

Recreation Specialization in the Social World of Contract Bridge

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Journal Article Excerpt

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by David Scott , Geoffrey Godbey

The recreation specialization concept is finding increased use among leisure researchers. To date, its application has been limited to studies of outdoor recreationists, including anglers (Bryan, 1977; Graefe, 1980; Ditton, Loomis, & Choi, 1992) boaters (Donnelly, Vaske, & Graefe, 1986), canoeists (Wellman, Roggenbuck, & Smith, 1982; Kaufman, 1984), hikers (Williams, & Huffman, 1986; Virden & Schreyer, 1988), and vehicle-based campers (McIntyre & Pigram, 1992). The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature of recreation specialization in an activity that is far removed from outdoor environments, namely contract bridge. This study focuses on the meaning of participation among bridge players and how these meanings are reflected in distinct styles of involvement. Data are drawn from a yearlong investigation of contract bridge players and groups.

Past Research

The recreation specialization concept was developed by Bryan over a decade ago to explain diversity among participants in a given activity (1977, 1979). Bryan proposed that within any given activity, there are distinct classes of participants who exhibit distinct styles of involvement. A style of involvement is defined here as a mix of orientations and behaviors that characterize a person's involvement in a given activity. Styles of involvement are reflected by skills, equipment and setting preferences, attachment to the activity, attitudes toward management practices, and the social context surrounding one's involvement (Bryan, 1977). Classes of activity participants were assumed to fall along "a continuum of behavior from the general to the particular" (Bryan, 1977, p. 175). One end includes newcomers, dabblers, and individuals who display little commitment to the activity; the other end includes individuals who are highly specialized and who display extensive commitment to the activity. Among anglers, for example, Bryan concluded that there are occasional participants, generalists, technique specialists, and technique-setting specialists. These groups can be arranged along the specialization continuum from "low" to "high." Bryan argued that a specialization continuum exists in all activities, although the "length of the continuum will differ for different activities" (Bryan, 1979, p. 185).

Researchers have applied Bryan's ideas to a number of outdoor recreation activities. The array of published studies have measured recreation specialization in varying ways. Together, however, these measures correspond to three dimensions of commitment as outlined by Buchanon (1985). One of these includes consistent or focused behavior. Here, specialization has been measured in terms of frequency of participation, years of experience, and number of trips taken over the past year (Graefe, 1980; Wellman, et al., 1982; Donnelly, et al., 1986; Virden & Schreyer, 1988;

Ditton, et al., 1992). A second dimension includes affective attachment. Researchers have measured specialization using indicators such as centrality to lifestyle and intensity of involvement (Viriden & Schreyer, 1988; McIntyre, 1989; McIntyre & Pigram 1992). A third dimension includes the number of "side bets" accrued from sustained participation. Side bets, as they relate to leisure, are those investments, accrued from sustained participation in a given activity, that would be lost by ceasing participation (Becker, 1960). As a measure of specialization, side bets have been defined as the amount of money invested in an activity (Viriden & Schreyer, 1988) and the number of friendships engendered through participation (Bryan, 1977).

Regardless of what indicators are employed, there has been little effort to develop typologies that depict the actual behavioral and attitudinal manifestations of different styles of involvement. Most studies have treated recreation specialization as a continuous rather than as a categorical variable. In this way, activity participants are arranged along a recreation specialization index which is assumed to be linear in scale; variation in index scores are then examined in terms of their relationship to preferences for equipment (Graefe, 1980), importance ascribed to resource attributes (Viriden & Schreyer, 1988; Ditton, et al., 1992), attitudes toward management practices (McIntyre & Pigram 1992), and amount of mediated interaction (e.g., consumption of activity-related magazines) (Ditton, et al., 1992). Research which focuses on distinct activity styles has been generally limited to descriptions of elite or serious activity participants. Stebbins' (1993) research on serious leisure, for example, has provided detailed insight into the activity styles of people who occupy the "high" end of the specialization continuum. According to Stebbins, serious participants, in contrast to casual participants, have an occasional need to persevere in their respective endeavors, display personal effort based on specialized knowledge, training, and/or skill; acquire durable benefits from participation over time; and identify strongly with their chosen pursuits. While Stebbins research is comparative, it gives short shrift to those activity participants who occupy the "low" or casual end of the recreation continuum.

Specialization research has also failed to examine the extent to which activity styles change over time. Bryan (1977) assumed that there was a tendency for recreationists to become more specialized the longer they participated in an activity. Hence, specialization is not just an analytic tool for differentiating among activity participants but a process whereby one becomes increasingly committed to the activity. Research is necessary to make clear under what conditions people progress along the recreation specialization continuum. Stebbins (1979) research on amateurs is helpful in this regard. Stebbins indicates that becoming serious about one's avocation involves a conscious decision to meet standards set by professionals.

