and large, however, the service sector is not the place to look for exciting, fulfilling work, in part because the service itself is often banal, even if important, and in part because of the ever present possibility of fractious customer relations.

The *artistic crafts* offer substantial scope for the would-be occupational devotee. Some are highly specialized, like etching and engraving glass, brass, wood, and marble. Others are more general, including ceramics work and making jewelry. Many people in the artistic crafts are hobbyists, who earn little or no money, whereas other people try to derive some sort of living from them. It is the second group, which consists of many part-time and a few full-time workers, who may become devotees. Variety and creativity are the principal distinguishing criteria separating them from nondevotees in this field. It is one thing to turn a dozen identical pots and
quite another to turn a dozen each of which is artistically unique. Those whose sole livelihood comes from the latter are likely to be card-carrying members of the starving artist class; in a world dominated by philistines, sales of artistically different products are relatively infrequent.

Most **product marketing** is the province of organizationally based employees, working in large bureaucracies and constrained there by all sorts of rules and regulations and locked into excessive times demands not of their making. Meanwhile, some small businesses do survive in this field, and offer the product marketers there a devotee occupation. The archetypical example here is the small advertising agency that, similar to the small customs work enterprises, designs and places publicity on a made-to-order basis for customers with budgets so restricted that they are unable to afford the services of bigger companies. Website design and promotional services can also be conceived of as a kind of product marketing. Only two distinguishing criteria appear to separate product marketers in small and large firms, namely control of time and bureaucratic social milieu. These two are nonetheless powerful enough to distinguish devotees from nondevotees in this sphere.

Most **planning work** is likewise bureaucratized in either government or medium-sized business firms. Indeed, city and town planners were listed earlier as professionals. But there are others facets to the occupation of planning that, on the small business level, can generate deep occupational devotion. Here, for instance, is the classificatory home of party and event planners, who if they seek sufficient variety, meet all six distinguishing criteria. The Achilles heel in this business is the level of efficiency of the work team, which if it fails in any major way, could result in disaster for the planner and a concomitant drop in sense of occupational devotion. Thus, it is one thing to plan well for some entertainment during a conference and quite another for the entertainers to fail to show up. Funeral planners suffer similar contingencies, by far the worst being a fumbled casket during the ceremony (Habenstein, 1962, p. 242).

The **family farm** is the final small business considered here. A dwindling phenomenon, to be sure, it still nonetheless offers many owner-families an occupation to which they can become deeply attached. Though they may exploit either plants or animals, the operation must be manageable for the family. All criteria apply here, though some need explaining. Farmers must be innovative when it comes to dealing with untoward pests, weather conditions, government policies, and the like. As for variety they experience it in rotating crops over the years and in observing how each crop grows during a given season. Especially at harvest time, farmers lack control of their own hours and days. But there is usually a lengthy period between growing seasons, when farmers have more control over their own lives. To the extent the farm is also run with hired hands, their level of effectiveness can contribute to or detract from the owner’s occupational devotion.

Further to the question of the so-called line between work and leisure, note that, while exceptions exist, a large majority of today’s devotee occupations actually owe their existence in one way or another to one or more serious leisure precursors. Elsewhere (Stebbins, 2004a, chap. 5) I also demonstrate how very much alike serious leisure and devotee work actually are and how fundamentally dependent devotee work is on its precursors in the domain of serious leisure. In fact, without it, the vast majority of devotee occupations would never exist. This is the common ground of work and leisure, for otherwise, work differs greatly from forms like casual leisure (Stebbins, 2001, chap. 4) and project-based leisure (Stebbins, 2004b).

**Serious Leisure**
Serious leisure is the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that participants find so substantial and interesting that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a career centered on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge, and experience (Stebbins, 1992, p. 3). I coined the term years ago (Stebbins, 1982) following how the people I had been interviewing and observing since the early 1970s defined the importance of these three kinds of activity in their everyday lives. The adjective “serious” (a word my respondents often used) embodies such qualities as earnestness, sincerity, importance, and carefulness, rather than gravity, solemnity, joylessness, distress, and anxiety. Although the second set of terms occasionally describes serious leisure events, the terms are uncharacteristic of them and fail to nullify, or, in many cases, even dilute, the overall deep fulfillment gained by the participants. The conception of “career” in this definition follows sociological tradition, where careers are seen as available in all substantial, complex roles, including those in leisure. Finally, serious leisure is distinct from casual leisure, or immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it.

