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## The Welfare Poor: Patterns of Association and Interaction in Discretionary Time

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THE WELFARE POOR: PATTERNS OF ASSOCIATION AND  
INTERACTION IN DISCRETIONARY TIME

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The welfare poor in America are classified into a "subterranean" strata not solely because of economic inequality but entrenched by racial ethnicity, age disadvantages, physical and psychological impairment, and broken family structures. While the misery and plight of the poor are often recognized in basic terms in which the survival necessity of food, clothing, health care, and shelter are real concerns, seemingly other less important cultural considerations are glossed over as trivia. Leisure participation continues to be neglected by researchers and because of this low priority, little or nothing is known of the leisure life style of the poor. Less still is known about how leisure or the absence of it affects the status of the poor. And of even greater interest are questions about lost autonomy, undifferentiation, and social isolation resulting from leisure patterns. Every one of these issues deserves further treatment but this research will be limited to probing the question of whether the poor have either a restrictive or multiple pattern of association in their leisure. The comparison is solely limited to testing the range of association among the poor and no comparisons are made either implicitly or explicitly on how higher status groups associate against the pattern of the poor. Before that task can be accomplished, it is necessary to determine exactly where the poor rank and the examination in some detail of that position in society may help to reveal how they associate in their leisure.

In characterizing the poor strata, explanations have consistently developed among similar lines of inquiry. Although dominant trends prevail, important contributions have been added by differing vantage points. In presenting what might be termed a theory of limited outlook, Curtis et al (1971: 344) concludes "that the position of the poor in our social structure limits their outlook to the local, intimate setting, impedes their hope for meaningful control of their destinies and facilitates the

development to feelings of alienation, isolation, fatalism, and low self-esteem." The inept impression of intimate, warm, informal relations does not describe the poor, rather the "informality," "personal quality of ease," "warm humor," so perceived and stereotyped, only shuts them off from further secondary relations in the community. "Numerous studies have documented the marked degree of social and cultural isolation of lower class persons. Nor is this isolation simply a separation from the mainstream of society; typically lower class persons have minimal interaction with those of their own kind (Roach, 1965: 507)." Indeed, depersonalization has even been found to pervade consumer interaction (Farberman and Weinstein, 1970). Most pointedly, a persistent pattern of circumspect relationships has been identified as limiting a poor person's range of social interactions and contacts.

By reducing interpersonal relationships, the role structure becomes undifferentiated. When relationships are narrowed, possibilities of exchange, and resulting integration into a community are depressed. What looks informal and relaxed in interpersonal relations is the negative consequences of this action. Reestablishing contacts of exchange in the community, moving from a state of unemployment to work, from abandonment to family, and from sickness to health is more possible than overcoming the social barrier of race (Yancey et al, 1972: 343-4). Contributing further to that narrow sphere of sociability is the reluctance of making "primary social relationships outside the immediate environment (Besner, 1965: 20)." By restricting the social environment, as if it were a closed system, entropy sets in thereby decreasing the chances of adaptation by reducing the interpersonal levels of contact. Substituting a managed welfare system, while providing necessary assistance, may even lead an individual to still greater dependency, since many interactions are then channeled through an agency. Place these individuals in a community environment which exhibits a degree of social disorganization and the problem proportionately increases. Moreover, the poor blacks even have a "rougher" time of it than whites, since their ghetto neighborhoods "exhibit a higher degree of disorganization (Drake, 1965: 785)." Given many of the conditions of age, race, housing and decreased sociability, the typical welfare recipient exists in a rather limiting situation with few options for social interaction.

The poor welfare recipient loses much autonomy and perhaps a measure of leisure which is an expression of freedom and voluntarism. "Their autonomy curtailed and their self-esteem weakened by the operation of the caste-class system are confronted with identity problems. Their social condition is essentially one of powerlessness (Drake, 1965: 772-3)." A movement away from society's institutions occurs because welfare recipients become dependent on bureaucratized agents to manage their external affairs, a movement analogous in many ways to prison inmates whose "external social status distinctions are severely

curtailed and so are contacts with the external world (Katz, 1968: 75)." While the analogy to prisons as opposed to slums is exaggerated, there are similarities between roles, and in particular over delimited patterns of social interaction.

