Husting, Gaming, and Femaling: Examining the Validity of the Generic Social Process of Involvements

Abstract

This paper examines the validity of the generic social process (GSP) of involvement with specific focus on initial involvements and sustaining involvements. This paper uses three ethnographic monographs as data to assess the appropriateness and validity of this GSP. *Male Femaling* (1997) by Richard Ekins, *Road Hustler* (1977) by Robert Prus and C.R.D. Sharper, and *Shared Fantasy* (1983) by Gary Alan Fine provide the data for this paper.

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Introduction

Human group life is based on the things we do. It is based on activity. This paper looks at three types of activities that people participate in and develop fascinations with. Specifically this paper will examine how people become involved in card and dice hustling, fantasy role games, and cross-dressing or sex-changing. *Male Femaling* (1997) by Richard Ekins examines men who cross-dress or seek sex change operations. They participate in a life-world where their activity may be referred to as male femaling. *Road Hustler* (1977) by Robert Prus and C.R.D. Sharper examines the life-world of people who cheat at card and dice games. In this life-world hustling is the activity of focus. In *Shared Fantasy* (1983) by Gary Alan Fine the life-world of fantasy gamers is examined. Using a comparative analysis approach I will allow three monographs on these topics to become my data so I may explore the generic social process of involvements in these activities.

Theoretical Frame

This paper will use a symbolic interactionist framework which privileges human lived experience. Symbolic interactionism assumes that human group life is intersubjective in that it recognizes a pre-existence and the reality of the other. It is multi-perspectival as each member of a group will have a different perspective and understanding of a given situation. Human group life is reflective in that individuals can take the viewpoints of other group members and themselves into account during meaningful intentional behaviour. It is also activity-based because humans are action-oriented beings who are always active in "doing." Human group life is negotiable as we mutually shape our life-worlds in conjunction with others. It is relational as it includes bonds, afflictions,

networks, communities, loyalties, disaffections, and various relationships with others.

Finally, human group life is processual in that it recognizes the sequencing of people's

experiences across various life-world situations (Prus,1997:11-15). The assumptions

made within symbolic interactionism ask us to focus on the intersubjective realities of

members of various life-worlds. For the symbolic interactionist human reflexivity,

agency, interchange, relationships, and activity are best understood in terms of process.

Prus (1997:11-17) highlights the importance of process:

> The primary conceptual and methodological implication of this processual
> emphasis is this: since all aspects of group life take place in dynamic
> terms or take their shape over time, it is essential that the human condition
> be conceptualized and studied in manner that are acutely mindful of the
> emergent nature of human lived experience.

Because people are involved in a multitude of activities and various life-worlds at one

time one way to understand the variations is to examine human group life through generic

social processes (GSPs). GSPs allow us to denote similar "sequences of activity across

diverse contexts" (Prus, 1996:142). So while one might ask what does cross-dressing

have to do with cheating at poker, using generic social processes as conceptual

framework allows us to see that "people's interactions in this setting are not so different

from those taking place in the other (community) context in which people find

themselves" (Prus, 1997:35). The study of GSPs within symbolic interactionism allows

us to see how human group life is similarly organized in a plethora of differing social

contexts.

GSP: Involvements

Human lived experiences are extremely complex. The most salient point for me is that "the study of group life should not be forced into 'nice, neat little boxes'" (Prus,1997:214). Generic social processes (GSPs) are a way of organizing human lived experience. They do not ignore, rather they attend to the emergent, individualistic, idiosyncratic, and unique aspects of human lived experience. While there are hundreds of GSPs from experiencing emotionality to participating in collective events, for this paper I have chosen to focus on the generic social process of involvements. "Involvements" is a GSP that intends to address the question of: how and when do people become involved in activities. Involvement, as a GSP, looks at the beginning (getting starting), the middle (continuities), the end (disinvolvement), and the relapses (potential reinvolvments) of being engaged in an activity.

One's involvements are viewed as multiple and shifting (Prus,1997:60). Because we can be involved in more than one thing at one time (for example, I am involved in being a graduate student but I may also be involved in being a volunteer at a hospice), involvements may also be incompatible, (Prus,1997:60) perhaps contradictory, competing, or even harmonious and complimentary. Involvements can be broken down into: (a) initial involvements, (b) continuities (sustaining and intensifying involvements), (c) disinvolvements, and (d) reinvolvements (Prus,1997:60). Then within each of these subprocesses there are further processes at work such as coming involved through seekership or being recruited under (a) initial involvements. Involvements can be considered one of the largest GSPs covering a multitude of aspects. For this reason I will

focus on the most salient aspects of involvement as they pertain to my data (the monographs) illustrating with examples from the texts. After introducing my data as three ethnographic monographs, I will define each subprocess and then proceed to examine the extent to which I found that my monographs address these processes and their validity.

Monographs/Data

The data for this analysis will come from three ethnographic monographs. An ethnography is a type of research pursuit that allows the researcher to obtain intimate familiarity with individuals and/or groups. As Prus (1997:17-18) states, "what is required is an active appreciation of the lived situations of the other, and this can be attained most effectively by venturing out into the life-worlds of those being studied and interacting extensively with those involved therein." This active appreciation into the lives of others in achieved through participant-observation, intensive interviewing, and observations. This is the approach to research that is taken by each ethnographer in these monographs. The information contained within these life-world portrayals will subsequently be looked at through the GSP of involvements.

Robert Prus and C.R.D. Sharper (1977) *Road Hustler: The Career Contingencies of Professional Card and Dice Hustlers*

In *Road Hustler*, Prus and his key informant, Sharper, examine card and dice hustlers and hustling. The book describes how cheating is possible within the world of gambling with emphasis on card games and dice games (for example, the games of poker and craps). More importantly, the book examines how individuals get involved with hustling, how their identities as "professional hustlers" derive, how they find and develop a solid crew

to work with, how they form relationships within their own crew and other crews, how they learn the ropes as a beginner, how they work the games, and how they deal with disruptions, accusations, close calls, and impending violence. While this research was conducted and the book was written before Prus put together a more formal list of generic social processes, it is evident that this early work informs the GSP schema. At the time, Prus used Sutherland's (1937) research on *The Professional Thief* as a point of comparison. He argues that we do not need a separate theory for each criminal orientation but rather that we should instead focus on the differing career involvements (1977:158). Therefore, instead of having a separate theory for each subculture, group, affiliation, or even activity that exists we can focus on the commonalities (and differences) found within the processes of each life-world. It seems clear to me that Prus was making a claim for the utility of GSPs even before he had begun to formally conceptualize them into being. The information contained within *Road Hustler*, obtained by participant observation, observation and intensive interviews with card and dice hustlers, provides me with ample data to analyze the generic social process of involvements and more specifically how card and dice hustlers manage reservations, acquire linguistic fluency, and question the viability of their perspectives.

Gary Alan Fine (1983) *Shared Fantasy: Role Playing Games as Social Worlds*

In *Shared Fantasy*, Fine examines the life-world of fantasy games. Fantasy games are a leisure activity involving groups of people (most frequently males) who use cards and dice to create a fantasy world for their make-believe characters. Fine (1983:2) writes:

> Fantasy games consist of players and referees collectively constructing
> history and biography for their society and characters. These
> 'experiences' can then be meaningfully referred to by members of the
> group. Such references reveal important features of the fantasy world
> created, the characters who inhabit this fantasy world, and the style of
> interaction of players and referees. When a gaming group exists over
> several weeks or months, this shared culture can become quite extensive
> and meaningful for group members.

