

The Psychologists are Coming!

Edward S. Bordin

University of Michigan

My interest in understanding the relationships between work and play and what permits their fusion or impels a person to keep them apart led me in the past to tangential glances at the literature on leisure. I suppose that my paper on fusing work and play (Bordin 1979) was a major reason I have been invited to react to this set of papers. Thus, I come as an outsider with a particular point of view carrying all of the advantages and disadvantages of such a position. Being above the fray, I can notice things that may be obscured by deep involvement and challenge assumptions that have been taken for granted. Not being deeply in touch with the phenomena in question, I may be susceptible to foolish and uninformed conclusions.

As I read through the four papers, there was a growing sense of *deja vu*. It reminded me of the struggle between the vocational educators and the early counseling psychologists over the vocational counseling turf. Reading between the lines, I see a comparable tug of war between physical and recreational educators and counseling psychologists. The psychologist is prone to start from a holistic view of individual functioning, to ask what engaging in leisure activities really means to people, to look at the way they use the definitions, to try to trace the behavioral, cognitive, and affective events to underlying constructs in order to establish a psychological basis for understanding this realm of human experience and behavior and for the devising and validating of educational and remedial interventions. The physical and recreational educators, perhaps by virtue of being more in touch with everyday "recreational" activity, are more likely to concentrate on the pragmatics of facilitating and carrying out such activities, the specific skills, information, and resources required. Dichotomies, of course, over-simplify. Psychology and education have more permeable boundaries than we psychologists, especially in our organizational selves, are willing to believe. So there are educators who identify themselves as psychologists and psychologists who identify themselves as educators.

Leaving the contention for turf with the possibly pollyannaish assertion that there is room for everyone, I turn my attention to the psychological understanding of leisure. The struggle with this question, as exemplified in all four papers, is more than a matter of definition. To my way of thinking, McDowell strikes the most meaningful note when he proposes that leisure be thought of as a state of mind (leisure consciousness and leisure ideology). I would go further in wishing to substitute the word "play" to refer to the "ludic" element which seems to be such an important, if not necessary, part of our lives. As several of the papers emphasize, the important distinction is between work and play and this depends on the state of mind of the person. One person's play is another person's work, e.g., the weekend tennis player and the tennis professional.

The main distinction is between the motives out of which the individual engages in the activity, whether it is a means to an end or an end in itself. What makes tennis playing work for the professional is that he at times will have to play when he would rather do something else.

While all of the writers pay attention to the social, cultural, and economic factors, not even McDowell goes far enough. The point of view does not seem to acknowledge the limits of growth and the energy crisis. Both of these events have raised questions about the reality in our dreams of a time when machines will relieve us of the necessity of working to stay alive, thereby relieving us of a major source of external pressure in the activities in which we engage. Sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly, it is assumed that inevitably the future will bring increasingly briefer work weeks and earlier retirement. The future is not so unidirectional, as indicated not only by questions raised by the finiteness of specific resources, but also by our present demographic situation. The falling birthrate of the last two decades has set in motion conditions in which the persons who are part of the population bulge of the late 1940's and the 1950's baby boom would have to be supported through social security in their retirement years by the workers of the smaller cohorts of the 1960's and 70's. Concern about the future viability of social security has already been expressed. Expansion of the role of women in the work force appears unlikely to provide sufficient remedy because the proportion of women who have entered the labor force is already too close to the saturation point to offer a large enough contribution to take up the slack.¹ There appear to be only two major ways to meet the problem: by drawing on either youth or older retirement-aged workers. Thus anticipations in thinking about leisure of longer retirement and wider prevalence may prove mistaken.

Greater longevity, which is realistic, is in itself creating pressures toward pushing back the age of forced retirement. The fact that shorter work weeks are accompanied by an increase in moonlighting and that men and women resist forced retirement does not, in my opinion, stem solely from economic pressures; it reflects some intrinsic needs that occupations can satisfy. I use the term occupation to designate that work, while meeting economic needs, also provides a significant expression of self.

Let me back up and summarize the argument, presented more fully elsewhere (Bordin, 1979). A key to the relation between work and play, whether they can be experienced as fused into the same activity or they must be separated, lies in understanding the psychological chemistry of effort, spontaneity, and compulsion. Effort, the intense expenditure of energy can characterize either work or play. The "labor of love" of the amateur musician or athlete may involve as intense effort, albeit for smaller portions of the week, as that of the professional in these fields. The major distinction is not between work and play, but separating the two from alienated toil. Here the activity has become devoid of intrinsic satisfaction. We feel forced to engage in it. Our history of being cared for as infants insures that even the direct experience of hunger or the threat of it is experienced as an external rather than an internal motivation. Compulsion refers to a complex distinction between inner and outer pressures. At a primitive level we feel compelled when we have no choice. Circum-

stances are out of our control or someone forces us to do something: Mother insists that we do our homework or a household chore before we join our friends; we schedule getting together to play a Beethoven quartet for free time after work. The essence of the joyful expression is in the spontaneously expressed activity, free of planning, free of delay. The complexities come in when we progress from the child's use of a broom handle as a horse, or whatever else is at hand as an expressive and satisfying activity full of spontaneity and joy to an adult's use of his "freedom" to watch a mindless television program with drugged boredom. We must somehow account for the fact that humans can long for freedom yet seek to escape it (Fromm, 1941).