#### SOCIAL CONTACTS AND AFFILIATION

Patterns of interaction and association in the community by poor welfare recipients are acknowledged to be of limited involvement. The pattern of most relationships is limited to immediate family or extended to church attendance. There are open contrasts even among the adjacent working class, black or white, where friendship and relational patterns possess a wider circle including some friends and neighbors (Feagin, 1970: 306-7). Declaring the poor as being isolated and unorganized is more of a declaration for their absence of affiliational ties. Without social contacts among friends, neighbors, relations, and interest groups, the sphere of interaction for an individual narrows and with that also freedom. Leisure is a voluntary act socially carried out with others who share and reinforce the norms of discretion. No activity is without its participants, audience, reference group, club, clique, or spectator. Leisure activities are indeed done alone, but the norm is with others (Cheek, 1971). Even with respect to solitary activities, one has to recognize that there is at least some indirect kind of interaction occurring even when reading, relaxing, or musing.

An obvious standard of a modernized industrial society is multiple role relationships, the ability to manage many different expectations, and to carry out diverse performances toward specified goals. The fewer an individual's role expectations, the weaker are his bonds to the community. The option of engaging in many differing role performances offers the individual a greater range of choices and freedoms. If an individual's role relations are few, his influence is reduced. Another important source of independence occurs when an individual changes roles, for it is during that interchange process that a routine is terminated and an individual can act in a relaxed voluntary manner. Leaving the office, shop or factory, going on a work break or pausing to chat, coming from school or church are times when an individual moves away or ceases to perform a designated role task. If an individual possesses a large number of role statuses, the potential for leisure freedom is greatly increased because of the possibility for more role interchanges.

Another element of the issue which has to be examined is where and under what circumstances do individuals normally socialize. The contrasts between the status of black and white are striking. The status variable is unmistakably a decisive factor, because proportionately a higher percentage of blacks are poor and welfare bound. The within-race comparisons between the welfare poor and other classes of blacks

should also be included when considering the issue of socializing. An urban study of blacks and whites which looked at this question found decisive differences (Yancey et al, 1971: 39). Upon examining various socializing situations, they stressed that "differences between the races appear only when we compare those who indicated that their socializing was facilitated by some play activity, as contrasted with those who mentioned some work activity--on car, house, garden. The former pattern is more frequently mentioned by blacks, while the latter is more mentioned by whites." The pattern of focused socializing around some play activity in the home is more likely to be present in middle class black households, while unfocused socializing in the home is more prevalent in lower class black and white households. The absence of direction, norms and rules found in game-like behavior in the lower classes removes an important source of adult socialization for those homes. One source of patterning or learning behavior involves aspects of cooperation and competition which is easily acquired in leisure situations of a game-like nature. Both the black and white middle classes are significantly higher participants than the lower class in subscribing to a formal game of socializing. Unfocused, random, nonpurposive socializing does not give rise to patterns of goal directedness and more rigid disciplined forms of socializing. The consequences of game-like behavior might prove to be quite revealing but are yet to be tested.

Lower class blacks also reveal reduced levels of socializing with friends done in the outside community. "Among blacks, the middle class is more likely to engage in these activities than the working or lower class, but the within-race status comparisons are hardly as significant as those between races (Yancey et al, 1971: 42)." Taking a localized stand toward the community cuts off channels of information and pleasure which are available in an urban environment.

The fact that cosmopolitanism is positively related to innovation and localism is negatively related to innovation works against the lower class black. The opportunity to accept change, new ideas and innovation is part of the growth and development of any class. To be cut off from social relationships is to experience routine monotony without any prospect of excitement and challenge. Briefly then, sociability among lower class blacks reduces their changes for social ties at least as it applies to their leisure needs.