The Bridge Study

This investigation explores the nature of recreation specialization in the social world of contract bridge.⁽¹⁾ According to a study sponsored by the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL), there are approximately 11 million people in the United States who play contract bridge (Contemporary Marketing Research Inc., 1986, p. 8). Contract bridge players, compared to the general population, are older, well educated, and have high levels of incomes. About 60% of ACBL members are female. It is not known what percentage of all bridge players are male and female.

Recreation specialization was examined in terms of the social world perspective. A social world is a culture area or sphere of interest (Unruh, 1979). Social worlds vary in size, shape, and level of organization. Large social worlds, like the social world of contract bridge, are diffuse and

amorphous in nature (Scott & Godbey, 1992). They also tend to be segmented into smaller, more specialized subworlds. According to Strauss (1984), segmentation arises due to spatial distinctions, skill differences, when participants are divided in terms of ideology, when social worlds intersect with other social worlds, and when recruitment results in new kinds of members. Subworlds develop, according to Strauss, when there develops "a collective definition that certain activities are preeminently worth doing and 'we' are doing them".

People participate in many social worlds although with varying degrees. Some individuals identify strongly with the social world. These individuals are frequently called insiders, and, as noted by Unruh (1979), "know the intimate details and workings of a social world". Others, however, limit the extent to which they participate and identify with social world activity. These individuals may be occasional participants (Bryan, 1977), strangers or tourists (Unruh, 1979), or dabblers (Stebbins, 1993).

In a previous study, Scott and Godbey (1992) reported that the social world of contract bridge is composed of two primary subworlds: social bridge and serious bridge. These two subworlds constitute well-organized culture areas that are distinct from one another. Players generally limited their involvement to one subworld over another. Indeed, most bridge players were quick to define themselves as either serious bridge players or social bridge players. The act of self-definition was reflected in unique definitions of what constituted legitimate activity. Sustained participation in one sub-world over another provided and reinforced a set of orientations which acted as filters in how players evaluated the range of social world activity around them.

Exploring recreation specialization in the social world of contract bridge must proceed with the understanding that players are self-defining in their respective orientations. Three research questions guided this study: (1) What types of players are there in the social world of contract bridge? (2) What indicators are useful in differentiating among players? (3) Are the types of bridge players sequentially organized as stages along a continuum?

Methodology

Overview

This study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, participant observation was used to become acquainted with the bridge world. In the second phase, semi-structured (in-depth) interviews were conducted. During both phases, data were collected from key informants and a variety of written documents.

Choice of Field Role

The kinds of data available through qualitative research hinges on one's choice of field role (Gold, 1969). To accommodate a mixed form of data collection, a participant-as-observer field role was used. This field role provided a basis for acquiring firsthand data on group activities, while allowing group members to be aware of the investigator's research interests. This made it possible to develop intimate understanding of the people, activities, and meaning of bridge activity, and provided the means of establishing trusting relationships with players, thereby providing a basis for employing the more formal interviewing techniques later (Douglass, 1976). A mixed form of data collection also provided different views or "slices" of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). That is, different methods produced more information on categories than any one

particular method. A mixed form of data collection also guarded against biases on the part of the researcher and a basis for checking accounts from different informants (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Setting

Data collection occurred in an eastern town fictitiously named Glenn Valley. The study was conducted in this locality of 50,000 people because the design of the study required participation in groups over a yearlong period. Contract bridge was chosen over other activities because an initial investigation determined that there were numerous bridge clubs in Glenn Valley, thus providing an opportunity to examine processes of segmentation (Strauss, 1984) and differences among play groups and bridge players.

Using a reputational or snowball sampling technique (Burgess, 1984) four bridge clubs were identified which allowed the researcher (the first author of this article) to become a participant-as-observer (Gold, 1969). The four groups were observed from April, 1989 through October, 1989. The clubs varied in size and frequency of meeting. The four groups are named fictitiously the UW Bridge Club, the Daytime Bridge Club, the Couples Bridge Club, and the Jackson Bridge Club (JBC). The JBC differed from the other three in that it was sanctioned by the ACBL, the ruling bridge body in the United States. The other clubs were organized primarily around friendship ties. In May 1989, participant observation commenced with a fifth club, the College Bridge Club. The College Bridge Club was composed largely of players who played regularly at the JBC. [See Scott and Godbey (1992) for a more complete description of the bridge groups and their respective members.]

Collection of Data

Participant Observation. As a participant-as-observer (Gold, 1969), the researcher played the role of kibitzer (native term meaning observer) and, sometimes, the role of novice player. To fit in, the researcher emulated members' behavior as much as possible (Polsky, 1969). Participant observation also involved engaging players in informal conversations before, after, and during breaks in the game, and in restaurants, bars, automobiles, and on the telephone. Field notes were written down immediately following the encounter. In all, 30 bridge encounters were observed. [See Scott and Godbey (1992) for additional information on the use of participant observation for this study.]