For this research Fine was involved in several gaming life-worlds as a participant. His

identity as an interested researcher was known so he had ample opportunity to interview

his game-mates. Fine describes fantasy gaming both generally and specific fantasy

games (such as *Dungeons and Dragons*) to illustrate for the reader what a fantasy game

is. Within his book he gives background information about fantasy games such as the

economic significance of the gaming society (27), communication networks (31), and the

media's role in disseminating information about gaming (35). He also goes into a

discussion of the players which includes information about recruitment (47),

justifications for gaming (52), age (162), other common social characteristics (45), and a

brief exploration of women in gaming (62). Fine explains the roles taken on my

members of the shared culture such as the referee who plays "God" (72) determining the

setting and scenario to be played. Activity is the focus when Fine is discussing decision-

making (86), controlling chance (90), luck (96), and cheating (99). He always seems to

return to explaining "where is the referee in all this" by examining his/her role during

these various aspects of activity. He also notes that relationships within gaming life-

worlds are important (177) and sustained through their shared fantasies but often do not

transcend the gaming setting (297).   Fine's detailed account of fantasy gaming will allow

me to see how individuals within this life-world manage reservations, how they acquire

linguistic fluency, and if and when they question the viability of their perspectives in an attempt to assess the validity of some aspects of the generic social process of involvement.

Richard Ekins (1997) *Male Femaling: A Grounded Theory Approach to Cross-Dressing and Sex-Changing*

Richard Ekins, in *Male Femaling*, describes grounded theory within the interactionist tradition to fall on a continuum between ethnography, which he says is highly descriptive, and ethnomethodology (31), which he says takes us too far away from the empirical social world being studied (32). He goes onto explain that he will be taking a symbolic interactionism approach focusing on the understandings of the founders of the tradition: Mead, Blumer (36), and subsequently Giddens (37). Ekins research is quite simply ethnographic in approach (if not in analysis) because he relies on a methodology centered around observation, participant-observation, and intensive interviews over an extended period of time in an attempt to learn about the life-worlds of cross-dressers and/or sex-changers. Ekins explains that male femaling occurs in three major modes. The first is 'body femaling' where a male desires his body to be female. Activities in this mode may include: body padding, gonadal change, hormonal change, facial and body hair change, vocal cord change, sex-change surgery (55). The extent to which these various activities are accomplished or desired depends on the person. The second mode is 'erotic femaling.' It is deliberately sexual where the sexual arousal stems from "the femaler himself by his own femaling, and/or through the awareness of others of his own erotic femaling" (56). In this mode a male femaler may dress up in feminine clothing and masturbate but may not wish to change their physical male body in any way. The final

male femaling mode is 'gender femaling' where men "adopt the behaviours, emotions, and cognitions socio-culturally associated with being female" (57). Ekins notes that this type of feminine role-playing does not need to be associated with eroticism. Based on these three modes Ekins examines how one begins as a male femaler (61), male femaling fantasy scripts (76), solitary activities (88), solo activities (92), dyadic activities (97), and group activities (101). The final section of the book provides what could be considered three case studies exploring how three different individuals *do* male femaling and the meaning it has for them. Throughout Ekins highly analytical portrayal of male femaling there are ample opportunities to look at the involvements of male femalers in terms of how they might manage reservations about their interest, how they acquire linguistic fluency to male female, and if and when they question the viability of their perspectives.

Analytic Emphasis

While the three monographs I am using were not developed with specific GSPs in mind because they were written from an interactionist perspective they lend themselves well to such an analysis. Certain monographs may be stronger or weaker in terms of which GSPs can be related to the content found within. My focus is on involvements so I will examine the monographs in terms of each of its subprocesses, where applicable. When reading my monographs specifically with the GSP of involvements in mind, I found that this group of monographs coupled with my own particular interest in the topics, provide interesting insight into three particular subprocesses. In terms of initial involvement I will focus on the subprocess of "initial invovlement" through "seekership" and "recruitment," as well as "managing reservations." In terms of continuities I will focus

on "internalizing perspectives," "achieving identity," "managing emotionality,"

"acquiring linguistic fluency," "making commitments," "developing relationships,"

"foregoing alternative involvements." Finally, "disinvolvements" and "reinvolvements"

will be briefly discussed. The overall goal is to assess the validity of involvements (and

the subprocesses) as a generic social process. This assessment will be done throughout

the examination below.

Initial Involvements (Getting Started)

Initial involvements in an activity consist of the ways in which people become involved

in different life-worlds. There are four ways that individuals become involved in things:

seekership, recruitment, closure, and instrumentalism. Each of these methods of

involvement will be explained and examples from the three monographs will illustrate the

concepts in an attempt to assess the validity of the GSP.

Seekership

The first way people may become involved in an activity is through seekership.

Seekership occurs when people pursue things that interest them (Prus, 1997:60). In terms

of seekership some people got into hustling because they had an interest in it or because

they saw an ad in a magazine for "bogus dice, marked cards, or techniques of

manipulation, and decided to try these out" (Prus, 1977:21).

Seekership is the way in which respondents in Fine's study got involved in fantasy

gaming. Fantasy gamers sometimes bought their own games (Fine, 1983:51) or learnt

about gaming clubs or groups through the newspaper (Fine, 1983:52). However more

often respondents became involved because of an interest in some realm associated with fantasy games such as an interest in military history and/or war gaming, a knowledge of fantasy literature, mythology, mysticism, or history, social sciences, or physical science knowledge (49). Fine says that prior interests in these things "serve as filtering elements for recruitment" (49). While prior interest in these things appears to be important Fine is clear to point out that they are not sufficient enough on their own for involvement. "One must learn of the game and become involved with those who play it [already]" (50).

For men interested in cross dressing or changing their sex, seekership is the most applicable form of initial involvement. These respondents often came to learn of their male femaling desires in various ways and then sought out opportunities to explore those ideas, interests, and feelings and to perhaps *try it out*.

> I stole a pair of her knickers when I was 12 and rubbed them over my penis in bed in what was still quite childish masturbation, and then quite suddenly it dawned on me that all women wore kickers! . . . I became the most fanatical knickers observer you can imagine. I went to almost absurd lengths to gain glimpse up between any women's legs and I was in a daze of pleasure to discover all the different styles! . . . I was 13 when I stepped, quivering with excitement into a pair of French knickers belonging to my sister. (Ekins,1997:63)

> Jack (Jean) was 7 or 8 years old when he remembers going into the family bathroom where his mother used to hang up her stockings to dry. He recalls touching them, smelling them, and on sudden impulse tried one of them on. This became his little secret. It was pleasurable, but he was not very sure why. (Ekins, 1997:65)

> I found I enjoyed women's magazines and I took a great interest in make-up hints and fashion, but although I was aware of this desire to interest myself in such things I would not really admit to myself that it was true. (Ekins, 1997:66).

For male femalers, initial involvements are most often a form of seekership because

individuals are seeking activities (be it cross dressing or reading female-geared

magazines) that most fulfill their personal interests.

Recruitment

> *Through recruitment, individuals whose interests are smiliar . . . can*
> *share them in the gaming world.* (Fine, 1983:59)

The second way that people become involved in activities is through recruitment. During

recruitment other people attempt to cultivate an interest in the activity and encourage

one's participation in it (Prus, 1997:60). Initial involvements through recruitment was

evident in *Road Hustler* when, for example, hustling crews used co-optation (32), to pick

up on a 'non-hustler's' talent in a specific area, such as the ability to socialize well with

others, and then entice that person to join the crew.