#### LEISURE LIFE STYLE AMONG THE POOR

Given the six patterns of leisure which Kaplan (1960) identified for American society, the two of association and sociability just reviewed have accounted for very little involvement among the poor. While this pattern does not constitute any great cultural loss since other patterns of leisure are available, the fact that social contacts are generally so minimal among the poor does constitute a loss. The

problem is plainly demonstrated in the findings of a national probability sample on leisure which found that for those who participated, over seventy percent did so with others in all activities (Cheek, 1971: 254). The social process of engaging in leisure is normally done by interacting with social others, and not done as unattached individuals or alone. To say that the poor don't really join clubs or visit as a form of leisure is one thing, but to observe that they do not carry out leisure through any kind of group is quite another. The poor seem to be socially isolated and neutralized. Part of that narrowing process includes leisure caused by segregation in which "so many of the usual recreational forms were denied them (Myrdal, 1964: 40)." The exclusion of blacks did not completely hinge on the basis of race, but was further compounded by low socioeconomic status. If any dominant consensus has emerged for the poor, it is that they are "automatically prevented from enjoying most of the forms of private or commercial recreation which are available to the rest of society (Kraus, 1965: 191)." Largely relegated to unemployed or marginally employed situations, the poor face a kind of "enforced leisure"--not a leisure allowing free voluntary autonomous action with social others, but a form of "nothingness" or "emptiness" which signals the absence of leisure. Because routinized patterns of work and group affiliation are not necessarily part of the daily life experiences, there is little to be "free of" and probably not much discretionary time.

Few studies have ever seriously evaluated the leisure style of the black, let alone the poor black. As early as 1927, attention was called to the plight of the black living in an urban setting. "Probably no greater problem arises in connection with the Negro's adjustment to urban life than that of how to achieve an effective organization and control of his leisure time activities in the face of race prejudice and other barriers which limit his contacts and frustrate his wishes. Those who have studied seriously the social life of Negroes realize something of the significant role which pleasure and relaxation play among them (Jones, 1927: 25)." If our knowledge is weak about the black pattern of leisure, still less information is known about the poor black's leisure. That only a few studies have been done is quite obvious from the literature, and none with any kind of solid basis for making accurate generalizations. To offset that evident lack of information, an urban-centered study was carried out in an attempt to identify the leisure life style of the poor. This study was part of a much larger project which sought to uncover attitudes of the poor toward selected aspects of the welfare system.

#### SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

The respondents in this study comprise a sample of individuals residing in Fulton County (Atlanta, Georgia) who were receiving assistance from the Social and Rehabilitation Services of the Department of

Health, Education and Welfare during the winter of 1973. Originally, 700 names were randomly drawn from a sampling frame consisting of 18,000 individuals who were currently enrolled in either the Aid to Families of Dependent Children, Vocational Rehabilitation (blind or disabled) or programs for the aged by SRS/HEW. Seventy-eight percent or 549 of the target group were ultimately interviewed by professional interviewers who were screened and matched by race with the respondent. The sample consisted of 82 percent black and 18 percent white; a ratio proportional to the welfare population in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Sample bias was minimal and unsystematic with the exception of thirty individuals who were unable to be interviewed due to apparent mental incapacibilities.

Undoubtedly the reasons for so few studies among the poor are the many difficult problems of enumerating the population, sampling, contacting, and interviewing respondents. Establishing rapport and convincing the respondent that what they reported would not be used against them is a difficult problem, but not insurmountable. This is especially true as concerns their leisure, since shades of the Protestant ethic, notions of frivolity, and stereotypes of being lazy and listless linger on.

Establishing rapport and convincing the respondents that their comments would be treated with strictest confidentiality was a primary concern in the present situation due to the nature of the subject matter and the understandable suspicion with which welfare recipients would tend to view a stranger seeking to ascertain personal information. Interviewers were trained and alerted to the difficulties of eliciting information from the potential sample. A number of role playing situations which employed current welfare recipients as interviewees were presented, and the first day's work of each interviewer was carefully assessed before they could continue. Additionally, a review session was held at the end of the first week of data collection. Validation checks were made for ten percent of the completed interviews and comments from those subjects contacted were favorable with respect to the interview situation. The researchers are, therefore, confident that the data are believable and were collected under the best of circumstances. Our assumptions concerning the validity of responses has been corroborated by Weiss (1968-1969), who concluded that the responses of black welfare mothers in New York were valid.