Interviewing. Thirty-four semi-structured (in-depth) interviews were conducted with 37 local players. Consistent with the tenets of theoretical sampling, players were chosen to be interviewed because it was felt that they would "further the development of emerging categories" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 49). Members and non-members of clubs were interviewed, as were players known to differ in age, gender, skill, length of membership in the club, and their bridge personality (a native term that refers to an individual's manner while playing). Interviewed were a mix of novices, intermediate players, and advanced players; young, middle-aged, and older people; newcomers and long standing members; men and women; students and non-students; and American and foreign-born players. More ACBL players were interviewed compared to players in the other three groups, although the proportion of players interviewed in each club was roughly similar.

Procedures used for interviewing were adopted from the writings of Spradley (1979) and Burgess (1984). While interviews were tape recorded and guided by an interview agenda, they were

conducted like conversations: questions were open-ended, allowing informants to talk about their bridge involvement using their own terms. Interviews generally lasted about two hours. Given the simultaneous nature of data collection and data analysis, each interview was necessarily conducted in a slightly different manner (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Insights or statements provided by one informant were verified in interviews with others. Similarly, the interview had to be flexible enough to accommodate the specialized knowledge of informants. Depending on the length of time devoted to one topic or another, there was a tendency to adjust the amount of time devoted to other matters. However, an effort was made to acquire information about the informant's personal history in bridge, frequency of participation, ACBL involvement, commitment to studying the game, friendship patterns within the groups, activity and setting preferences, reasons for playing bridge, and understanding of various technical terms. All interviews were transcribed into verbatim accounts.

Key Informants. Throughout the research, the investigator relied upon three long-standing players from the two ACBL clubs as key informants. These individuals were chosen because of their extensive knowledge about bridge and their long history of involvement in clubs in which they were members (Fine, 1984). Key informants were chosen from only the ACBL clubs because these clubs were relatively large in size and the playing techniques were found to be more complex than in other clubs. Key informants spent considerable time on the telephone with the researcher, providing answers to vexing questions concerning bidding, protocol, and other group-related matters. They also provided a basis for confirming observations made during participant observation and semi-structured interviewing.

Written Documents. A number of written documents were examined for data. As an augment to participant observation and semi-structured interviewing, these written documents provided different slices of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Hundred of letters to the editor in the bridge magazine, *The Contract Bridge Bulletin* were read. Magazines and books were also read for their content (e.g., Sontag, 1977). One particularly rich source of data was NETNEWS, an electronic bulletin board. NETNEWS provided a forum for users to talk about bridge on a daily basis. From November 30, 1989 to April 3, 1990, 515 distinct bridge messages on NETNEWS were examined and catalogued.

Treatment and Analysis of Data

The constant comparison method of data analysis was used (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method involved: (a) creating categories (concepts) from data; (b) finding relationships among the categories; and (c) integrating categories and relationships within the context of a dominant theme. This process was greatly facilitated by immersion in the lives of the bridge players. Sustained participation provided a context for understanding group life and the meaning of bridge from the point of view of the people under investigation (Blumer, 1969).

Data were classified into categories (concepts) on an ongoing basis. By categories, we mean classes of phenomena or regularities observed within the bridge world (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Spradley, 1980). Many categories were emergent (e.g., kinds of bridge players, reasons for not playing with a particular person/group, polite play, ethical play). Other categories were predetermined (e.g., commitment, friendship patterns, game and setting preferences). The use of predetermined categories provided a basis for comparing findings from this study with that of other studies of recreation specialization. However, these categories were treated as sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1954). No effort was made to apply specific benchmarks to them a priori.

The development of categories was accomplished by a dual process of subjective interpretation and visual inspection of field notes, transcribed interviews, and written documents. This process was facilitated by coding data in the form of cultural domains: "a category of cultural meaning that includes other smaller categories" (Spradley, 1979, p. 88). One such category, for example, was reasons for not playing with a person. Once this category was established old and new data were examined as a means of elaborating the category's properties.

Next, relationships among categories were examined. This involved looking for linkages among the data. For example, data relevant to the category kinds of bridge players were examined in terms of reasons for not playing with a person. Similarly, data relevant to the category reasons for getting upset with other players were examined in terms of the category reasons for playing bridge. Again, both old and new data were examined in terms of these (and other) relationships.

During the course of research, two primary groups of players were discovered: serious players and social players (both are native terms). Players were frequently heard saying, "I don't play social bridge," or "I don't play serious bridge." This distinction served as a core category in integrating the multitude of categories and relationships gleaned from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). An initial typology of bridge players was created that contrasted serious players from social players. Inspection of the data, however, led to a number of negative cases (Denzin, 1978), so we created a new typology of players that included four sub-groups. The groups are ideal types, developed for conceptual purposes.

