

Self-Identity, Modernity, and the Rational Actor in Leisure Research

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Fundamental to leisure research is the notion that people's recreation is a medium for personal enhancement and self-development (Murphy, 1974; Kelly, 1990), and that the constitution of self-identity is a developmental process of psychological growth and positive self-transformation. The non-obligatory nature of leisure provides a distinctive life-space in which people can either cultivate preferred self-definitions (Haggard & Williams, 1992), or creatively elaborate new self-definitions in the face of change (Kelly, 1983). This framework is grounded in the pragmatism of Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionism, where the theoretical starting point is the autonomous self defined by intentions, goals, attitudes, values, and beliefs formulated through social interaction. The primary task of individuals is self-definition (i.e., "Who am I?"), and the empirical focus is on how those self-definitions direct subsequent behaviors.

I argue, however, for a different theoretical starting point, drawing from existential (Giddens, 1984) and postmodern (Harvey, 1990) theories of social action. The fundamental motivating task for individuals is to develop trust in the order and logic of an increasingly complex world—or what Giddens (1984) calls "ontological security." Order and coherence are not a necessary or pre-given part of the structure of natural or social systems. Rather, this order must first be socially constituted in a process where individuals create routine actions and interactions of everyday life, reflexively recognize order and continuity in those actions, and in turn embrace and reproduce that order by ongoing participation in these patterned social practices (Giddens, 1984). The primary task of individuals is to create a patterned collection of social practices that constitute a sense of continuity and stability. The self, in this context, is an anchoring device that helps the individual make sense of a fragmented, ambivalent world with an expanding "plurality of choices," and a pervasive sense of ambiguity in everyday conduct.

Self-identity and Goal-directed Behavior

The leisure identity literature is consistent with the widely used rational actor models found in outdoor recreation and leisure research. These social

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psychological models assume that the cognitive qualities of the individual (intentions, desires, preferences, motives) determine subsequent behavior. Similarly, the identity literature explains leisure behavior in two ways. One perspective asserts that people become committed to, or personally involved (Havitz & Dimanche, 1990; Selin & Howard, 1988) in certain self-images, and then seek identity-confirming behaviors in their recreation activities (Haggard & Williams 1992; Shamir, 1992). This perspective states that people's commitment to a self-identity drives involvement in specific recreational behaviors, and motivates participants to engage in self-referent behaviors. A second perspective maintains that the self is a constantly developing process, and leisure is the life space for expressively working out one's desired self-identity in the face of change (Kelly, 1983). Researchers reference leisure behavior to a process in which people use the freedom of the leisure situation to create desired self-meanings. Because leisure is freely chosen, participants are motivated to engage in leisure activities that add to, or enhance one's existing self-definition in a linear and developmental way.

These functionalist approaches to self-identity assume that recreationists are motivated, goal directed actors (Driver & Tocher 1970), and if asked, can articulate their motives, needs, roles, emotions, values, benefits, and preferences. These cognitive qualities of the individual (the psychological "black box") are instrumental in directing subsequent behavior toward some goal outcome. Social psychological models like this are direct descendants of Parsons' (1951) "personality system." His systems-based "theory of action" (1951) maintains that individuals are goal-directed, with intentions, purposes, and ends that guide everyday interaction and behavior. Observed behavior represents the process of compromise between what the individual wants (the "personality system") and what the normative restraints (the "social system") and the value orientations (the "cultural system") of society will allow (Parsons, 1951).

I argue that this causal link between self and behavior may be spurious. The complexity of postmodern existence challenges societal assumptions about rationality, order, and morality. Individuals frequently encounter situations where they do not know what to say and do next—where attitudes, values, or beliefs offer no clear guidelines for action. Social interaction is full of ambiguity and it is often unclear whether one's actions are appropriate or if those actions produce optimal outcomes (Giddens, 1991). People also find their lives increasingly fragmented by multiple role demands, more frequent career changes, and information technologies that compete for one's attention (Harvey, 1990). The hallmark of the postmodern world is the "saturated self" (Gergen, 1991), where one must cope with an increasingly complex world filled with pervasive ambiguity, temporal and spatial discontinuity, and fragmented lifestyles. The idea of a "core" self that directs life decisions, and develops and matures through life's experiences carries little currency in postmodern theory.