#### FINDINGS

A series of leisure activities was factor analyzed in order to determine whether any peculiar patterns would emerge deviating from that described by Kaplan (1960). The principle components method, with orthogonal rotation, was utilized to extract unidimensional factors of leisure involvement from the Atlanta sample. Five factors emerged and the least squares method was used to assign factor scores to the individual

subjects in our sample (Rummel, 1970: 437-41). An emergent pattern of activities was identified by three distinctive groupings presented in Table 1.

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Table 1 about here  
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The first factor was marked by aspects of social interaction depicted in partying behavior, card games, and movies in the outside community. Factor one might be termed "entertainment" which implies a notion of openness toward others, interaction in a community setting, or a focused kind of interaction. The distinguishing characteristic of social involvement outside the immediate family means more extensive social contact offering a greater chance for autonomy. The second factor extracted plainly represents "arts and crafts," including sewing and other hobbies. The underlying behavior of this second factor is more likely to be distinguished by the level of individual involvement. The expressed purpose of the activity can be very easily accomplished without involving anyone else. While hobbies are personal kinds of experiences, clubs and voluntary associations dealing with a hobby often serve to provide a social function. Autonomy is served when hobbies evidence a social interactional process organized into clubs, annual meetings or the like. The essential behavior of a hobby, however, plainly requires that an individual take steps and exercise initiative toward a purpose whether building models, collecting artifacts, or creatively engaging in an art form. A third factor emanating out of the analysis paradoxically contains a mixed degree of "sociability" of which shopping and visiting are the principle activities. Shopping allows an individual a readily accessible outlet into the community for browsing, window shopping, pricing or buying. Shopping can be done alone or in the company of others, but never without clerks or other consumers. The context need not include interaction but is still done in public, and behavior must at least take into consideration some minimal forms of intercourse. The other activity of visiting relatives inherently focuses attention upon direct interaction. The social bonds of intercourse rely upon kinship ties which unite the larger family unit and mold interaction. Visiting among relatives when viewed in respect to patterns based on employment or residence is more likely to occur among the lower status levels. The mixed strength of the sociability pattern in this factor hinges upon the degree of interaction necessary for either shopping or visiting.

Two remaining factors have also been identified, but their relative importance is limited by the amount of variance explained.<sup>1</sup> Factor four represents "outdoor recreation" containing park and picnicking behavior while factor five is composed of "radio and television." Because the

sample is predominantly composed of blacks, it is not unexpected that park behavior would represent a low value given the past history of park use among blacks. And, mass media, often believed to be a dominant aspect of the lower strata, rather than assuming a more dominant role, functions more as a babysitting service, or relates simply to reduced leisure participation (Meyersohn, 1968-69).

Confidence in the original factors is definitely enhanced by a validation procedure but even without that, they are sound theoretically when compared to Kaplan's model which classifies activities in roughly the same manner.<sup>2</sup>

In an effort to test influences on the leisure factors a series of independent variables was measured which assessed socioeconomic influences, personality and associational determinants. Variables were chosen for their possible effect on the leisure factors. Socioeconomic data including education and income were gathered along with aggregate data measuring age and number of family dependents. Personality information was obtained from the anomie scale (Srole, 1956) and an attitude scale toward welfare (Kallen and Miller, 1971). Both these sets of variables played very little part as predictors of leisure factors. The variables were tested by applying a multiple stepwise regression model to the data. Practically no variance in any of the five leisure factors was accounted for by these variables. That finding is not surprising and coincides with data on the Srole index. The sample data was so consistent of poor welfare types that very little could be determined from some of the information because of the skewed distributions. The results obviously confirmed that the poor lacked education, income and were highly alienated. Nobody should be surprised to find that aggregate data, socioeconomic indices, and even some personality variables would not predict any outcome for the leisure factors because of the lack of differentiation among such a strata. More importantly, the variables tend to overlook patterns of social relationships which structure group life.