Results

Bridge players are not a homogeneous group sharing the same attitudes and behaviors. Consistent with past research on recreation specialization, they differ markedly in terms of the meaning of participation, setting preferences, the kinds of commitments made, their relationship to other players, their orientation to competition, and a number of other factors. Most players readily define themselves as either serious players or social players. This act of self-definition provides an important frame of reference in how players evaluate their own orientations and the orientations of others. Self-definition is developed and reinforced by sustained interaction with like-minded players. In addition, players frequently have encounters with players unlike themselves, and these experiences, too, contribute to self-definition. In sum, self-definition among bridge players entails a deliberate decision to participate in one subworld (serious or social) over another.

A strict dichotomy, however, fails to explain variation among serious players, on the one hand, and social players, on the other. To do this, four ideal types were developed: (a) tournament players, (b) regular duplicate players, (c) regular social players, and (d) occasional players.⁽²⁾ Tournament players and regular duplicate players are types of serious players. Regular social players and occasional players are types of social players. As ideal types, the sub-groups do not exist in any concrete sense. Rather, they are abstractions we developed to elucidate the different styles of bridge involvement. The four types are differentiated on the basis of criteria outlined in Table 1.

Implicit in studies of recreation specialization is that there is an incremental progression from one end of the continuum to the other over time. This is not the case among the four types. The four types represent unique styles of involvement. Few social players had aspirations to become serious players. Indeed, as will be seen, many regular social players purposely TABULAR DATA OMITTED rejected progressing to a more serious level of involvement. The four types of players

are discussed as follows.

Tournament Bridge Players

Tournament bridge players constitute the hard core players in the bridge world. Some tournament players are professionals and earn their living by playing bridge; the vast majority, however, are strictly amateurs. While most tournament players tend to be highly oriented to competing, there are many, in the words of Bryan (1979), who are highly committed to "propounding the values of the so-called minority recreationist". These players organize tournaments, teach lessons, and promote bridge as a free time activity. In general, tournament players are recognized on the basis of their: (a) exclusive participation in ACBL sanctioned games; (b) intense enthusiasm and identification with bridge; (c) tendency to allow their involvement to get out of hand; and (d) orientation to the quality of bridge playing rather than friendly interpersonal relationships.

ACBL Involvement. Most informants described bridge as the best of all possible card games, some describing it as the "Cadillac of card games." Tournament players go further by claiming that duplicate bridge is the best of all possible games. They prefer duplicate over rubber and party bridge because it provides them a more reliable test of their abilities. [Chance and luck are greatly reduced since everybody plays the same cards.] Tournament players also prefer playing duplicate bridge in ACBL sanctioned games because of the higher quality of competition and rules and ethical play are more rigidly enforced.

These preferences imply an aversion for social bridge. Most tournament players voiced a strong dislike for social bridge games due to the lack of skilled players, unethical play, too much talking, and the lack of focused attention on the game. This enmity was voiced by Harry, a 55-year old Life Master(3) (all names used are pseudonyms): "Social bridge is hopeless. It's worse than sitting in your chair and staring at the wall."

Tournament players in Glenn Valley played about twice a week at one of three local ACBL clubs. Tournament players also attended more than six out-of-town tournaments a year. While some of these were close to Glenn Valley and did not necessitate overnight accommodations, others (regional or national tournaments) required the player to travel greater distances and spend nights away from home. Players with family and/or work commitments stated that they usually took only three-day weekends when playing at these tournaments. Others, however, said that they had taken full weeks off from work. A few said they made a vacation of playing bridge at tournaments and/or ACBL clubs throughout the country. Tournament players noted that travel, meals, hotel costs, and tournament fees all make bridge a potentially costly avocation. One informant said he spent about \$5,000 in 1989 playing bridge.

Identification. Becoming a tournament bridge player involves affirming the role of "serious bridge player." This act of self-definition had four aspects. First, the player must be determined to persevere at the game (Stebbins, 1982). Players' initial experiences in serious bridge clubs are often negative because they find themselves outclassed by more experienced players. Perseverance entails a decision to not withdraw in the face of these difficulties. Marvin, a 48-year old professor, expressed this point of view: "People either give in to the frustration and forget it, or become determined to overcome it. I tried to overcome it and learn to play as well as the people who frustrated me."

A second aspect of self-definition involves a commitment to skill development. Free time away from the bridge table is spent privately reading bridge paraphernalia and studying hands, talking

about bridge hands with other tournament players, and working with regular partners in order to develop joint understandings. A commitment to skill development was reflected in a tendency to try out new techniques (e.g., bidding conventions) and a knowledge of the game that far surpassed that held by social players. The experience of Harry is revealing. When interviewed, he held over 1,500 master points (the second highest in Glenn Valley) and had won two regional titles. Harry subscribed to 2 bridge magazines and owned over 100 bridge books. He said he studies the game daily. Much of this activity was integrated into his daily routine:

I like bridge books that have problem hands. I'll do between 2 to 10 hands before I go to bed. Sometimes I'll do problems if I have a little leisure time between dinner and an evening activity, or if I am home for an evening. And occasionally, if I have a few spare moments here [in my office] I'll read. I keep a few spare books here. So I continually do some problems each day.