Self-identity and Modernity

Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984, 1991) offers one alternative way of thinking about the self under postmodern circumstances. Giddens' fundamental contribution to sociological theory is his concept of the "duality of structure." This concept is a critique of traditional approaches that view structure as a constraining element in human action (Durkheim 1895/1982; Parsons 1951)—i.e., the "imperialism of social structure." He also critiques instrumentalist theories that rely on assumptions about the goal-directed "rational actor"—i.e., the "imperialism of individual experience." Instead, Giddens maintains that individual action and social structure are mutually constitutive of each other. Human action constitutes social structure by establishing routine interaction patterns that lend a sense of continuity and regularity to the episodic nature of everyday life. These routine patterns of social interaction reproduce structural conditions that are, at the same time, the scaffold of individual action—i.e., the duality of structure.

Individual behavior, in this "duality of structure" framework, is integral to social structure. In everyday interaction, people "reflexively monitor" their own conduct as well as the conduct of others. They then skillfully constitute the order and logic of the situation by tacitly drawing on collective knowledge of how an interaction sequence "ought" to proceed. People "reflexively monitor" their routine interactions at two levels: at a level of "discursive consciousness", and at a level of "practical consciousness." Discursive consciousness involves the ability to give reasons for what one does, and the ability to attribute reasons behind other people's actions—where one stipulates intentions, purposes, goals, needs, and dispositions to explain one's actions. "Agents are normally able, if asked, to provide discursive interpretations of the nature of, and the reasons for, the behavior in which they engage" (Giddens, 1991; p. 33). Nevertheless, discursive consciousness for structuration theory is not the analytical centerpiece as it is for action theories, but only one component of a more fundamental process.

Giddens says that the difference between discursive and practical consciousness "is the difference between what can be said and what is characteristically simply done" (Giddens, 1984; p. 3). Thus practical consciousness comprises the "folk" methods of everyday interaction (Garfinkel, 1967) that are always in use to guide and interpret action, but which are rarely articulated.

Many of the elements of being able to 'go on' (in everyday life) are carried at the level of practical consciousness . . . Most forms of practical consciousness could not be 'held in mind' during the course of social activities, since their tacit or taken-for-granted qualities form the essential condition which allows actors to concentrate on tasks at hand. (Giddens, 1991; p. 36).

The practical level of consciousness differs from the discursive level, in that people do not "hold in mind" much of the content of what they are doing in everyday circumstances, but could articulate their "folk knowledge"

if asked. Actors reproduce social structure when tacit contextual knowledge is shared and they can competently engage in the routine of the context.

From this perspective, the self is only one component of a broader action dynamic. It does not deny that people develop self-definitions that characterize the continuity of individual action and meaning. Giddens (1991) devotes a chapter to what he calls the "trajectory of the self," which analyzes the trend of self-help books that are an orthodox expression of contemporary self-growth and self-actualization movements. He maintains, however, that these images of the self are a recent invention, symptomatic of the conditions of modern society. The self, as a growing, "becoming" entity, is a heuristic device that lends regularity to everyday activity. So the self is a "reflexive project" realized in the discursive consciousness of individual, and must be sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual as he or she produces and reproduces the routine activities and order of everyday life.

[A] person with a reasonably stable sense of self-identity has a feeling of biographical continuity which she is able to grasp reflexively and, to a greater or lesser extent, communicate to other people . . . A person's identity is not to be found in behavior, nor—important as this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going (Giddens, 1991; p. 54).