To at least begin an approach in determining patterned social relationships among the poor on leisure, three sociability indexes were tested by obtaining scores on who participated with another individual in an activity. The aloneness index measured the times an individual did an activity without social interaction as a ratio over their total pattern of activity. A primary group leisure involvement index was also employed to measure the number of times an individual did an activity with members of the immediate family expressed as a ratio over their total pattern of activity. Finally, a secondary group leisure involvement index was measured that took into consideration patterns of association with friends and neighbors also expressed as a ratio over total activity patterns. Tables 2 and 3 contain an intercorrelation matrix among the predictor

and dependent variables along with the results of the multiple regression analysis for the first three leisure factors. The contribution to the total explained variance by factors four and five was minimal and could not be expected to reach any meaningful level of explanation.

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Tables 2 and 3 about here  
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The bulk of the explained variance for the entertainment factor was accounted for by three variables. Secondary group associations accounted for most of the variance, since parties and game behavior are carried out in the company of others. Rather than occurring solely among family members, the pattern is more autonomous and reaches out to friends and neighbors in the community. The isolation generally expected among the welfare poor did not hold for this factor, perhaps because age enters into the explanation. The younger are more active in entertainment, more mobile, sexually aggressive and less likely to be trapped without friends. Yet, this factor still turns upon the alone variable. Although the explained variance is minor, having the variable even appear is telling of some degree of isolation. The norms regulating participation in leisure activity are partially influenced by how the activity itself is structured. Some activities by their very rules require more than one individual in order to complete the act, but the precise nature of the social relationships are not that clearly specified. Mates, friends and organizations are but a few possibilities. To have a single party seeking entertainment alone is not typical. Arts and crafts, on the other hand, are more adaptable to singularity. Evidence is found of the alone situation operating to predict a major amount of the variance for this factor. There was also a positive relationship with more immediate members of the family or primary group. The older tended to be more involved and there was evidence of a weak negative relationship with secondary groups. The pattern of predictors for the second factor is quite consistent with what might be expected given the kind of activities. The fact of the activities being more adaptable to engaging in leisure by oneself or in primary relations is more in keeping with the social isolation explanation. A third sociability factor including a combination of visiting and shopping was undertaken alone or in more primary group relationships. The limitations on social relationships takes over this third factor revealing a model that reinforces the isolation theme.

The second and third factors strongly suggest that the poor possess a somewhat restrictive leisure. The first factor clearly establishes an extended sphere of socializing. But the data unfortunately do not get at an in-depth view of friendship among the poor. The number of different associates, basis of association, or degree of association are questions

which need to be asked before a clearly defined view can be presented. Even without this information, the weight of the evidence suggests that the poor engage in a narrow band of activities, and for the most part are either accompanied by family or are simply alone. A cross-tabulation of activities by persons engaging in them clearly reveals that there is a restrictive pattern of socializing among the poor. Of the twenty-one different leisure activities that were selected by the poor with varying degrees of participation, the highest ranked category was consistently that of being alone, followed next by that of participating with children. The lowest ranked category of participation was found among one's friends.<sup>3</sup> Clearly the pattern emerging from the data strongly points to a rather limited circumspect pattern of association.

### CONCLUSIONS

The opportunity to exercise discretionary time is controlled not only by access to employment but also by one's pattern of association. The experience of autonomy is lacking among the lower classes because of such barriers. Reduced autonomy results from a limited range of responses to possible leisure activities. Couple this narrow response set with highly circumspect patterns of association and the consequences become more disastrous for the poor. The leisure life style of the poor can best be characterized by their response to an open-ended question probing what they do in their free time. Many responded by saying they did "nothing" or just "sat and relaxed." The response is symptomatic of deeper ills that reflect a general subsistence level of existence.

