

Games Consumers Play:
The Construction, Maintenance, and Defense of Elective Identity Through Play

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THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Business Administration in the Graduate College of the University of
Illinois at Chicago, 2012

Chicago, Illinois

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to the love of my life, Keith Fisher, for his dedication to me and my needs throughout this process, the patience to deal with me during the struggling periods, and the perfectly-balanced combination of pressure and incentive to help drive me to its completion.

Acknowledgements

I could not have made it this far without the sage wisdom and advice of my chair and advisor, Joseph Cherian. The depth and breadth of his knowledge never failed to amaze me. I have to thank Albert Muniz and Suzanne Fogel for the over-the-top effort on their part in helping me bring this document to fruition. I would also like to thank Charles King and George Vukotich for their eleventh-hour addition to this committee and their contributions despite this daunting hurdle to doing so.

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Summary

Play is a means to express and explore an individual's or a community's identity. The individual uses play to communicate meaning about who they are. People perform identity when they meet role expectations (Goffman, 1959). Play involves accepting or rejecting the role expectations of the situation in which we find ourselves (Grayson, 1999). We don't have to play when there are role expectations, but we *can* if we so choose.

All play has meaning (Huizinga, 1956). It points to and signifies other things. It reflects and rewards the values of the players' community. If shopping is more than buying things but the buying of identity (Clammer, 1992; Johnstone and Conroy, 2005), then play is the demonstration and the performance of this purchased (and elective) identity. The acquired 'things' become the props we use to make identity performances real, visible, and readable by others. This research will look at the effort consumers go through to construct, maintain, and defend elective identities within the environments within which they are enacted—what I will refer to throughout this document as 'playscapes'. I ask the questions,

1. "Why take the effort to construct, maintain, and defend an elective identity within a playscape? (What are the payoffs?).
2. "What role does the environment play in affecting elective identity consumption processes?" and
3. "[How] do players differentiate between other players and spectators within a playscape?"

Summary (continued)

What I show through this research is how the explicit recognition of play in the elective identity process enables us to better understand how consumers approach consumption. Once we are freed from the obligations of necessity—once we are free to play—we can approach our consumption differently. Once we begin to play, we don't all play the same way.

Identities are not static; they are ongoing projects. They are a process. We can work at these projects or we can play at these projects. We can make these projects a game and, in doing so, they take on the characteristics and components of any other game. They have a playscape—boundaries within which they are played. They have rules determining what you can and cannot do. They have pieces, props, and other paraphernalia. They involve the suspension of the 'real world' for the acceptance of an imaginary world that—while it is active—takes precedence over the outside world. Finally, games have other players.

One of the things this research makes apparent is that other players, in the form of spectators, are more important to play and games—especially elective identity games—than we may at first realize. In consumer behavior and consumer culture theory we tend to treat the observer as a given; as something that is fixed. As a result we tend to see elective identity performances as one-sided communication—as presentations made to relevant audiences. What, in fact, my research shows is that elective identity performances are more like multi-sided games with both moves and countermoves. Elective identity becomes a form of negotiation between the performer and an active audience who are also involved in the performance—or, in keeping with

Summary (continued)

this dissertation, a negotiation between players playing the same or similar games. As an open game—one whose goal is to keep playing and not end the game—elective identity games involve the creation, maintenance, and defense of different elective identities within a playscape. Successful play means the creating, maintaining, and defending playscape-compatible elective identities. It is through the ongoing play within these playscapes that boundaries are tested and performances assessed. It is an iterative process, a conversation, between presenter and observer in which a consumer can choose to play either role. If we study just one side of this equation we cannot get a proper understanding of the role played by each—like hearing only one side of a phone conversation. We can try to piece some of it together, but we can be more confident in what we hear and understand if we have both sides of the conversation.

I. INTRODUCTION

“Playing left to itself would go on forever”

—*Richard Schechner*, *The Future of Ritual*

A. Background

Consumption is about play. Play is intrinsically motivated, self-oriented, and active (Holbrook, 1994, Grayson, 1999). It is my contention that when we consume we are engaged in a potentially playful activity—most, if not all, consumption contains some elements of play. Holbrook argued, “anything—a silk tie, for example—can be valued for its efficiency, its morality, its esthetics, or, indeed, its playfulness” (in Grayson, 1999, p106). Most conspicuous consumption is ultimately a performance for the benefit of others (Deighton, 1992; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Goffman, 1959)—play enacted to communicate who we are and how we expect to be perceived by others. As such, understanding how people play is central to understanding how consumers consume.

Play is a means to express and explore an individual’s or a community’s identity. The individual uses play to communicate meaning about who they are. People perform identity when they meet role expectations (Goffman, 1959). Play involves accepting or rejecting the role expectations of the situation in which we find ourselves (Grayson, 1999). We don’t have to play when there are role expectations, but we *can* if we so choose.