Third, self-definition entails developing a strong affective attachment to the game. Tournament players referred to themselves as "gung ho," "bridge nuts," or simply "serious bridge players." A strong esprit de corps existed among tournament players; they derived great pleasure from telling and listening to bridge-related stories. Tournament players were also emphatic in their belief that bridge is the best of all possible games.

Finally, taking on the role of serious bridge player means engaging in activities that encourage the infusion of new players into the game. In Glenn Valley, this was reflected in supporting a newly opened ACBL sanctioned club. A few tournament players helped by directing games and teaching bridge lessons there. Others supported the club by simply playing there; not because they felt games there were competitive (many said just the opposite) but because they felt the club would attract new people to the game.

Uncontrollability. Stebbins (1979) used the term uncontrollability to refer to the tendency of an "avocation to get out of hand". This phenomenon was evident among some tournament players. Many agreed that their involvement in bridge usurped participation in other leisure activities: a few said that their involvement sometimes conflicted with family and work obligations. The experience of Kathleen is illustrative. At the time of the interview, Kathleen was 44-years old, married, and had one child living at home. She was not employed outside the home, but spent a lot of time baby-sitting her granddaughter. She played about three times a week, was a regular participant in post-game gatherings, and spent a great deal of time on the phone talking to other players about bridge hands. She said she read bridge material constantly when she began playing ACBL bridge: "For the first two years, that's all I did. That's all I wanted to do. I let my housework go. I was just gung ho for two years. But I have learned to relax a little since." Kathleen recognized that her bridge involvement curtailed her involvement in other activities: "I used to go to church once in a while and I don't do that anymore. It wasn't a top priority, but it was something you should do. But now it kind of got shoved aside." She also stated that her bridge involvement limited her getting to know people other than bridge players.

Experiential Foci. As noted, tournament players preferred playing in duplicate bridge games that were sanctioned by the ACBL because of the controlled environment and the quality of competition. This preference underscored tournament players' tendency to emphasize the experiential components within the game rather than the experiential aspects surrounding the encounter. This preference was reflected in three ways.

First, tournament players shared a desire to test their bridge skills to their fullest extent. The essence of playing bridge was a feeling of mastery and accomplishment. For many, accumulating master points and/or becoming a Life Master were validation of skill rather than a source of

status. This finding is illustrated in a statement made by Rita, a 41-year old who was a few points shy of becoming a Life Master: "Becoming a Life Master was a very important goal for me but not anymore. In the type of bridge I want to play, becoming a Life Master is just certifying me as being ready to learn to play." This sentiment is probably shared by ACBL players throughout the country. A nationwide study of bridge players revealed that only two percent of ACBL members felt that master point accumulation was the single most important reason for playing duplicate bridge (Contemporary Marketing Research Inc., 1986).

Second, tournament players strongly emphasized proper protocol and ethical play. Unethical play (e.g., bidding with inflection) elicited strong, negative sanctions from tournament players because such actions undermined the display of technical and intellectual mastery. Because ACBL games are open to the public, tournament players looked to the Director for maintaining an ethical game and making fair rulings. Directors, however, did not always measure up in the eyes of some tournament players and many reported this as a source of great frustration.

Finally, tournament players did not regard friendship as integral to their bridge involvement. Other players were often regarded as "bridge acquaintances." Tournament players evaluated others in terms of their bridge skills and were quite willing to ignore what people were like outside the bridge game. A statement made by Richard concerning one of his regular partners (who was deceased) is illustrative: "Ed Fields was not a friend--we were sort of socially incompatible. He was much younger, low-economic status, lower education level. We had nothing at all in common other than bridge."

Regular Duplicate Players

Regular duplicate players comprise a second category of bridge players. Like tournament players, regular duplicate players regarded their bridge involvement in serious terms, as evidenced by their strong attachment to ACBL sanctioned games. Unlike tournament players, however, they were much more likely to regard their participation in social terms, and display little commitment to upgrading their skills. Despite variation among regular duplicate players, they generally shared five characteristics: (a) regular involvement in serious games and social games; (b) ambivalence concerning skill development; (c) a relaxed attitude toward competition; (d) tempered devotion to the game; and (e) intimate interpersonal relationships with other players.

Frequency of Participation And Type of Involvement. Regular duplicate players in Glenn Valley played about twice a week. Most of this involvement was centered in one of three clubs sanctioned by the ACBL. Tournament involvement was limited to events (unit or sectional tournaments) within 50 miles of Glenn Valley, requiring no overnight accommodations. Unlike tournament players, many regular duplicate players were members of clubs composed primarily of social bridge players. While informants regarded the quality of play in such clubs as inferior, strong friendship ties prevented them from withdrawing. In other cases, regular duplicate players organized "social" duplicate clubs which are outside the auspices of the ACBL. These clubs were composed entirely of women or married couples. Frequently, bridge players unaffiliated with the ACBL were invited to join. Informants regarded their participation in these clubs as superior to pure social groups because the quality of play is better and conversation is kept in check.

