Foreword

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Occupational devotion is a relatively new concept; it denotes a distinctive personal orientation toward a particular activity that is both work and leisure. It was introduced in Stebbins (2004/2014), as a formal recognition of the powerful love for a serious leisure interest that gets expressed in the desire to make a living from it and thereby become enabled to pursue the activity fulltime. The livelihood gained from such work was described in the 2004/2014 book using an “economic situation” scale. It ranges from poverty or near poverty through passable living, comfortable living, and culminates at opulent living. Devotee workers at the bottom of this scale are, in fact, typically making their living from their serious pursuits only on a part-time basis. At this point, the rest of their livelihood normally comes from another job, a family member (e.g., parent, spouse), institutional support (e.g., governmental grants, foundational awards), and possibly other external sources.

A serious pursuit becomes devotee work when its participants meet six criteria (Stebbins, 2004/2014, p. 9) while engaging in a remunerated activity:

- 1) The valued core activity must be profound; to perform it acceptably 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. The adjectives “creative” and “innovative” stress that the undertaking results in something new or different, showing imagination and application of routine skill or knowledge. In this regard, boredom is likely to develop only after the onset of fatigue experienced from long hours on the job, a point at which significant creativity and innovation are no longer possible.
- 4) Would-be devotees must have reasonable control over the amount and disposition of time put into the occupation (the leisure value of freedom of action), such that they can prevent it from becoming a burden. Medium and large bureaucracies

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tend to subvert this criterion. For, in interest of the survival and development of their organization, managers have felt they must deny their non-unionized employees this benefit, sometimes forcing them to accept stiff deadlines and heavy workloads. But no activity, be it leisure or work, is so appealing that it invites unwavering participation during all waking hours.

- 5) The would-be devotee must have both an aptitude and a taste for the work in question. This is, in part, a case of one man's meat being another's poison. John finds great fulfillment in being a physician, an occupation that holds little appeal for Jane who, instead, adores being a lawyer (work John finds unappealing).
- 6) The devotees must work in a physical and social milieu that encourages them to pursue often and without significant constraint the core activity. This includes freedom from excessive paperwork, caseloads, class sizes, market demands, and the like.

As in serious leisure so in devotee work, there are some disagreeable demands that are nonetheless insufficiently obnoxious to spur the participant to quit making a living in this way. That said, any of the six criteria may change for the worse, forcing the participant to abandon the passion that carried that person into such work.

Occupation devotion is possible in four types work. Such work has so far been observed in the following sectors of the economy: the liberal professions, consulting occupations, craft-like trades, and creativity-based small businesses. The liberal professions emerge from diverse amateur and volunteer pursuits. Such lines of work vary according to the public-centered (in art, science, sport, entertainment) and the client-centered professions (e.g., law, medicine, education, architecture, engineering, social work). Only certain craft-like trades contain the potential for innovative work, among them, masonry, plumbing, and electricity. The same can be said for some of the small businesses, which include those offering short, personal or small-group instructional programs, custom work, animal care, and repair and restoration services.

Still, client-centered professionals must be trained, and here is where amateurs (and, as noted below, some volunteers) enter their special world of work. These trainees have been analyzed as "preprofessional amateurs" (Stebbins, 1979, p. 36), who as they take courses, engage in practical work and learn just how fulfilling their future profession really is, and so develop a substantial devotion to it. This practical work gives them the opportunity to engage in at least some of the core tasks done by their professional counterparts. All this occurs in a milieu that is essentially one of serious leisure, in that students can and do at times quit those training programs, thereby giving substance to their basically non-coercive nature.

Among the organizational volunteers are those who use their altruistic role to explore for work in a particular segment of the job market. Sometimes these volunteers hope to find employment by this route, accomplished by getting experience that will improve their chances of finding work in that field or a related one. Sometimes they simply want to explore the nature of work there, and sometimes

they believe that volunteer experience will look good on their resume. On the other hand, pure organizational volunteers – those who serve primarily for the fulfillment derived from executing its attractive core tasks – may be hired to fill a remunerated post in their organization that generates occupational devotion. One such post is volunteer coordinator.

Commitment is critical in occupational devotion, where it is neither an antecedent nor a concomitant of devotee work, but rather one of its most profound consequences. Devotees become committed to a line of work based on their deep involvement in and attachment to its valued core activity. The worker discovers, while working, just how fulfilling the core tasks can be. This suggests that we must be careful to specify the type of commitment felt, for one type – it is negative – springs from arrangements associated with the job which can prove highly costly should that job be abandoned (e.g., seniority, pension plan, health care). The second type of commitment is positive; it comes, as just noted, from deep involvement in and attachment to a line of fulfilling activity, an attitude that is characteristic of occupational devotees.

Research on occupational devotion is still in short supply. Many of the entries under “Work” in the serious leisure perspective Bibliography (cf, www.seriousleisure.net/Bibliography) are theoretical rather than empirical and, of the latter, most are centered on the amateur-professional career path, as opposed to the paths of hobbyists, enthusiasts in the crafts and trades, and small business proprietors. The contributions to this special issue of the *International Journal of Sociology of Leisure* are therefore particularly welcome, since they shed new light on this heretofore neglected area of leisure and work.

References

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