

SOCIAL WORLDS AND THE LEISURE EXPERIENCE

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PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

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