Orientation to Skill Development. In contrast to tournament players, regular duplicate players did not spend hours privately studying the game, talking about hands, or experimenting with new techniques. Most were content to play a relatively simple system (Standard American) while incorporating a few conventions that were easy to learn and understand. The experience of

Lillian, a Life Master for 15 years, is typical. At the time of the interview, she played about twice a week at two different ACBL clubs. She had a few regular partners, although she mostly played with her husband, Richard, a tournament player. While she attended more bridge tournaments than other regular duplicate players, this was because she went, out of devotion, with Richard. Lillian was considered a good player and enjoyed the game, but she did not consider herself a student of the game:

Q: Your husband said that you folks own approximately 40 bridge books?

A: He owns them. (Laugh.) He owns them! He wishes I would read them. They are his. He selected them, he bought them - they're his.

Q: Do you read The Bulletin?

A: Not really. I just glance at it.

Q: Do you ever read any bridge books?

A: No. That is probably why I am not a better bridge player. I just don't enjoy reading bridge books. I love to play but I don't enjoy studying it.

Lillian said she acquired her bridge knowledge from years of playing with Richard, and she adopted new conventions only because Richard wanted to try them out.

Orientation to Competition. A casual orientation to skill development was associated with a relatively relaxed attitude toward competition. This was reflected in three ways. First, regular duplicate players rarely displayed the sober, even cutthroat, demeanor that sometimes characterized the tournament player. Instead, they put a high premium on polite play, defined here as the consistent display of congeniality at the bridge table. This type of behavior was also evident among tournament players, but was consistently displayed by regular duplicate players. In general, polite players were friendly to their opponents, displayed a sense of humor, were willing to forgive partner and opponent mistakes, and avoided disparaging their partners for poor bidding or poor play.

Second, duplicate players avoided calling the Director when a novice erred in terms of protocol or regularities. ACBL rules dictate that the Director is to be notified when irregularities of any sort occur. Experienced ACBL players do not regard the act of calling the Director as a form of punishment. Rather, the Director was considered a neutral party whose function was to objectively make rulings when improprieties occur. To novices, however, having the Director called was both intimidating and embarrassing. Regular duplicate players were sensitive to these feelings and were frequently observed providing non-threatening instructions to novices who had committed an infraction.

Third, regular duplicate players were relatively unconcerned about collecting master points. Some stated an indifference to becoming a Life Master; others said they did not register the master points that they had earned. This indifference may explain why many did not travel to more out-of-town tournaments where master points are awarded at a higher rate than they are at club games.

Extent of Identification. Regular duplicate players said they did not make the investments in either time or money that tournament players do. As noted, they rarely owned bridge books and

showed little interest in improving their skills. They also did not allow the game to get out of hand as was sometimes the case with tournament players. Still, most regarded bridge as their favorite leisure activity and an important part of their lives.

Relationship to Other Players. Regular duplicate players were more likely than tournament players to regard other club members as friends. Some friendships were initiated prior to entry into the club; in other cases, friendships were engendered as a result of sustained participation in the club. Regular duplicate players frequently developed regular partnerships with their friends. Unlike tournament players, they cared less about a player's bridge skills than what s/he was like as a person. This tendency was particularly true among female regular duplicate players.

Regular Social Players

Just as tournament and regular duplicate players defined themselves as serious players, regular social players defined themselves as social players. These individuals have rejected serious standards and have divested their egos from participation. However, it would be incorrect to conclude that regular social players were not committed to bridge. In fact, many regarded bridge as their favorite leisure activity; most had been playing regularly (at least once a week) for many years (some for over 50 years); and most said that the majority of their friends also played bridge. In effect, regular social players are highly committed, but what they are committed to is different and must take place within the context of a relaxed and friendly environment. A preference for social bridge over serious bridge is indicative of a well-developed set of attitudes cultivated and reinforced, over time, by experiences with an array of different players and bridge clubs.

A Preference for Social Bridge Clubs. Regular social players defined themselves as social players. This act of self-definition implies a rejection of serious bridge. When describing serious players, regular social players routinely used words like serious, rude, nasty, unfriendly, and cutthroat. Yet bridge was an established leisure activity in the lives of regular social players in Glenn Valley. Almost all had been playing their entire adult life. In terms of frequency, those with work and family commitments played about once a week; others played more. Sustained participation was accomplished by playing in a number of social bridge clubs that met once to twice a month. Most were members of at least four bridge clubs. Regular social players were also occasionally called upon to substitute in clubs in which they were not members.

In Glenn Valley, there was extensive overlapping among players within different social bridge clubs. It was not uncommon for players from one club to be composed of players from a number of other clubs. This overlapping created a strong acquaintance network among regular social players. This had three important implications. First, existing clubs had a large pool of players from which to recruit substitutes and new members. Second, individuals plugged into this network were able to maintain a level of desired participation because they were not dependent solely on one club for regular involvement. Third, players participated in wider circles within the bridge world. These experiences provided the player with new information concerning techniques, conventions, and ways of doing things. Such experiences also helped the player define what constitutes legitimate bridge. While a few regular social players acquired a more serious orientation to the game and began playing ACBL bridge, most developed a strong distaste for playing with serious players and in serious clubs.