Thus, the "project of the self," for structuration theory, is not a quest for self-improvement or development against the constraining forces of an external world. Instead, the "project of the self" is to "maintain the narrative" in those moments of ambiguity or "ontological anxiety," or to anchor the self across the contingencies of time and space.

Research Questions

The theoretical starting point that one chooses has consequences for how one empirically tests the relationship between self and behavior. When the autonomous, intentional self serves as the starting point, then behavior, as a "role-making process" (Stryker, 1980), is the dependent variable. Traditional identity theories maintain the primacy of the self. The individual as a social object is self-evident. Self-identity, then, is the cause of subsequent behavior that is intentionally directed toward confirming self-meanings in social interaction, or directing a developmental trajectory or growth process over an individual's lifetime. When the concept of "ontological security" serves as the starting point for how people interactively constitute the social order that helps "maintains the narrative," then self-identity, as fashioned by patterned social practices, becomes the dependent variable. Structuration theory maintains that self-identity is a heuristic metaphor used by people to characterize individual life in a complex postmodern world. Self-identity is a reflexive representation of how people skillfully execute routine behaviors that constitute order and coherence in the complexity of everyday life. The former perspective focuses on how self-identity and the process of self-development explains leisure behavior. The latter perspective considers how

routine leisure practices explain the self and anchor the self in the coherence and order of society.

The self in structuration theory begs an explanation. The self is not a given entity or core property of every individual, but is something that must be constituted and reconstituted in everyday activity. This means that the routines of everyday activity provide the matrix within which individuals reflexively construct their self-definitions. Such a perspective offers an empirical means for understanding the development of the self that is largely missing from a strict symbolic interaction formulation. Mead maintains that the self is negotiated and verified in interaction (1934). The individual presents a self-definition, takes on the attitude of the other to gauge the presentation's validity, and reads the reflective cues from others in refining the meaning ascribed to the self. In this way, the self becomes a social object that takes on meaning only in an interactional context. This emphasis on meaning offers a somewhat vague empirical formulation. For structuration theory, however, the self is implicated in the ongoing routines of everyday life. Interaction per se is not the exclusive focus, but instead is a subset of a broader spectrum of routinized human activities. The empirical task is to specify how people construct and maintain personal biographies out of the ongoing practices of everyday life—i.e., maintain a self-narrative over time.

This analytical framework raises three general research questions. First, how do people constitute leisure identities out of the routine and skilled enactment of everyday behavior? Second, are the structuration framework and the self-development framework mutually exclusive? Do routine behaviors predict identity as structuration theory would say, or are identities a better predictor of behaviors as role-identity theory would say, or are identities and behaviors mutually constitutive? Finally, is leisure the life space to work out new emergent identities in the face of change, or does leisure enable people to anchor themselves in preestablished self-narratives in the face of change?

Traditional goal-directed models of behavior assume the self, or individual volition, is the best predictor of behavior. With that assumption, cross-sectional research designs are adequate designs for demonstrating linear relationships. Structuration theory expands the analytical focus to show how social practices constitute social structure and order, and how individuals interpret self-meaning around the reproduction of social order in their everyday routine behaviors. If the self is the discursive product of routine social practices, then one would expect one's engagement and elaboration of these routines in everyday life to predict the self. One would also expect some resistance to self-identity change in the face of life course disruptions and change. Because structuration theory directly confronts the issue of change and stability, it requires other research designs—quasi-experiments, diary methods, time-series analysis, panel studies, and interpretive methods of data collection and analysis.

The leisure research field has tended to be an applied sub-discipline often driven by management questions about visitors and visitor behavior.

While this is a useful role for the field, I also believe leisure research has spent too much time borrowing theories and concepts from other social science fields, and not nearly enough time contributing to those social science disciplines. I believe that structuration theory offers one way for leisure research to move beyond linear goal-directed models and contribute to social science discourse on individual behavior, social structure, and the forces of change and stability in a complex postmodern world.

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