Amateurs are found in art, science, sport, and entertainment, 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 amateurs. Furthermore, professionals work full-time at the activity, whereas amateurs pursue it part-time. Hobbyists lack this professional alter ego, suggesting that, historically, before their fields professionalized, all amateurs were hobbyists. Both types are drawn to their leisure pursuits significantly more by self-interest than by altruism, whereas volunteers engage in activities animated by a more or less equal blend of these two motives. That is, volunteering is uncoerced help offered either formally or informally with no or, at most, token pay and done for the benefit of both other people and the volunteer (Stebbins, 2001, chap. 4).

Hobbyists are classified according to five categories: collectors, makers and tinkerers, activity participants (in noncompetitive, rule-based, pursuits such as fishing and barbershop singing), players of sports and games (in competitive, rule-based activities with no professional counterparts like long-distance running and competitive swimming) and the enthusiasts of the liberal arts hobbies. The rules guiding noncompetitive, rule-based pursuits are, for the most part, either subcultural (informal) or regulatory (formal). Thus, seasoned hikers in Canada’s Rocky Mountains know they should, for example, stay on established trails, pack out all garbage, be prepared for changes in weather, and make noise to scare off bears. Liberal arts hobbyists are enamored of the systematic acquisition of knowledge for its own sake. Many accomplish this by reading voraciously in, for example, a field of art, sport, cuisine, language, culture, history, science, philosophy, politics, or literature (Stebbins, 1994).

Serious leisure is further defined by a set of distinctive qualities, qualities uniformly found among its amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers (Stebbins, 1992, pp. 6-8). One is the occasional need to persevere at the core activity to continue experiencing there the same level of fulfillment. Another is the opportunity to follow a career (in a leisure role) in the endeavor, a career shaped by its own special contingencies, turning points, and stages of achievement and involvement. Third, serious leisure is further distinguished by the requirement that its enthusiasts to make significant personal effort based on specially acquired knowledge, training, or skill and, indeed at times, all three.
The fourth quality is the numerous *durable benefits*, or tangible, salutary outcomes such activity has for its participants. They include self-fulfillment, self-enrichment, self-expression, 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, 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 becomes a powerful goal in serious leisure.

Fifth, serious leisure is distinguished by a *unique ethos* that emerges in association with each expression of it. At the core of this ethos is the special social world that begins to take shape when enthusiasts in a particular field pursue substantial shared interests over many years. According to Unruh (1980) every social world has its characteristic groups, events, routines, practices, and organizations. Diffuse and amorphous, it is held together, to an important degree, by semiformal, or mediated, communication. The sixth quality – *distinctive identity* – springs from the fact of the other five distinctive qualities. Participants in serious leisure tend to identify strongly with their chosen pursuits.

**Conclusions**

What is happening today to this interface between work and leisure? In answering this question note, first, that the modern work ethic – most generally put that hard work is good – is manifested in at least two main ways: workaholism and occupational devotion. Generally speaking, the scope of the latter appears to have shrunk in some ways. It has been buffeted by such forces as occupational deskilling and degradation (e.g., Braverman, 1974), industrial restructuring (e.g., downsizing), deindustrialization (e.g., plant closure and relocation), failed job improvement programs (e.g., the Human Relations and Quality of Work movements, Applebaum, 1992, p. 587), and overwork, whether required by employers or sought by workers craving extra income. Nevertheless, certain forms of devotion are more evident in the present than heretofore, seen for instance, in the rise of the independent consultant and the part-time professional. So the problem appears to be less one of continued devotee work opportunities than one of a narrowing base of recruitment for people to fill those opportunities. It is against this background, then, that the small, but extremely important, common ground of work and leisure in North America continues to exist.

**References**