Relationship to Other Players. Regular social players regarded the people with whom they play as close friends. This was true even when players saw and interacted with others on only a monthly basis. Doris, a 58-year old widow and a regular member of four social clubs, provided a typical

statement: "Even though we don't see each other but once a month we're good friends. And I could count on them for anything, and they could count on me." Regular social players were also more likely than serious players to develop friendships, or at least become good acquaintances, as a result of their bridge involvement. These friendships frequently spilled over to contexts outside the bridge encounter. For example, regular social players said they frequently participated in other leisure activities with their bridge playing friends, and they often invited them to special events in their lives (e.g., a child's wedding, a retirement party). Also, regular social players said they counted on their bridge playing friends in times of emergencies or crises.

Having Fun and Keeping the Peace. Regular social players emphasized sociability as a primary reason for playing bridge. They also regarded bridge as a thoroughly enjoyable game. Sociability and enjoyment were tightly fused in the eyes of regular social players. This fusion was reflected in three ways. First, regular social bridge players consistently used the word fun to describe their particular orientation to the game. Having fun meant expressing oneself freely within the context of the bridge game and separating one's ego from one's performance. Players were observed exchanging anecdotes, laughing, joking, and not worrying about the ethical standard of others' play. The following statement by Hanna (63-years old) is illustrative: "This couples group, as you know, drinks a lot. This is purely a social [club]. My husband, Neil, hoots and hollers and he doesn't play according to any rules. He likes bridge and he likes to have a lot of fun."

Second, regular social bridge players put a high premium on polite play among members. They painstakingly avoided criticizing others' play, even when such mistakes are made repeatedly. Regular social players tended to disdain those not behaving in this manner and avoided playing in clubs where such players were known to be present. Incidents nevertheless arise during a bridge game that potentially result in tension among members. Regular duplicate players defuse this tension by engaging in "peace keeping" tactics, behaviors that are purposely conciliatory and non-confrontational. One such tactic was tossing out a hand, a native term that refers to voiding a hand and its resultant score.

Third, regular social bridge players were indifferent about developing their skills. Most were content to use bidding principles that were popularized by bridge master, Charles Goren, in the 1940s. Few said they bothered reading bridge books or magazines, although a few said they read bridge columns printed in the newspaper. They also did not take time dissecting hands as a means of learning from past mistakes; many said that once a hand was played, it quickly vanished from their short term memory. A de-emphasis on skill development was reflected in limited knowledge of various technical terms (e.g., types of bids), and the belief that criticism was not so much a learning tool as a source of conflict.

Identification. Regular social players consistently described their bridge involvement as personally meaningful. While their participation rarely interfered with work and family commitments, regular social players said bridge was among their favorite leisure activities and worth making time to play. Joan, (46-years old), a regular member in five social bridge groups, stated: "I will play bridge anytime. Since I work from the house I can get up at 3:00 or 6:00 in the morning and get whatever I have to do done." This strong affective attachment toward bridge was striking among older informants. They described bridge as an activity that they could continue to participate in despite failing health and a loss of loved ones. Bridge was not pursued simply to fill time. Rather, the positive aspects of bridge were underscored. Television and other solitary activities were felt to be time fillers; bridge was an activity that had special meaning in their lives.

Occasional Players

Occasional players are marginal members of the bridge world. In many ways they were similar to regular social players in that they share the same attitudes toward experiential foci, competition, and skill development. Unlike regular social players, however, they lacked established pattern of involvement and did not regard their bridge involvement as important.

Patterns of Activity. Occasional players lacked sustained involvement in bridge over time. Few played more than once a month. While most did not participate in regularly meeting clubs (their participation was limited to occasional rubber bridge games with family and friends), some were members of social clubs. Participation of this sort was usually limited to one or two clubs. This pattern was particularly characteristic of males, whose bridge involvement was typically limited to one of many couple's clubs that met monthly.

Occasional bridge players were mixed in terms of activity and setting preferences. Some preferred duplicate over party or rubber bridge; others were either indifferent or did not have enough knowledge about the different kinds of games to articulate a preference. Those who were members of social bridge clubs preferred social bridge over serious bridge. Reasons given were the same as regular social players: sociability and enjoyment.

