

## A Rejoinder to Reviewers' Comments

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It is with satisfaction, and trepidation, that we engage in dialogue with the likes of Hobson Bryan, Walt Kuentzel, and Bonita McFarlane. Collectively, their respective works on recreational specialization have contributed much to our understanding of leisure behavior, particularly outdoor recreation behavior. Bryan's groundbreaking work on recreational specialization among anglers and fly fishermen laid a foundation for subsequent exploration of within-activity differences. His works in 1977 and 1979 spawned dozens of studies, theses and doctoral dissertations, and scholarly articles appearing in journals, conference proceedings, and books. Kuentzel's work on paddlers, hunters, and sailors has shown us that different dimensions of recreational specialization have varying degrees of association with one another and that these dimensions do not correlate with other aspects of recreational involvement in a consistent manner. Finally, McFarlane's work on birdwatchers may be the most complete study conducted to date, using the recreational specialization framework, that seeks to determine the number of participants within a given leisure social world who embody particular styles of involvement. In this brief rejoinder, we will limit our remarks primarily to what we see are opportunities for additional research that stem from our distinguished colleagues' comments.

Our three reviewers agreed that leisure researchers needed to conceive specialization as a process that entails change over time. In her comments, McFarlane noted that past research on recreational specialization "has focused on quantifying the 'amount' of specialization an individual possesses." Studies, in fact, have treated recreational specialization as a *condition* that characterizes people's involvement at a given point in time. An argument could be made that researchers, we included, have actually measured involvement and commitment rather than specialization. Our major objective was to rethink what recreational specialization means and how we should go about studying it. We believe that specialization is *a process that entails a progression in how recreationists participate in and view the activity over time*. Hence, our conception of recreational specialization is based on the idea that people's involvement changes over time as reflected by a focusing of behavior, the acquisition of skills and knowledge, and the tendency to become so committed to the activity that it becomes a central life interest. While we advocated the use of longitudinal data, we agree with McFarlane that qualitative

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research designs, which study participants at different stages of involvement, are well suited to helping us understand the factors that facilitate and constrain specialization.

In his comments, Kuentzel provided valuable insight into the different career trajectories facing leisure participants. He made the case that modernity and commercialization of leisure have created a diversity of opportunities, which may actually encourage people to sample activities rather than specialize. We agree completely with this point and wrote the article with the understanding that specialization is not a typical career course that characterizes people's involvement in leisure activities. As we noted, many individuals may choose to participate in a wide range of leisure activities at any given point during their life. Such individuals may actually scoff at performance standards and codes of ethics embraced by specialists and social world insiders. Future research needs to establish the extent to which people choose to specialize in activities. Studies may reveal that experimenting (or sampling), dabbling, and other styles of involvement better describe people's leisure in modern society than does recreational specialization.

Kuentzel also noted that a multiplicity of leisure opportunities is likely to generate various participation trajectories within a given leisure social world, which means that progress is unlikely to be directed toward "an ultimate pre-established objective." We agree with this insight as well. In fact, we addressed this issue in a previous draft of our paper but cut it because of space limitations. What we think Kuentzel is saying here is that recreationists are increasingly discovering that there are many sources of *specialization* within a given social world and progression may occur along any number of lines. Specialization here means something slightly different than a developmental process; in this case the word refers to a specific field or area of interest within the broader, more inclusive social world.

For purposes of clarity, it may be useful to use the term *subworld* to refer to a specialized field or area of interest within a social world proper. Subworlds form as a result of segmentation processes. Kling and Gerson (1978) defined *segmentation* as the "tendency for [social] worlds to develop specialized concerns and interests within the larger community of activities, which act to differentiate some members of the [social] world from others" (p. 26). According to Strauss (1984), for a subworld to develop, "there has to emerge a collective definition that certain activities are preeminently worth doing and 'we' are doing them" (p. 128). Within any given leisure social world today, there may exist multiple subworlds in which participants may invest their energies. We do not presume that these subworlds can be arranged along a continuum from least to most advanced (cf., Ditton, Loomis, & Choi, 1992). In fact, the subworlds, while being fundamentally different from one another, may exhibit a like degree of complexity with regard to conventions, practices, and techniques. People may choose to participate in one subworld to the exclusion of others; in some cases individuals may participate in multiple subworlds. Irrespective of the subworlds in which people participate, however, patterns of progression, stages of involvement, turning points, and career contingencies are likely to be the same.

The social world of bicycling provides a useful example of what we are talking about. Figure 1 represents, in a general way, how the activity of bicycling has become more diverse and segmented in contemporary America over the last few decades. For many years, two types of cycling predominated—road cycling and bicycle motor-cross (BMX). In the mid 1970s mountain biking began to develop, primarily due to a small group of road cyclists looking for new challenges. Over time this group’s new equipment, behavior, and values and attitudes were adopted and legitimated by others. With the help of mass media, the popularity of this new activity spread throughout the United States. The differences between mountain biking and road cycling in techniques and ideology are so far-reaching that the segmentation process actually represented a “splitting off” (Strauss, 1984) of the new sub-world from the existing social world. Interestingly, mountain biking is continuing to evolve as evidenced by the emergence in recent years of cross-country racing, trials competition, and downhill racing. Time will tell whether or not these branches within mountain biking become subworlds in and of themselves.