> He had good social contacts, mixed well with people, and had good size. .
> . It didn't take us long to realize his potential as a public relations/shoot-up
> man. . . We worked with the guy fairly steadily for three or four weeks in
> this area. Then we said, 'Look, we're going on the road, do you want to
> work steadily?' He said, 'Sure.' (Prus, 1977:43)

Becoming involved in card and/or dice hustling often occurred through recruitment by

either working solo and then stumbling across someone looking for a partner (21),

stealing (41) or borrowing members from other crews, through co-optation (32),

described above, or most commonly by 'drifting into the professionalism.' In this case

one goes from solo hustling to making contact with and being accepted by a professional

crew (32). "These partnerships are clearly predicated on performance criteria with

partners being recruited/retained on the basis of their dedication to their work and their

ability to fit into existing crew routines" (Prus, 1977:46). Recruitment is an important

way that people get started into the career of a professional card and/or dice hustler.

Recruitment is also used as a method by which people become involved in fantasy

gaming. Because one must learn the game and become involved in it through playing it

with others (Fine, 1983:50), social networks become important for involvement. Status is

gained in a group by recruiting knowledgeable and innovative new players (51). These

accounts from Fine's interviews and field notes (Fine, 1983:50-51) illustrate how others

were recruited into fantasy gaming through people they knew:

> Stew told me that he began playing C & S because of a friend's interest.
> This friend bought a copy of C & S, and Stew and his friend got interested
> in the game.
>
> A friend of my brother at church went to a war gaming club, and he told
> my brother about it, and my brother told me.
>
> Last year I [went] to South [High School], and I was on the wrestling team
> and I met Greg and he introduced me to it, and I just enjoyed it, and I
> brought it home.

Recruitment, being introduced to the activity by others, is a method in which individuals

became involved in both the subculture of card and dice hustling and the life-world of

fantasy gaming.

Closure

Experiencing "closure" is the third method by which people become involved in life-

worlds. In "closure" one would experience pressing obligation or limited choices (Prus,

1997:60) that lead to involvement in various things out of a sense of desperation. "Closure" was not seen as a main method through which individuals became involved in hustling, male femaling, or fantasy games.

Instrumentalism

The final way that people become involved in subcultures, which is not included within the original schema, is through instrumentalism. By people doing things to meet an end, an objective, or a goal people often become involved in activities and various life-worlds (Prus, 2008:Lecture). An example of this is when Ekins (1997:69) met Henry, who until landing a female role in a school play had only been fascinated by female clothing and tired on only a few articles. However, it was through playing the female character's role in the school play that "propelled him to a life of regular cross-dressing." Besides this example, instrumentalism was not a main method of initial involvement within these monographs.

Analysis

The methods through which individuals becomes involved in group life, subcultures, and life-worlds occurs in fours ways: seekership, recruitment, closure, and instrumentalism. It would appear as though this group of generic processes covers all of the fathomable methods through which individuals become involved in new activities. What should be noted, and what I have learnt from this comparative analysis, is that initial involvements often occur in more than one way for the same activity. While one individual may become involved through seekership, the very next person, invovled in the same life-world may have been recruited into it. Because I can not think of an example of

becoming involved in any activity that does not fit within the categories laid out by Prus

(1997) it leads me to believe that the generic categorization of initial involvements is

reliable and sound.

Managing Reservations

Apart from the method by which individuals get started in activities or various life-

worlds another process within initial involvements is that of managing reservations. Not

all involvements have smooth commencements as some are fraught with doubts, risk and

stigma (Prus, 1997:60), anxiety, fear, or being labeled in a certain way such as "geek,"

"loser," "weirdo." Sometimes in order for a person to become involved in an activity

they must overcome these labels, doubts, risks and stigmas first and it is overcoming

these barriers that are of concern for the process of managing reservations.

For the card and dice hustler anxiousness, nervousness, and fear must be overcome in

order to cheat in card and dice games.

> Now, if we are talking about a novice, many of the events he tries to work
> are probably going to end up costing him money . . . at the party he is
> likely to get anxious or scared or make mistakes, and these things will cost
> him. (Prus, 1977:21-22)

> Unless they can handle the pressure associated with the fear of being
> discovered at cheating, they seem destined to remain 'situational cheats'
> or 'honorable players' . . . Unless they become connected with a partner,
> they are likely to become disenchanted or overly anxious about their
> cheating involvements. (Prus, 1977:13)

> Maintaining one's temperament under game pressure is another
> component of being considered a reliable teammate. Some very skilled
> mechanics, for example, may tense up in the dramatic atmosphere of the
> game and either won't switch the dice or may make noticeably rigid

movements . . . When a mechanic 'loses his nerve,' crews are reluctant to use him in that capacity. (Prus, 1977:38)

While it appears that having a partner, or even a crew may lessen the anxiety felt about cheating it is also suggested the taking on a partner requires managing reservations about being affiliated with and reliant on someone else. "Having a partner means that one has to share the profits and there may be additional expenses associated with travel or accommodations. It also means that one places his reputation and physical safety in the hands of another person" (Prus, 1977:22). The decision to take on a partner means overcoming the reservation of relying and trusting other people with your own safety and your own reputation.

Another reservation that must be managed as an entry to involvement in card hustling is the fear of getting caught. Sometimes close calls make an individual question their skill and involvement.

One of the first close calls that come to mind is the first cooler I put in a game. I had been practicing for months and I felt quite confident in taking out a deck and putting in a cold deck. But, the first time I did it in a game situation, the cooler ended up upside down on the table. The man whose deal it was look at and said, 'What did you do? How come you turned them like that?' I said, "I don't know!' I kind of laughed and said, 'Deal, deal!' So he did, but I felt very jittery and I thought, 'Gee, I don't know if I'll be able to do it properly the next time.' Anyway, I went to the washroom and made up another cooler. About an hour later, I got up enough nerve and I switched decks, correctly this time. (Prus, 1977:112)

Furthermore, because hustlers may spend time hanging around venues where gambling generally occurs (e.g. racetracks, pool halls, cars, card games), they may be seen as 'shady' (23) or they may become involved in other illegal activities (58-59). Hustlers are

expected to develop a "larceny sense" in that "they be opportunistic, taking the fullest

advantage of every situation in which to save or make the crew or themselves some

money" (48).

> When I first got involved in hustling, my attitudes were less calloused. I
> might be at a stag of some sort and say some fellow is losing a little
> money . . . you find out that maybe he just got married, or that he has
> some kids and here he's writing checks and I would slow down. If you
> pull something like this with a crew, the other guys will want to know
> what the hell you are doing! . . The position they take is that 'You can't
> have feelings on the road.' And it's true. (Prus, 1977:48-49)

In card and dice hustling, you must be able to not only overcome the fear, anxiety, and

nervousness that comes with knowingly cheating and hoping you do not get caught, you

must also be able to overcome your consideration for other people and callously cheat

them whenever you get the chance. It is not until one is able to managing these

reservations and overcome these barriers of involvement that one is able to become a

professional road hustler.

People who become involved in the life-world of fantasy games must also overcome

barriers. For this group, it seems that individuals have to manage reservations about

becoming involved in an activity that is deemed strange (Fine, 1983:45). People who

participate in fantasy games are seen as gooks, jar-heads, nukes, freaks (45), aggressive

(43-44), losers (58), lacking social skills (61), odd, isolated (60), and because of the focus

on death, combat, war, and battle, they are seen as blood-thirsty (43-44).