Traditionally, play, in the form of various festive celebrations, was a means for groups to demonstrate to relevant audiences the positive values and beliefs (the identity) of their group. The festival was the way in which communities communicated their identity (Schechner, 1993; Falassi, 1967; Turner, 1969; Fernandez, 1991; Noyes,

1995) and celebrated their accomplishments. For the Baroque ruler, festival celebrations were “a serious discourse, a communication of truths (real or fictional) between a sponsor-ruler, numerous artists and craftspeople, and a specific audience” (Aercke, 1994, p37). It reinforced communal myths (Drewal, 1992; Arnoldi, 1995) and bonded its celebrants one to another. The festival “provides ideal *entrees* into a community’s symbolic, economic, social, and political life” (Farber, 1983 in Proctor, 2004, p132). It is in this social play that people let down their guard and allow themselves to reveal elements of themselves that would not otherwise be accessible.

The festival has waned in influence in the modern world. We no longer engage in the revelries of the traditional festival in the same ways. Many of the ascribed identities so integral to the individual’s personal identity in the past—those of blood, birth, and pew—no longer have the power to compel individuals like they did. Elective identities—both individual and collective—have risen in importance. What were once long, complicated, meaning-laden celebrations of (ascribed) identity have no place in modern industrial cultures organized around work weeks rather than seasonal cycles—we no longer have weeklong festivals at the end of seasons, we have weekend days at the end of weeks. Without these traditional, ascribed-identity festivals, we need to look to their modern replacements. Cultures and subcultures have developed their own modern equivalents of the festival structured to more suitably match our modern consumption and production calendars. As identity has become more fluid in the 21st century and less tied to rigid structural elements of society, the forms these elective identity festivals can take are also more fluid. Conventions (Porter and McClaren, 1999; Badone and Roseman, 2004; Kozinets, 2001), brandfests (Stokburger-Sauer, 2010; Schouten et al,

2007), consumption-oriented gatherings (Goulding et al, 2002; Goulding and Saren, 2009; Kozinets, 2002b) and other comings together of consumers—whether annually, monthly, or weekly; live or online—provide a means for consumers in self-identified communities to share and celebrate the elements of their common identity with one another. These can be annual gatherings in the desert to celebrate any one of several loosely-defined identities characteristic of the Burning Man gathering in the Black Rock desert of Nevada (Kozinets, 2002b) or the weekly gathering of mutually-identifying community members in a nightclub. The important element they share is a playful creation and celebration of an elective identity that is influenced by their playing with the products and meanings available to them in consumer culture.

B. Purpose of the Study

All play has meaning (Huizinga, 1956). It points to and signifies other things. It reflects and rewards the values of the players' community. If "shopping is not merely the acquisition of things: it is the buying of identity" (Clammer, 1992 in Johnstone and Conroy, 2005), then play is the demonstration and the performance of this purchased (and therefore elective) identity. The acquired 'things' become the props we use to make identity performances real, visible, and readable by others. This research will look at the effort consumers go through to construct, maintain, and defend elective identities within the environments within which they are enacted—what I will refer to throughout this document as 'playscapes'. I ask the questions,

1. "Why take the effort to construct, maintain, and defend an elective identity within a playscape? (What are the payoffs?).

2. “What role does the environment play in affecting elective identity consumption processes?” and
3. “[How] do players differentiate between other players and spectators within a playscape?”

I will look at consumption as play guided by three of the rhetorics of play—(social) identity, the self, and imagination/phantasmagoria—identified by Brian Sutton-Smith (1997). Rhetorics are the underlying ideologies that justify a field of study. They are the arguments used by the researchers in the field to justify studying that field. When we consume we use play—in the form of games—to engage in group and individual identity and self-presentation activities. Within these identity games there are different types of players and different approaches to the games they play. Where we have players, there will be different player identities. To play football is to be a football player. To play chess is to be a chess player. To play ‘pig out’ is to be, well, a pig. Each of those player types has an associated identity (image, stereotype, etc). When we are playing particular games particular identities are salient for us. Elective games yield elective identities. Since most of the consumption games we play are elective games (even our consumption of necessities allows for enough freedom of choice as to allow a playful approach to them), why do we play the games we play. What is the motivation? The question at the heart of it all is, “Why take the effort to construct an elective identity within any context? What is the payoff?”

My study is an examination of the satisfactions players derive from the different elective identity games they play in consumption environments. When the game(s) of one set of players collide with the elective identity game(s) of another set of players, the

consequences can be important. When our salient identity is challenged, we can feel threatened in different ways. How we respond to threats to our elective identities—consumer constructed identities—is important to understand.

C. Significance of the Study

From a marketing perspective play and elective identity is relevant to any service provider or retailer since they provide the playscape in which, and the props *with* which, consumers play. By understanding the players and the games they play we look to understand the payoffs and their choice of playscapes in which to play their games. To some extent it is an extension of the role of services in all marketing offerings suggested by Vargo and Lusch (2004) but goes back further to the idea of retail and service environments as designed experiences as proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1998).

In looking at the various manifestations of play (for example, dark play) as a way to understand consumer creation of elective identity, it's necessary to identify contexts in which this play frequently occurs. Not all playscapes are created equal. If we wanted to look at those places where ascribed identities manifested their play-identity activities, we would look to the festival and the feast. These two, often intertwined, activities were the predominant locus for ascribed identity play (Schechner, 1993; Falassi, 1967; Turner, 1969; Fernandez, 1991; Noyes, 1995).