The diagram also provides a visual tool for understanding the various branches in which cyclists may specialize over time. The participant (we will call her Jane) may start from a casual beginning and cycle with family and friends. At some point Jane may try her hand at mountain biking. A key career contingency is operating here—she has moved to a part of the country where opportunities for the activity are readily accessible and many mountain bikers live and pursue their avocation. Enjoying her initial rides and support

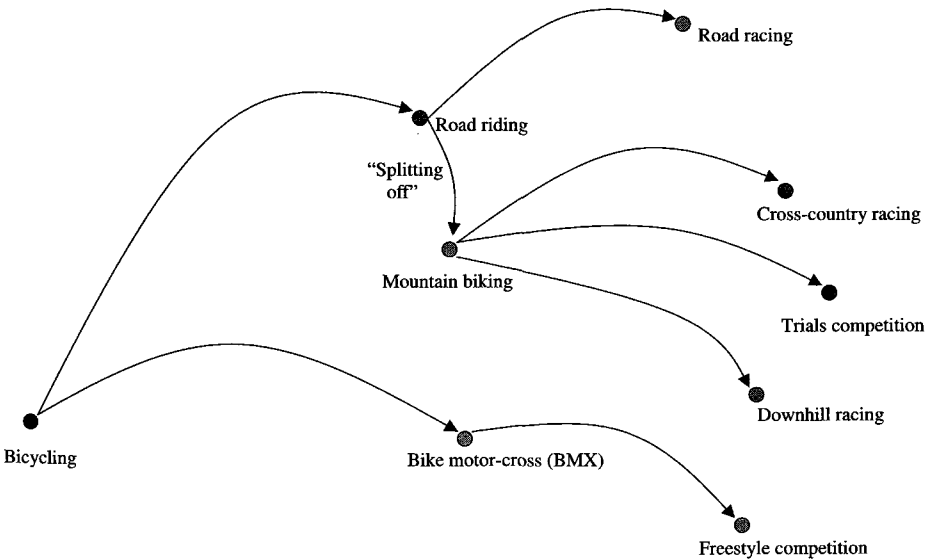


Figure 1. A conceptual representation of segmentation processes in the social world of bicycling.

from other mountain bikers (another career contingency) entice Jane to purchase a mountain bike of her own and spend more time developing her skills. Over time, Jane realizes that many mountain bikers are branching off into cross-country racing, trials competition, and downhill racing. She tries all three and discovers that she really likes downhill racing. Over the next few years Jane begins to specialize in this branch of mountain biking, as evidenced by a focusing in behavior, the development of skills, and increased personal and social commitment. Most of Jane's free time is spent training and competing in downhill racing with other downhill racers. Jane also helps organize local racing events and almost all friends are now individuals she met through racing.

The reviewers also commented on issues pertaining to the speed of progression. McFarlane asked questions about how long it takes people to progress to an advanced level of involvement. One avenue for future research is to explore timetables associated with career progression. Bryan, in contrast, speculated about the implications associated with "jump-starting" into an advanced level of participation in activities. He argued that a degree of "cultural lag" might be evident as individuals exhibit high degrees of skill and equipment use but fail to exhibit appropriate ethical conduct. Another term to describe this chasm between behavior and attitudes is *status incongruity*.

Bryan's ideas get to the heart of a neglected issue in leisure research: conventions and practices (Hall, 1987) within any given leisure social world are likely to be contested by participants. As we noted in our paper, insiders (or high-ranking specialists) may regard newcomers with contempt until they have demonstrated appropriate skill and attitudes (Brannigan & McDougall, 1983; Donnelly & Young, 1988). Hence, there is some pressure to acquire skills and accept existing conventions and practices. However, as noted by Bryan, some individuals may consciously or unconsciously not conform to established ways of doing things. Segmentation is a possible outcome whereby a new subworld emerges. Members of the new subworld may find themselves in perpetual conflict with others over access to resources, public opinion, and so on. Future research should, thus, focus on the implications that cultural lag or status incongruity has on both segmentation and legitimation processes (Strauss, 1982) within a given leisure social world.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide a rejoinder to ideas put forth by three well-known scholars. We believe that Bryan, Kuentzel, and McFarlane have written first-rate commentaries and that their ideas deserve expansion and space beyond the limitations imposed by the review-and-response format typical of most journals. We have limited our remarks primarily to expanding on what we believe are some potentially rich research opportunities in the area of recreational specialization offered by Bryan, Kuentzel, and McFarlane. We hope that the collection of articles here provide greater conceptual clarity as researchers seek to go about understanding change and progression among leisure participants.

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