> Unfortunately you get a lot of people that think we are warmongers, and
> are the type, you know, 'give us weapon and we will kill, pillage and

> everything,' and in actuality, myself, I don't want to enter the military. As far as I'm concerned we should ban all weapons. You know, I'd rather not have them. I'll play my games. (Fine, 1983:43)
>
> That's their kick; they can get tremendous amounts of money, wealth, power, with actually having to put up with the inequalities of this world, where it's much harder to do. Most fantasy gamers are not really winners in our societal sense. Most of them are fairly small potatoes people . . . They're losers only in terms of our society's judgment of them, not necessarily in their own judgment. (Fine, 1983:58)
>
> We are fairly isolated because we have a tendency to meet like every Friday night, you know, which is your social night normally . . . I know some people that are totally socially out of it . . . they don't have any real social life. (Fine, 1983:60).

In order to become involved in the fantasy game life-world participants must manage any reservations they have about being labeled any of these things.

Becoming involved in the life-world of male femaling requires that participants manage many reservations and attempt to overcome many barriers. Participants experience doubts when they feel their desires are wrong (Ekins, 1997:119). They experience name calling (96) and feelings of stigmatization (104). Their desire to cross-dress and/or change their sex leads to feelings of: isolation (66), guilt (69, 119), fear (68, 142), apprehension (86), humiliation (86, 142), rejection (86), denial (149), confusion (149), and confliction (119). These feelings often lead male femalers to perform gender femaling activities secretively or in private (51, 148, 67, 91). In order to become involved in some level with male femaling participants must overcome, or at least suspend, some of these barriers to certain extents to be able to *be* actively involved in their desires whether it is to wear women's clothing, for example, or to simply fantasize about it. These two quotes highlights the level of confusion and types of feelings

associated with male femaling that in order to participate may need to be managed to

some extent:

> Josephine is cross-dressing in the privacy of her home. She has made a
> few tentative contacts with members of a self-help group for TVs and TSs,
> and has begun a number of correspondences with male femalers . . . She is
> spending more than she can afford on photographic equipment to
> photograph her male femaling. She alternates between fantasying a
> female partner – someone to talk to, touch and hold on to – and cross
> dressing and masturbating, fantasying that she, herself, is a woman of her
> dreams. She is torn by conflict – by guilt at what she is doing: 'it is
> wrong' – and by an increasing addiction to her activities. (Ekins,
> 1997:119-120)

> She [my wife] found out a few times I was cross-dressing because I used
> to leave things under the bed in an unlocked suitcase. I was desperate to be
> found out to be able to talk to someone. But unfortunately she was fairly
> rigid in her attitude and was disgusted, so everything was thrown away.
> Then dressing started again, secretly. And it was found, and it was thrown
> away. That happened two or three times over the next eight years and each
> time I denied it, because of her reaction and because of my fear. Of
> course, it didn't go away. It got stronger. This really carried on for a long
> time and I was confused, a bit scared and very sad. (Ekins, 1997:149)

Fear of being discovered stopped Jack (Jean) from male femaling for awhile but this fear

was overcome by developing a strategy for femaling secretively.

> Jack (Jean), referred to previously, had seen his mother's stockings
> hanging up in the bathroom on many occasions and had long been
> fascinated by them. On several occasions he had been seized by the
> impulse to try them on, but had resisted because of his feelings of guilt. As
> the impulse became stronger, fear of discovery became more overt. What
> if his mother wanted to know why he was in the bathroom so long? What
> if he could be seen through the bathroom window or the keyhole? What if
> he damaged the stockings? For a while the strength of these factors
> overcame his impulse to being femaling. Slowly, however, he developed a
> strategy to maximize the possibility of his beginning femaling remaining
> undiscovered. (Ekins, 1997:67-68)

This quote illustrates how male femalers have to overcome barriers, such as feelings of fear, in order to accomplish the activity of male femaling. This is a clear example of how reservations are managed; strategies are put in place, in order to facilitate one's involvement in male femaling.

The generic social process of initial involvements includes not only the ways in which individuals become involved in activities such as seekership or through recruitment, it also includes the subprocess of managing reservations. The extent to which one is able to overcome obstacles such as risks, doubts, stigmas, and labels impacts their involvement with the activity.

Analysis

The process of managing reservations is part of the generic social process of initial involvements and it recognizes that individuals overcome certain barriers such as doubts, risk, and stigma (Prus, 1997:60) in order to be involved in particular life-worlds. All three of the monographs used to analyze this process included aspects of managing reservations. This suggests that its consideration is a valid process. My suggestion would be that perhaps the GSP of managing reservations could be broken down into sub-categories. The emphasis on labeling, how others see one's involvement in the activity, seems quite appropriate here. My belief is that this view/label from the other seems to differ greatly from having to overcome one's own fears or anxiety. While both seem quite pertinent to the process of managing and overcoming reservations, the source of the

reservation, be it from within the self or cast upon one by others, may be considered

different enough to warrant two separate categories.

Continuities (Sustaining and Intensifying Involvements)

The generic social process of sustaining and intensifying involvements (Continuities)

includes at least eight subprocesses that can work as stand-alone processes. That is to say

that they are all very important elements to how we look at people's involvements in

various life-worlds. It also indicates that any one of these subprocesses could potentially

be a paper unto itself. Therefore, this paper will provide an analysis of most of these

subprocesses with a focus on their relations to "becoming involved" but it should be

recognized that none is being dealt with in its entirety.

Internalizing Perspectives

Internalizing perspectives can be understood as the process that members go through as

they become immersed in the life-world or subculture when their viewpoints become

consistent with their involvements (Prus, 1997:60). This is a generic social process unto

itself which includes subprocesses such as: assessing new perspectives and resisting

unwanted viewpoints, learning patterns of objects, dealing with ambiguity, and rejecting

formerly held viewpoints (Prus, 1997:63) to list a few. Specifically I will look at how

learning new patterns of objects, or "rules of thumbs" allow one to sustain their

invovlement in two of the subcultures examined.

In *Road Hustler*, Sharper, the key informant and former card and dice mechanic (the one

who manipulates the cards and dice), provides a nice illustration of the significance of

learning the patterns of objects (Prus, 1997:63). In other words, he notes the importance

of learning the ropes and developing viewpoints consistent with the hustler life-world.

> Looking back I know that I paid for meals and they [the crew] rolled the
> restaurant but what are you going to do? Go back and say, 'Give me my
> money back!' For about a month I didn't catch on, then when you get to a
> real shitty place, you catch on. You see them hemming and hawing and
> stalling around. You wonder what they are doing, so you watch and you
> see what's going on. Now, once you find out on your own, then they open
> up to you. But it's not like they're going to say, 'Well this is what we're
> going to do . . .' They don't' do that, it's basically learn as you go. And
> the more you learn, the more your status goes up. If they see that you are
> getting hep, your chances of staying with that crew are a lot better. After a
> while you realize that they are doing this constantly and it's an normal
> thing for them to do. Rolling restaurants, rolling motels, and boosting is
> the thing to do for a hustling; no one looks down on you for doing it. In
> fact, it's their norm. You're a sucker if you don't! . . . But you see it's a
> world of difference. (Prus, 1977:58)

This quote illustrates that the ability to acquire and/or internalize the perspective of the

crew, as *just what a hustler does*, is important for one's status within the group and also

for one's ability to continue working with them. These "patterns of objects" or "rules of

thumb" (Prus, 1997:63) in terms of learning about the hustling way of life are learnt

mostly through observation (Prus, 1977:59).