Living within the context of an urban industrial society is both rewarding and punishing. Like any paradox, the solution eludes reconciliation because the ambivalence is reality. But certain segments of society are set off from the pleasures and pressures of meaningful cultural activity; they fall far beyond the expected pattern of normal social interaction. Some are poor and share less in wealth and the pleasures that it can bring. The disjunction between the material displacement among the poor and middle income groups is obvious for the displacement of the poor from social roles. The fact that they do not usually have a job career or strong family ties removes much from their lives. Not just the subjective experiences but also many normative consequences both positive and negative are never realized within a narrow band of role expectations. The freedom of exercising role choice in leisure is greater than in other behaviors. That freedom expressed by participating with other people is more important than some range of activity. The function of sociability is therefore essential for providing an individual with interactional relationships which unite them with the larger community. The welfare poor are simply denied relational autonomy within the associational framework of leisure.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>In both instances, the Eigen values were well below 1.00, so they were not included in Table 1.

<sup>2</sup>Since an orthogonally rotated factor analysis forces the factors to be statistically independent, the resulting patterns may simply be a function of the technique. As a check against just such a possibility an oblique rotated factor matrix was generated and none of the resulting factors which emerged were different from those found in the original rotated matrix.

<sup>3</sup>Kendall's coefficient of concordance was sig. at .05,  $W=.563$ .

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TABLE 1

THREE ORTHOGONALLY ROTATED FACTORS FOR  
SELECTED LEISURE ACTIVITIES\*

Variable	Factor			h <sup>2</sup>
	1	2	3	
Partying	.711			.57
Attend movies	.656			.51
Play cards	.594			.42
Play a sport	.393			.20
Attend sports	.383			.31
Visit friends	.353			.31
Go driving or riding	.337			.34
Do sewing		.590		.45
Work on hobby		.584		.42
Do gardening		.396		.25
Work on house or apartment		.324		.26
Go shopping			.646	.42
Visit relatives out of home			.555	.44
Reading			.490	.34
Percent common variance	55.3	15.7	11.9	
Eigen Values	4.30	1.22	1.02	

\*The activities were originally coded in terms of frequency (1. Never; 2. In last month; 3. In last week). Several other leisure activities (fishing, picnicking, visiting a park, watching TV, listening to the radio, listening to music, and home doing nothing) loaded moderately on three additional factors which were discarded due to noninterpretability and because each had Eigen Values of less than 1.00.

TABLE 2

ZERO-ORDER CORRELATION MATRIX OF FOUR PREDICTOR  
VARIABLES AND THREE DEPENDENT VARIABLES\*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Age	1.000						
Aloneness index	-.055	1.000					
Primary group leisure involvement	-.325	.016	1.000				
Secondary group leisure involvement	-.362	.280	.211	1.000			
Factor Scale 1 (Entertainment)	-.415	.215	.164	.560	1.000		
Factor Scale 2 (Arts and Crafts)	.064	.444	.217	.041	-.034	1.000	
Factor Scale 3 (Sociability)	-.180	.470	.408	.343	.170	.211	1.000

\*In some instances, the correlations are based on slightly less than 570 cases.

TABLE 3

REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF THE DEPENDENT VARIABLES

<u>Dependent Variable: Factor Scale 1 (Entertainment)</u>						
Independent Variable	Zero-Order Correlation	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Standardized Beta Weight	Standard Error	Standardized Beta Weight
Secondary Group Leisure Involvement	.560	.413	.036	.448		
Age	-.415	-.053	.010	-.260		
Aloneness Index	.215	.044	.022	.072		
$R^2=37.1\%$						

  

<u>Dependent Variable: Factor Scale 2 (Arts and Crafts)</u>						
Independent Variable	Zero-Order Correlation	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Standardized Beta Weight	Standard Error	Standardized Beta Weight
Aloneness Index	.444	.259	.022	.470		
Primary Group Leisure Involvement	.217	.122	.018	.275		
Age	.064	.021	.010	.115		
Secondary Group Leisure Involvement	.041	-.077	.035	-.093		
$R^2=27.6\%$						

TABLE 3 (Cont'd.)

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable: Factor Scale 3 (Sociability)				
	Zero-Order Correlation	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Standardized Beta Weight	
Aloneness Index	.470	.227	.020	.400	
Primary Group Leisure Involvement	.408	.160	.016	.351	
Secondary Group Leisure Involvement	.343	.123	.032	.144	
					R <sup>2</sup> =40.2%