I believe that we need a great deal more theory and research directed at the work of children and the play of adults. It is evident that as children grow older, their play becomes more organized and more planful. The spontaneity of childhood is gradually transformed into the sports and games of youth with formalized rules. It looks as though newer satisfactions which go with being older call for a mix of effort expended to reach a greater level of skill and requiring more structure. Clearly, there is an optimal point. Beyond that point, often reached with the "Little League" phenomenon and its overintrusiveness of adults, the joy is taken out of it. Thus spontaneity and self-involved effort form a continuum with compelled and alienated toil which the stark distinctions between work and play may obscure. The assiduous practice required to obtain the joy of playing a Mozart sonata tells us that many of the most meaningful and enduring joys of life may demand planful, almost painful effort that skirts the border of becoming alienated. All of us have experienced the tug of war between some longer term chosen satisfaction and some more immediate, but shallower gratification.

To summarize this part of the argument, we must penetrate beyond thinking about work and leisure to understanding the various mixes of spontaneity, effort and compulsion in our lives and how they serve our search for self-realization. When the economic motives are removed, if that is even possible, work-like activity in the sense of an effort sustained over time because it incorporates a significant sense of self and provides opportunities for spontaneity and joy will still be sought out of the compulsion of inner need. This, not the protestant ethic, is the sense in which work is a necessary psychological ingredient of human life, not always achieved, but always sought. This is, of course, an hypothesis that cries for formal empirical verification or rejection.

My experience as a vocational counselor suggests to me that individuals vary in how much they can and want to fuse work and play. As several contributors point out, work may not provide all of the opportunities for self-expression that an individual requires therefore the distinction between work time and leisure time remains necessary and useful. We should, however, guard against the kind of distinction that Gardner pokes fun at when he says:

What can be more satisfying than to be engaged in work in which every capacity or talent one may have needed, every lesson one may have learned is used, every value one cares about is furthered?

No wonder men and women who find themselves in that situation commonly overwork, pass up vacations, and neglect less exciting games such as golf.

It is one of the amusing errors of human judgment that the world habitually feels sorry for overworked men and women --and doesn't feel a bit sorry for the men and women who live by moving from one pleasure resort to the next. As a result, the hard workers get not only the real fun but all the sympathy too, while the resort habitues scratch the dry soil of calculated diversion and get roundly criticized for it. It isn't fun. (1968, p.32)

It seems likely that there are both individual and social-technological barriers toward achieving that ideal fusion of work and play that Gardner celebrates. We need research on both of these issues. I have encountered the individual barriers in the phenomenon of the individual who, when confronted with the possibilities of a vocational expression of a hobby or other leisure time preoccupation, responds "Oh no! That would take the fun out of it." Further investigation has suggested to me that at least one important source of such a stance is a state of extreme tenderness to pressure from authority. This is a person who is very sensitive and reactive against anything sensed as pressure from others. So great is this sensitivity that even pressure created by the self-commitment that is involved in a career choice is experienced as submitting to tyranny. As a confirmation of this formulation, I have found that such an individual avoids play activities requiring great commitment and effort. I have stated my belief (Bordin, 1979) that the individual acquires a readiness to fuse effort with spontaneity free of the debilitating feelings of compulsion to the extent that he or she experiences a form of leadership from parent, teacher or other caretaker who exerts authority coupled with mutuality and bonds of affection and respect, in short, a strong working alliance. All this suggests that one of the important places to begin understanding individual factors in the use of work and leisure is in the study of children in work times, not just in school, but at home. Some of the Blocher and Siegal's cognitive developmental propositions could be meaningfully tested within such an observational framework.

Even these days of rising unemployment and decreased affluence should not obscure the fact that the affluent society is not always synonymous with satisfaction and well being. Similarly we should avoid the error of expending all our efforts on achieving playful needs through leisure activities. The developmentally oriented leisure counselor should be concerned with how work can be designed to make more possible the elements that Gardner features through the redesign or enrichment of work systems. Some important work has been done. For example, Blauner (1964) has challenged the assumption that there is a single level of control that characterizes the present industrial system. Comparing four industries, he finds work in printing and chemicals, each in its own way, fostering a sense of control and permitting the worker to find meaning and self-commitment and, therefore, to be plagued less by alienation and cynicism. By contrast, automobile assembly line and textile workers operate in a machine-person context which fosters powerlessness and alienation, the case of the textile worker being somewhat

tempered by the nature of community life in the southern town. Ford (1969) provides an example of experimental approaches to the problem of job design and workers' motivation. In experiments carried on with various routine clerical jobs with AT&T, by removing controls (without removing accountability), by giving tasks in more natural units, and by introducing new, more difficult tasks, he was able to demonstrate greater productivity, lower turnover, and greater satisfaction.