As similar example can be found with Ekins' *Male Femaling* when "Josephine" writes to

his/her friend about being a beginner who needs to learn the *know-how* of cross-dressing.

> I live in a relatively small town and although some people know I am TV,
> it would not be acceptable to go around in public dressed, even if my
> standards of dress, make-up, etc. were of a much higher quality. In all
> these areas I am really a raw beginner and like most TVs have to learn the
> hard way. There is little chance that I could ever pass in public due to my
> height, but this does not worry me unduly but I would like to get to a
> standard acceptable for socials etc. (Ekins, 1997:120)

"Josephine" is telling his/her friend that he/she has not yet acquired the learning patterns

associated with entry into the cross-dressing life-world. Acquiring and/or internalizing

perspectives consistent with their involvements is important to both hustling and male

femaling as individuals learn the patterns of objects or "rules of thumb" (Prus, 1997:63)

associated with the activities of hustling and cross-dressing.

Achieving Identity

The generic social process of achieving identity is a complex process unto itself. It

consists of: attributing qualities to self, encountering definitions of self from others,

comparing definitions of self, resisting unwanted identity imputations, conveying

information about self to others, assignment identities to others, promoting definitions of

others, encountering resistance from others, and reassessing identities imputed to others

(Prus, 1997:64). For the purpose of examining identity which is achieved through

involvements, identity definitions (of the self and of others) seek to be consistent with the

particular involvement (Prus, 1997:60).

For those involved in card and/or dice hustling the identity that is often sought is that of

being a professional. While "anyone" can cheat at card and dice games they do not

become "a professional" until they orient themselves into the activity as a full-time

career, become dedicated to it, have their identity structured around the activity of

card/dice hustling, acquire the specialized skills, have the ability to always maximize

profits, and become mobile and well connected socially (Prus, 1977:31). It would seem

that professional card and/or dice hustlers, as opposed to novices or amateurs, are usually

members of a crew. A crew is usually made up of three to four members and sometimes

upwards of ten (33) each member having a very specific role during the hustle. The

game roles include the "mechanic" who does the actual manipulation of the cards or the

dice. The public relations member (or "shoot-up" man) whose job it is to "establish

personal creditability among the patrons attending the event and to entice them into

playing" (Prus, 1977:34). The final game role is the "muscle man" who provides

protection to the other team members. His role is seen as least important and unless he

processes other skills he is likely considered unnecessary (34-35). The two non-game

roles are the contacts man who locates feasible events and games and the "boss" who

manages the crew (35-36). Often crew members can and do play more than one role

within the group. The point is that until one becomes a valuable member of a crew, able

to play many roles, their identity as a professional hustler is unlikely.

> Say your main shoot-up man is also capable of manipulating cards.
> Maybe your regular mechanic is getting a lot of heat in a game or has to
> leave the or perhaps he's sick that evening. You wouldn't lose that much.
> Your shoot-up man become the mechanic in the game and the others win
> the money. *Usually, you find that the **professionals** are capable or doing
> it all.* (Prus, 1977:37, emphasis added)

For card and dice hustling, achieving the identity of a professional hustler is informally

granted through the activity of sustained hustling, one's commitment to it, one's skills,

one's alliance with a stable screw, and one's ability to play numerous roles within the

group.

One's identity and status as a fantasy gamer are important elements during fantasy

games. Someone with a higher status is awarded certain privileges such as getting

attention from the referee and being permitted to sit next him/her. In practice, having a

higher status means the referee will help your character along "while allowing low-status

characters [to] fend for themselves" (Fine, 1983:156). One's status appears to be

informally granted in numerous ways dependent on age, reputation in gaming situations,

knowledge, experience and commitment to gaming. As Fine notes, "status changes as the

new player gains in experience, becomes one of the regular at the Golden Brigade, and

learns how to referee" (Fine, 1983:156). Those with a higher status and/or a heightened

commitment to fantasy gaming are referred to as "hard core" (26,46). Fine (1983:47)

writes,

> Describing the 'typical' gamer by single example is impossible, probably
> more misleading than instructive. However, we may reach certain
> tentative conclusions about this subsociety by focusing on the hard-core
> gamer. This person is male, unmarried, and in his early to mid-twenties;
> he has read deeply in science fiction, fantasy, and history; he has
> completed college and may have attended graduate school for some time;
> he believes that he has a lively imagination; he either has a job
> commensurate with his skills or has decided to live as best he can with a
> low-paying job for the present, planning to look for a more appropriate job
> later; he often has strong feelings about war, either as a former member of
> the armed services or as a confirmed pacifist; finally, he disregards many
> of the normative requirements of conventional society, feeling a need to
> concentrate on his own interests without regard to the expectations of
> others. Having drawn this picture we must not forget that a population's
> variance is as important as its central tendency.

This generalized description of the hard-core gamer identity focuses on his demographic

characteristics. However, in other places, Fine suggests that a hard-core gamer is also

someone who has a heightened commitment in the fantasy gaming life-world (26, 46).

For example, one respondents says, "they'll socialize with each other. I know very few of

them have social lives outside of gaming, 'cause gaming is their hobby, their spare time

is spent gaming. And that's it" (Fine, 1983:59). Therefore, one's identity as a hard-core

gamer is achieved through building a sound reputation, gaining experience, regular

attendance (commitment to gaming), and learning how to be a referee. Achieving such

an identity, as informal as it is, may help to sustain one's involvement in the life-world of

fantasy games.

However, in one case a gamer wanted to distance himself from the identity (resisting

unwanted identity imputations: Prus, 1997:64) of a hard-core gamer "by claiming a

partial, rather than total, interest" (Fine, 1983:61). As one respondent says,

> I know some people . . . they don't have a social life . . . Me, I used to be
> like that . . . and this is the reason I've gotten out of war-gaming and role-
> playing gaming a lot . . . My social life comes before my gaming life.
> (Fine, 1983:61).

So while some individuals may become hard-core gamers as they gain experience and

become more committed to the activity and gaming life-world not everyone wishes to be

imputed the identity of a hard-core gamer.

We are born with certain identity tags at birth. One of those designations is gender (Prus,

1997:63). For men who cross-dress as women or change their sex to female, gender is an

important consideration towards their own identity and how others define their identity.

The ethnography *Male Femaling* in its entirely may be considered best examined through

the generic social process of achieving identity. That is to say that the whole book is

about this one process. However, because the focus of this paper is on involvements the

most salient aspect of achieving identity in regards to how one involves themselves in

male femaling is the example of Jeremy who encounters a definition of self from others

(Prus, 1997:64) that validates his involvement as a cross-dresser.

> [Jeremy] took particular enjoyment from being a woman in a woman's
> world. He savoured the moments as he would go through the racks of
> women's clothes . . . [He] would feel a mounting sense of excitement as
> he entered the changing room . . . He would recall the tremendous feeling
> of well-being he experienced on his arrive home with his purchases. As
> he reflected upon the various male femaling activities of the day, his
> thoughts would ponder the 'highlights'. Invariably, it was what he took to
> be the affirmations of being a woman that provided him with the most
> pleasure: the waiting in the queue of girls and women making their
> purchases, whilst some of their boyfriends and husbands waited for them,
> at a distance, at the like. Paying for his purchases with his credit card
> made out in his female name was very important to him. Here was a
> (preferably) female cashier accepting him as another female, as he made
> his female purchase in his female name. (Ekins, 1997:84-85)

Jeremy's identity as a female was confirmed through his involvements with the other. It

was important to him that his identity as female was validated. This illustrates that

through involvement in activity, in this case, cross-dressing, one's identity can be

achieved. Achieving certain identities such a professional hustler, a hard-core gamer, or

being seen as an authentic female may validate one's sense of self enough that it sustains

their involvement within the subculture.