Many occasional players went for long stretches without playing or thinking about bridge. They either lacked enthusiasm or had outside commitments which hindered them from playing more frequently. Also, some players lacked the connections to participate more frequently, a situation that enhances our understanding of how career changes occur in the bridge world. Some serious bridge players said that they began playing ACBL bridge not because of its perceived superiority but because they lacked connections to play social bridge. This tendency to jump from occasional player to serious player suggests a "speeding-up" of the recreation specialization process. Here, players plunge into an advanced style of play having skipped over intermediate stages. Most occasional players probably do not go this route and remain occasional players. Those that do must adapt to the ACBL style of play if they expect to develop a regular schedule of games. Kathleen is one such person. Her inability to locate other social players in Glenn Valley prompted her to try ACBL bridge. She quickly adapted and, at the time of the interview, was only a few points shy of becoming a Life Master. Others fail to adapt and either drop out or play in such clubs occasionally.

Identification and Meaning of Participation. Occasional players are characterized by their limited identification with bridge and exclusive participation with friends and/or family. While a few said that bridge was among their favorite leisure activities, most did not and few had any desire to expand the boundaries of their involvement. Some volunteered that it was a leisure activity that they could readily give up. This attitude was held by a 70-year old named Renee. Upon retiring a decade ago, Renee joined two social bridge clubs. Although she played only once or twice a month, she said this is more than she did in the past. The only reported reason she played was that it provided her an opportunity to be with friends. "I found out that if I didn't play bridge, I would be left out. This is a bridge town." Renee stated that she has no ambition to join other bridge groups and would gladly miss a bridge game if there were alternative activities going on in the community.

Discussion

Four types of bridge players were identified: tournament players, regular duplicate players, regular social players, and occasional players. Consistent with past research on recreation

specialization, differences among player types were reflected in the intensity of involvement, meaning of participation, game and setting preferences, frequency of play, orientation to skill development, and the kinds of commitments made. The ability to differentiate players in terms of these criteria is an indication that the specialization concept may be applied to activities that are not outdoor-related.

Implicit in Bryan's original writings (1977, 1979) and subsequent studies of outdoor pursuits (Ditton, et al. 1992; Donnelly, Graefe, and Vaske, 1986; McIntyre and Pigram, 1992) is the belief that recreationists become more specialized the longer they participate in an activity. This belief has remained largely untested. Findings from this study indicate that many bridge players do not become more specialized over time. While tournament players were the most specialized of the four groups, the groups did not fit along a developmental sequence. These facts imply a modification of Bryan's hypothesis.

It is important to remember that the bridge world is segmented into two subworlds: social bridge and serious bridge. Each of these subworlds are highly developed culture areas with its own practices, sanctions, recruitment process, and so on (Scott & Godbey, 1992). Bridge players readily define themselves and others as being serious or social in orientation. In the case of tournament players, regular duplicate players, and regular social players, self-definition implies a well-developed sense of what constitutes authentic and unauthentic activity. Self-definition also entails embracing one style of involvement over another. A strong preference for social bridge or serious bridge suggests that the four types of bridge players are not stages within a continuum of specialization but members of different social worlds. Given the chasm separating them, progression from social player to serious player is tenuous. Indeed, many regular social players actually resisted becoming specialized in terms of criteria outlined by Bryan (1979).

Results from this study suggest that future research on recreation specialization must look more carefully at the self-defining nature of recreation participation. The process of specialization or becoming serious appears to be related to a desire to develop skills at an advanced level. We must also not overlook the different career paths available to people when they adopt a leisure activity. This study indicates two primary career paths among bridge players: a serious path and a social path. These paths loosely conform to the dichotomy "serious" and "unserious" leisure proposed by Stebbins (1992). Even Stebbins, however, may have underestimated the level of social organization underlying "unserious" leisure and the level of commitment evinced by many participants in this subworld. Regular social players, for example, regard bridge as a favorite leisure activity; many make time to play; and many have played regularly for years. Regular social players also have acquired side bets (Becker, 1960) since regular participation has resulted in the acquisition and fostering of close friendships; withdrawal would cost them a viable outlet for maintaining these relationships. In short, a social path is not void of commitment. This conclusion echoes Buchanan's (1985) argument that differences in behavior and attitudes are often more a matter of perspective than commitment: "An individual who has accrued many side bets as a result of fishing, who has accepted the role of a fisherman, and who has exhibited consistent fishing behavior for a number of years is committed to fishing even if he drinks beer, fishes from a boat, and uses worms".

1 Contract bridge is a generic term that is descriptive of a distinct class of four-person, partnership card games, including rubber bridge, duplicate bridge, and party bridge.

2 After we establish that there were four types of bridge players, we sought out quantitative measures from our data to test whether the four types were different statistically from one another. We found five variables: membership in the ACBL, frequency of bridge participation,

number of bridge tournaments attended per year, number of bridge books owned, and knowledge of different technical terms. Using discriminant analysis, these variables successfully classified 100% of tournament players, 75% of regular duplicate players, 78% of regular social players, and 63% of occasional players. While a very small sample was used (N = 37), these data, nevertheless, provided statistical evidence to support the existing typology and classification of players. Readers may write the first author for a summary of this analysis.

3 A Life Master is an individual who has earned 300 master points of different colors in ACBL sanctioned games. Master points are the basic unit by which skill is measured and awarded in ACBL sanctioned games.

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