When it comes to the process of leisure counseling, I found the Tinsleys' paper particularly illuminating and provocative. Clearly, much attention is required to the question of why individuals need this kind of help. In the area that they designate as leisure guidance and decision making, I have two difficulties. One, I find it difficult to understand clearly the information and skill issues. At times I imagine the informational side smacking of the advertising-marketing element in making individuals aware of possibilities and "selling" them on which ones are for their own good. I see dangers analogous to those inherent in the over-organization of children's sports activities. And what skills are being referred to? This is my second difficulty. If they are skills in decision-making, I would be fearful that concentration on these would misdirect us away from the importance of spontaneity in leisure and the play spirit. Here I am more concerned with helping individuals achieve greater capacity for spontaneity than to train them to be cautious and planful. Let them recapture some of that capacity to flow and make use of whatever is at hand, rather than be condemned to the adult version of the joyless manipulation of preplanned toys or leisure activities. On the other hand, the reference to skills may be directing attention to the acknowledged fact that many of the most satisfying experiences in work and play activities are achieved only through the mastery of certain skills. Is leisure guidance in this context synonymous with music and sports education and the like?

When it comes to what the Tinsleys have designated as leisure counseling; it is difficult for me to distinguish it from psychological counseling. Wishes to enhance one's self realization are not likely to be so compartmentalized as to be confined to single areas of one's life. This is not to say that, for a given individual, it might be most expeditious to work on the psychological issues of effort, spontaneity, and compulsion through the leisure area of life as compared to work, family relationship, etc. Of course Blocher and Siegal might contend that we must not overlook the possibility that we are dealing with a cognitive developmental failure. This points up the kind of field research we need.² For example, in designing the kinds of intervention aimed at remedying the cognitive deficiency, we would want to see whether and how these would differ from those guided by a view, for example, that this individual's sensitivity to authority makes him or her prone to see external pressure in the absence of it, and whether the effects of the intervention or interventions, if they can be discriminated, generalize to leisure actions and to other areas of the individual's life.

As a conclusion to my reactions, I can only express my indebtedness to the contributors. They have shown us that leisure counseling is an area where psychologists can have their own peculiar brand of fun.

References

- Blauner R. *Alienation and freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1964.
- Bordin, E.S. *Research strategies in psychotherapy*. New York: Wiley, 1974.
- Bordin, E.S. Fusing work and play: A Challenge to theory and research. *Academic Psychology Bulletin*, 1979, 1, 5-9.
- Boxandall, R., Gordon, L., & Reverby, S. (Eds.). *America's working women*. New York: Vintage Books, 1976.
- Campbell, A. Changes in psychological well-being during the 1970's of homemakers and employed wives. In D.G. McGuigan (Ed.) *Women's lives: New theory, research and policy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1980, 291-302.
- Ford, R.W. *Motivation through the work itself*. New York: American Management Association, 1969.
- Fromm, E. *Escape from freedom*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1941.
- Gardner, J.G. *No easy task*. New York: Harper Press & Rowe, 1968.
- Gelso, C.J. Research in counseling: Methodological and professional issues. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 1979, 8 (3) 7-35.
- Smuts, R.W. *Women and work in America*. New York: Stocken Books, 1974.

Footnotes

¹I do not have access to the exact statistics one would like but some indication of how rapidly we are moving toward a full representation of women in the labor force is indicated in the estimate that for all women, 16 years of age and over, the proportion in the labor force rose between 1950 and 1968 from one in three to two in five. At that later time more than half of the women between 20 and 54 were engaged in work (Smuts, 1974, viii). Another source finds that the percentage of all women in the female labor force has risen almost continuously from 1890 (18%) to 1974 (45%) and that the percentage of married women working has risen even faster so that in 1974 there is virtually no difference (45% vs. 44%) (Boxandall, Gordon, & Reverby, 1976). Finally, Campbell (1980) reports a phenomenal increase during the 1970's in the number of women employed to a proportion of 54%, in 1978, an increase of a third from the 1971 level. If many more married women move into the work force, they would have to be replaced for child-care-home-care purposes either by single women or by men withdrawn from the work force.

²I am not receptive to the current rush into analogue research without the intervening bridging studies that demonstrate that the analogue captures the issues we identify in field observation and that the results of the analogue study are transferable. See Bordin (1974, Chap. 4) and Gelso (1979).