Accomplishing Activities

All of human group life revolves around activity. The generic social process of doing

activity consists of the processes of performing activities, influencing others, and making

commitments, each with its own subprocesses (Prus, 1997:65-67). In terms of

accomplishing activity within sustaining and intensifying involvements, the process

would examine how one obtains competence and composure within the group setting

(Prus, 1997:60). Again, we find ourselves able to write an entire paper on how hustlers

go about the activity of card and dice hustling, how fantasy gamers go about the activity

of gaming, and how those wishing to cross-dress or change their sex go about the activity

of male femaling. In fact, these entire ethnography each accomplish this task in their

own right. However, the other areas of sustaining and intensifying involvements resonate

with me more so I intend to focus my attention therein.

Managing Emotionality

In order for continued involvement within these life-worlds, participants rely on the

ability to manage their emotions. By experiencing and exhibiting appropriate affective

styles (Prus, 1997:61) members of these groups sustain their involvements. For fantasy

gamers the ability to manage emotions is important to maintain a smooth gaming

experience for the entire group. Group members may become frustrated when referees

ignore their requests (Fine, 1983:156) or when someone obtains a poor reputation. Mark,

for example, was considered a 'sadistic referee' whose "reputation was developed

because he was not seen as having the *right* to kill the characters of older and higher

status members" (Fine, 1983:161). Once while refereeing, "his players became

disgruntled with the campaign and decided to commit suicide en masse" (Fine, 1983:161)

which Mark found to be in very poor taste. Such occurrences signal to other referees that

players dislike when their characters face impossible odds and that 'sadistic referees' will

not be tolerated (161). There appears to be appropriate and acceptable ways to express

emotions (e.g. being disgruntled by another's actions) within these gaming situations.

Because conflict may arise and personalities may clash, the ability to manage one's

emotions during fantasy gaming is important because of the reliance on the group

structure and the interaction among players that it necessitates.

For male famalers a common emotion they must manage in order to be involved in the

activity of cross-dressing, for example, is that of ambiguity. Confusion about one's

desires seems to permeate respondent's thoughts.

> I was dressed as Gail . . . I just kissed him on the cheek. Then he kissed
> me on the lips. And that was it . . . I stood in the road for twenty minutes
> and thought 'My God! Am I gay?' I thought, 'No I am not. I was a woman
> kissing a man.' And really I think that was the first time, when I thought,
> 'My God. Perhaps, I'm not transvestite. Perhaps, I'm transsexual.' Well
> you can imagine for the next few months I didn't know what to do with
> myself. (Ekins, 1997:150).

While feelings of confusion and ambiguity over desires seem to be common among male

femalers in some regard they must be managed in order one to continue the activities of

male femaling.

With card and/or dice hustlers emotions must be managed in order to continue hustling.

As has been mentioned above, feelings of fear and anxiety in regards to actual cheating

(e.g. switching the dice) or towards getting caught at cheating must be overcome in order

for the hustle to continue. Another example of managing emotions is when a new person

joins a crew. "As the newcomer to the team, the prospect is likely to encounter some

advice and extensive criticism. If he has worked his way up through the ranks and has

attained a reputation as a capable performer, he may resent being treated as an inferior"

(Prus, 1977:52). Newcomers to a crew are often "shortcaked" (Prus, 1977:52) in that

they will receive less than their equal share of the evening's profits. Being cheated out of

one's equal share of the profits may lead to confrontation. However, as the informant

explains (Prus, 1977:52-53), it is just part of the procedure when you're new.

> They justify it like this. They have more seniority, they have more
> material, they have more time into it, they have invested more money, and
> they are risking more than the newcomer. . . But the newcomer is not seen
> as equal, so to them it seems fair . . . I remember my first thousand, boy
> was I surprised! . . . I thought hustling was the greatest thing in the world.
> . . . [then] when you start seeing them do this to other newcomers, then
> you start thinking back, 'Yeah, that's what they did to me' . . . It's pretty
> well standard procedure when it's a newcomer, but, if a man is worth the
> money, you give it to him, and that's the way they work.

It is suggested that trouble would occur if you stood up for yourself and demanded your

equal share. You could, presumably, be removed from the crew. Recognizing the way

things work, learning the patterns of objects and "rules of thumbs" (Prus, 1997:63) allows

a person to manage their emotions in a way that could otherwise be detrimental to their

continued involvement in hustling.

The ability to manage emotions is important for continued involvement in fantasy

gaming, male femaling, and road hustling.

Acquiring Linguistic Fluency

Acquiring linguistic fluency refers to the ability to learn the effective ways of

communicating within the group setting (Prus, 1997:61). Coming to learn the "shared

"sets of symbols, [and] language is the single most important feature fostering a tendency

towards a unified or centralized culture" (Prus, 1997:69). In other words, being able to

communicate, using the shared sets of symbols and language, allows an individual to sustain their involvement in an activity and in a subculture.

Within the gaming culture there is a specific lingo, such as a "grognard" (one who is a war gamer, particularly concerned with extreme realism) (Fine, 1983:29) used by players that one would need to learn to sustain an involvement with this activity. The same thing occurs with hustling such as the use of the word "hep" to denote someone who is *in the know*. Furthermore, crews often use verbal cues and non-verbal cues to signal different messages to other crew members (Prus: 1977:56,23).

Gaining linguistic fluency occurs within the life-world of male femalers as well. Some even go to the library to research their fascinations (Ekins, 1997:147, 140). Like hustling and fantasy gaming this activity also has a unique lingo with words and concepts such as 'tucking' referring to hiding one's male genitalia (86) and the term 'dressed,' to refer to someone who is wearing their female clothes as opposed to their male clothing. For male femalers another consideration is the titles used to describe their interests and activities. The terms 'transsexual' (TS), 'transvestite' (TV) have been supplied by modern medicine (103) and some people chose this language set to apply to themselves. However, "groups previously happy with the term 'transvestite' are increasingly using the term 'cross-dresser.' They see it as less pejorative and less clinical" (Ekins, 1997:103). Overall, male femalers aim to find a label for themselves that fits (107).

Linguistic fluency, being able to communicate, verbally and non-verbally, using a shared

set of symbols and language, with other members of the life-world is an aspect of one's

continued involvement in the activity.

Making Commitments

Making commitments describes the process of investing in an activity and perhaps

developing a dependency on it (Prus, 1997:61). The types of commitments made within

male femaling activities revolve around the extent one wishes to participate in group life

as a woman or female. For example, someone who has had a sex change operation is

certainly much more committed to the female lifestyle than a man who wears a dress

around his house on Sundays. Another example of investing in one's female involvement

is taking out a credit card in the name of your female persona (Ekins, 1997:84). By using

the credit card at various times that individual is further committing to the male femaling

lifestyle.

Card and/or dice hustlers make several commitments to the lifestyle. Professional road

hustlers make sacrifices in terms of their relationships with others. It is hard to have a

wife or girlfriend and be a road hustler (Prus, 1977:129) because of the time spent away

from home. Hustlers often sacrifice their jobs to become full-time hustlers (23). After

being a hustler for awhile, years, it is often hard to find legitimate employment again

(131), thus securing one's commitment to hustling. Furthermore, often the personal

investment and time spent in hustling is great enough that people "feel that hustling owes

them something, a debt that can be realized only through greater participation" (Prus,

1977:29). Committing one's self to these activities by investing time and energy into

learning the skills and developing a stable crew may sustain hustlers' involvements in

this subculture. Making different types of commitments sustains one's involvement in

the subculture.

Developing Relationships

When people create and sustain positive bonds with others (Prus, 1997:61) they are

experiencing the generic social process of developing relationships. Developing

relationships was most important for card and/or dice hustlers where their reliance on

their crew mates was pivotal not only to their success financially but also their own

personal safety (22). Relationships within hustling are created around the activity of

hustling but solidarity and trust remain important. The importance of having a solid

professional crew that works well together is highlighted by Prus' (1977:27) informant:

> A crew like that, if it stays together for a time, is likely to go places,
> because when you work together as a unit, it is much easier and your
> returns are better. You pretty well have to be able to connect with a couple
> of solid crews like this to get some real experience.

The type of relationship that is developed in hustling is a business relationship (26).

There is no mistaking that crew relationships are like "regular working relationship[s]"

(Prus, 1977:25) where in the end it is not about friendship or comradery, it is about the

money.

In fantasy gaming the types of relationships that develop are based on common personalities and/or interests (Fine, 1983:59) in gaming or related aspects such as history or fantasy. Friendships are made within these groups (137,155,177) and are based on having a hobby in common and voluntarily spending six or seven hours a week together for many months (137). Not everyone gets along and some players are less liked than other (160) but even these types of relationships help to sustain the involvement of people in this life-world over time.

When people come together in groups and have things in common relationships for various reasons develop and these relationships help to sustain one's involvement in the life-world.

Foregoing Alternative Involvements

One's commitment to their involvement in activities means they sometimes have to forego other involvements or activities. By neglecting other options or even burning bridges that were once intact (Prus, 1977:61), subculturists confirm their involvement in their life-worlds as male femalers, hustlers, or fantasy gamers. For male femalers foregoing alternative involvements may include the fact that once one has had sex re-assignment surgery they are unable to return to being male again (as of 1997) (Ekins,1997:55). Since the surgery is permanent individuals who chose this option are unable to return to their previous life as an atomically biological male.

For fantasy gamers, especially hard-core gamers, who become immersed in the life-world of gaming, they may foregoing alternative social opportunities. This is the reason that

one member, also quoted above, decided to lessen his time gaming because as he says:

"my social life come before my gaming life" (Fine, 1983:60).

For card and/or dice hustlers by continued involvement in hustling they are foregoing the

opportunity to have a legitimate job (Prus, 1977:23, 131). Likewise, hustlers often give

up relationships with others such a wife or friends (29) in order to continue their

involvement in this subculture. As Sharper (Prus, 1977:129-130) says:

> It gets tough to relate to a wife when your in a business like this.
> Sometimes you might like to about what you did on the road, but they
> don't understand a lot of it and they like a lot of it either. She has to
> understand that when a man that is hustling steady, he really doesn't have
> time to fool around on the road . . . It's not a life for a married man, and I
> would say that most of them are divorced, separated, or living common
> law.

Involvement in the road hustling life-world sometimes means that individuals forego

activities such as raising a family or holding down a steady legitimate job. For sustained

involvement in some life-worlds foregoing alternate involvements becomes necessary if

the activities conflict with other aspects of one's life.

In terms of sustaining and intensifying involvements this section of the paper has looked

at the subprocesses of continuities. While noting each subprocess, it has focused on

internalizing perspectives, achieving identity, managing emotionality, acquiring linguistic

fluency, making commitments, developing relationships, foregoing alternative

involvements in an attempt to illustrate some of the ways that involvements are sustained

and continued within the life-worlds of male femaling, card and dice hustling, and

fantasy gaming.

Analysis

The generic social process of continuities also referred to as sustaining and intensifying

involvements covers massive amounts of data. As previously noted each of the

subprocesses within this category could easily be a paper unto itself.   For example,

"achieving identity" is a generic social process on its own. I think this can cause

confusion and certainly makes the GSP of involvements a large one. However, because

each of these subprocesses or processes are important I do not think there is an alternative

way which allows us to consider the majority, if not all, of the processes at work in

human group life and lived experience. For this reason, while perhaps cumbersome, I

think the subprocess of continuities is not only thorough it appears to be valid as well.

Becoming Disinvolved

Becoming disinvolved in activities is a process that can be abrupt, extensive, partial, or

uneven (Prus, 1997:61). They may also occur overtime in various ways. People may

develop doubts about their involvements in activities and may simply become

disenchanted or bored with activities. Disinvolvements were discussed only peripherally

within the selected monographs.

Questioning the Viability of Perspectives

When individuals experience obstacles or dilemmas during their involvements within

subcultures they may question the viability of their perspectives (Prus, 1997:61) and

involvement in the subculture. These dilemmas or problems, if not resolved, may lead to

their disinvolvement with the activity. An example of this comes from Road Hustler

when individuals sometimes run into the dilemmas of being able to find a reliable partner

to hustle with (Prus, 1977:3). Furthermore, running into problems such as getting caught

(called a 'hey rubes') and experiencing physical violence (114) may make an individual

question the viability of hustling.

Within fantasy gaming other social responsibilities sometimes pose as an obstacle to

continued involvement within gaming. "Players cite marriages, full-time jobs, and

graduate school as reasons for disengaging from the hobby, indicating that social

responsibilities affect the free time necessary for participating in these games" (Fine,

1983:40). Individuals may become disinvolved when they find that fantasy gaming is

actually posing an obstacle or dilemma to other social responsibilities that may matter

more to them. In general, the subprocess of questioning the viability of perspectives

suggests that individuals may halt their involvement in a life-world because continued

participation may cause obstacles or dilemmas to other areas of their lives.

Reassessing Identity

Reassessing identity refers to those who become disinvolved in subcultures or activities

because they question the extent to which their identities within these subcultures are

consistent with the desired images of themselves (Prus, 1997:61). Individuals' goals may

change over time and this may force them to reassess their identity and therefore there

continued involvements in some activities.

For male femalers the ambiguity associated with one's involvement in cross-dressing

leads some to question their involvement in terms of reassessing their identity as a male

femaler. This may lead to repeated attempts to involve one's self from the life-world of

cross-dressing by throwing away their female clothes for example.

> The femaler may vacillate, for instance, between cross-dressing episodes,
> confusion about their meaning, and in many instances, repeated attempts
> to stop what he is doing, marked symbolically by frequent 'purges' – the
> periodic throwing away of offending collections of clothes, cosmetics,
> jewelry and so on. (Ekins, 1997:87)

These instances, where one purges their female belongings and attempts to stop their

invovlement in cross-dressing is an example of an indiviual reassing their identity as a

male femaler. Such a reassessment may lead to disinvolvement (and potential

reinvolvement).

For those involved in road hustling reassessment of identity often leaves individuals

feeling that their identity is tied to hustling making it hard to disinvolve from. Prus

(1977:30) writes, "as a person becomes more immersed in social networks that promote

his self-identity as a hustler, attempts to disengage himself from hustling become

increasingly more difficult and costly." So while a reassessment of one's identity may

cause him or her to become disinvolved, such a reflection may in fact further sustain their

involvement.

Finding Activities Troublesome

Individuals may become disinvolved in subcultures because they find the activities

involved in participation troublesome, unpleasant, boring, or cumbersome (Prus,

1997:61). Hustlers may become bored with hustling and gamers may become bored with

fantasy gaming. Likewise, the often secretive (Ekins, 1997:65) aspect regarding one's

involvement in male femaling may become troublesome enough to disinvolve some

individuals from cross-dressing. Individuals who experience boredom or burdensome

feelings towards activities may chose to abandon a subculture as a result.

Encountering Emotional Difficulties

When an individual experiences emotional difficulties such as becoming distraught,

withdrawn, or distrusting (Prus, 1997:61) they may chose to become disvolved with the

activities that cause strife. This means they may become disinvolved in the life-world

when encountering emotional difficulties. This was not a process illustrated in the

chosen monographs.

Lacking Linguistic Fluency

The inability to communicate with other participants is called lacking linguistic fluency

(Prus, 1997:61). This may refer to not only a shared verbal language but also associated

lingo and non-verbal communication. A lack of linguistic fluency may impact one's

involvement in a subculture to the point that one might become disinvovled. A lack of

linguistic fluency was not a process of disinvolvement discussed with the selected

monographs.

Being Freedup From Existing Commitments

The ability to relocate leaves one freed up from existing commitments (Prus, 1997:61)

and provides the opportunity for disinvolvement in activities and subcultures. An

example of this might be if a hustling crew were to break up because of a death of a crew

member, it would forcibly freeup crew members, who may chose to become disinvovled with hustling an take up another 'vocation' such as book making or pool hustling for example. Being freedup from existing commitment was not a process evident within the three monographs considered.

Another example from card and dice hustling is that during off-season times crew members may become involved in other types of hustling, such a pool hustling (Prus, 1977:135). If one were to find this type of hustling more lucrative they may become disinvolved in card and dice hustling as a result of having been freed up during the off season and experiencing an alternative involvement (also illustrated below).

Severing Relationships

Severing relationships is the process by which individuals involved in the same life-world may experience conflict, animosity with each other or exclusion from the group (Prus, 1007:61). The severing of relationships may cause one to become disinvolved in the subculture. For hustler the prospects of working with other crew, or changing crews (Prus, 1977:30) may cause some relationships to sever. For example, if a crew's mechanic were to start working with another crew and severs his relationships with his original crew this may lead the other original crew members little choice but to become disinvolved in hustling unless a suitable replacement can be found.

Also, within hustling a crew member's relationship with the group may be severed if he is fired from the group.

> As the group is also defined in a business framework, members are selected/retained on the basis of performance capabilities. Thus, although other crew member may personally like a fellow whom they define as having become troublesome, they will terminate anyone they feel is costing them money and jeopardizing their operations . . . Terminations of established crew members are generally defined as a 'falling out' by the involved parties and, as far as possible, an attempt is made to maintain good parting relations. (Prus, 1977:40)

If one is terminated from the crew, their relationships are mostly severed from this group and unless one is recruited into a new crew, it is feasible that they may become disinvovled in hustling from having lost their membership within the crew.

Encountering Opportunities for Alternative Involvements

If one encounters opportunities for alternative involvements it is possible that they may choose to resign from their involvements with a life-world. For example, one may disinvolve themselves from fantasy gaming at the local chapter because they have begun to play these fantasy games through a computer or over the internet instead. This aspect was not discussed in Fine's (1983) monograph because it was conducted and written prior to a time when it was common for people to have home computers and before the expansion of such games over the internet. However, this provides a plausible example of how one might becomes disinvovled with playing real life fantasy games due to the existence of similar but alternative involvements through computer and internet usage.

For card and dice hustlers because they have exposure to a lifestyle that, at times, could lead them closer other forms of crimes, involvement in hustling may be abandoned for

more 'lucrative' forms of stealing such as burglary or robbery (Prus, 1977:23,130). Encountering other opportunities may lure people away from certain activities and towards other activity thus constituting a disinvolvement.

Analysis

Overall, these monographs include little analysis or discussion of the process of becoming disinvolved in hustling, male femaling, and fantasy gaming. Because the nods towards these processes are minimal it is hard to judge the validity of this set of processes. It would seem as though ethnographers, at least in these three examples, are more concerned with answering the how and when about involvements and activities and less concerned with examining how subculturists become disinvolved in these activities. While I recognize it is challenging to consider all aspects in one published monograph I think it would be worthwhile to spend some time studying disinvolvements as well.

Become Reinvolved

Becoming reinvolved in activities occurs when people begin to define opportunities for reinvolvements in former situations as more feasible; when they note greater changes to self or situations that would justify reinvolvements; or when they find that they have less extensively organized their routines around their present involvements (Prus, 1997:62). The processes of becoming reinvolved were not discussed in the monographs used as data for this paper. This too suggests that more emphasis could be placed on these processes in future ethnographic monographs. Or perhaps it signals that reinvolvements (and disinvolvements) are just simply not as important (to whom?) as the processes of becoming involved and sustaining that involvement over time.

Conclusion

Overall these monographs were extremely interesting to read. As a sociologist it is always interesting to delve into an unknown life-world and see *what is going on there*. Even by reading second-hand accounts of such experiences is still amazingly interesting and fundamental to what we do as sociologist in our attempt to understand not only the human condition but how our worlds are constructed in different ways. Specifically, I found Ekins (1997) monograph quite theoretical and (over) ladden with analysis. I would have liked to read more accounts of his participants' experiences with male femaling. The analysis was also enjoyable but I would have appreciated hearing his data speak more. *Road Hustler* (1977) by Prus and Sharper was enjoyable on many fronts. I especially favoured the discussions about how crews operate during the actual game settings. I would have liked to hear the experiences of other crew members such as "the boss" for example. His role still is not very clear to me. Fine's (1983) ethnography was an interesting read because I really knew nothing about fantasy gaming before reading his book. I recall a group of peers, during highschool, who were referred to as the "trench coach mafia," playing such fantasy games with cards and dice, at lunch hour or during spare-periods. However, I had no idea what they were doing so this monograph was enlightening in that regard. I would have found it useful had the author given a fantasy game script. I wonder what players are saying to each other during the game? How does it unroll? I had a hard time picturing in my head how a fantasy game is actually played. How it is the same as or different than other referent points such as monopoly for example? A script of a fantasy game would have been helpful in this regard.

The most challenging aspect of writing this paper for me was attempting to focus myself on involvements instead of meandering too far off course. The GSP of continuities lends itself well to getting off track because it includes some very complex processes of it's own. The challenge was to ensure I was discussing each subprocess under continuities in terms of its relation to involvements. I found myself having to come back to this point on numerous occasions.

Secondly, I found that many ideas presented in the monographs actually overlapped with more than one process. So while Mark is talking about the sociability of fantasy gaming, he is also talking about developing relationships, doing activity, *and* internalizing perspectives all at the same time. This makes the task of analysis challenging because individuals' comments often speak to numerous processes at play at one time. Thus, reinforcing Professor Prus' (1997) suggestion that ethnographic research is just that: challenging.

When I told my partner the topics of the books I was reading for this paper his reply was, and I quote: "What does card hustling have to do with cross-dressing?" This made me chuckle because it reinforced the idea that was suggested by Professor Prus in class and in his book (1997): even though human activities are seemingly different by looking at them through generic social processes we learn that human activities are actually not so different from one another. Exploring these monographs in terms of generic social processes has solidified this idea for me. This paper has confirmed for me than human

group life, while presumably different, is not so different when being examined using

generic social processes as a foundation of inquiry.

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