“The majestic festive performance was the occasion on which not only all of a society’s arts and crafts, by also all the ideologies which governed it, were combined and re-presented in a physically tangible form in order to recall from the past (or a willfully recreated past), reiterate for the present, and preserve for future memory the political and philosophical concerns of the age. Such organized play served several functions within the communities for which it was enacted. Most fundamentally, it was a crucial strategy in the ongoing process of dynastic self-representation or self-affirmation in stability, which is itself, perhaps,

the essential feature of the very principle of absolute rule. For that reason alone, the principles that guided the labors of the participating artists-craftsmen in various media can with justification be called rhetorical. It was their task, of course, to persuade the nation or community, and, perhaps most of all, its neighbors, of the sponsoring ruler's power and wealth; not less importantly, they praised and affirmed the ruler's validity and place in history. (Aercke, 1994, p6)

While we can still see elements of the older festival celebrations reflected in annual events like Mardi Gras, Spring Break, and Renaissance Fairs; we can also examine them in more frequent events, closer to home, that celebrate and reinforce identities on a daily basis. I am looking at the 'extra-economic, experiential significance' (Maisel 1974; Sherry 1990) of play as a foundation for the construction and maintenance of elective identity.

D. Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation contains four main components. I start with a review of the pertinent literature on play, dark play, elective identity, the nightclub, and player archetypes. Next, I describe the methodology used to understand how consumers use play and dark play to construct, maintain, and defend elective identities in the nightclub. This is followed by a detailed description of findings and a discussion of what they mean for marketing. I conclude with contributions to the field and managerial implications.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A. Introduction

In this section I will review the relevant literature to this study. I will begin by looking at Elective Identity and how that differs from past sources of identity. I will look at the various aspects of play, including dark play, with an eye to how they interact with identity processes. I will look at the festival as an expression of a group's identity and the communication of that community's values to itself and the outside world. Finally I will look at the nightclub as a form of festival and the expression of the elective identities therein.

B. Elective Identity

Identity comes in two main types, ascribed and elective. Ascribed identities are those that we inherit by virtue of birth. They are our racial, national, gender, class, and religious identities over which we have no (or very limited) control. Ascribed identities were the dominant identities for most individuals throughout most of our history. Elective identities are those identities we choose. They are the ones we adopt or manufacture—often through the consumption choices we make. “Elective Identity is that sense of self that is developed by choice and change. It is the identity that people are able to self-fashion from the world around them, to pick up and discard at will” (Cornwell and Drennan, 2004, p114). We have been liberated (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995) from these former ascribed identities and freed to pick and choose from a catalog of goods (and associated identities) provided by the market (Arnould, 2007). “The consumer is ready to have Italian for lunch and Chinese for dinner, to wear Levi's 501 blue jeans for the

outdoor party in the afternoon and try the Gucci suit at night to attend a Japanese exhibition, not only changing diets and clothes, but also the personas and selves that are to be (re)presented at each "function" " (Firat, 1997, p79). These personas and selves consumers create around these brand and product identifications can seek reassurance and support in communities (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) just like ascribed personas and identities do. "The quest for a good community is, among other things, a quest for a neighborhood where one does not fear standing an arm's length from his neighbor, where one can divine the intent of someone heading down the sidewalk, or where one can share expressions of affect by the way adjacent residences dress up for mutual impression management" (Suttles, 1972, p234). Individuals look for communities in which their individual identities can feel safe. Elective identity communities, being more mobile than the ascribed identity community, also search for a place where they can be safe. These communities, like all communities, can find themselves in search of a good home—a process which can be made more or less difficult according to the identity in question.

a. The Evolving Sources of Identity

Our world is one in which many consumers no longer look to the traditional hierarchical markers of status—church, class, race, gender—to define who they are and how they should act. This has left them free to define themselves and their actions in new ways (Fournier, 1998, Arnould and Price, 1999, Schau and Gilly, 2003). Goods and services are no longer viewed simply as products to be consumed in and of themselves—their production, and more importantly their consumption, take on

increased meaning (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). They have become signs and symbols that signify much larger meanings in the lives and identities of those that consume them (Levy, 1981; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Fournier, 1998; Schau and Gilly, 2003; Belk and Costa, 1998). They become 'enchanted' and 'multivocal' as they develop their own narratives (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995, Fournier, 1998). They speak to us and for us.

In his writing on fandom and the consumption of media products, Henry Jenkins points out a number of ways in which fans move from being passive viewers of media to active participants with the media (what we would now call prosumption). He tells how writers of fan-fiction (the writing of stories based on existing characters in media products) appropriate an existing media product (i.e. Star Trek, Star Wars, Harry Potter) to escape their mundane existence in order to enter a more magical world. He borrows a term from deCerteau and calls them 'poachers' of textual meaning (deCerteau, 1998; Jenkins, 2006b). In these acts of poaching fans appropriate the original narrative texts and reinterpret them to create meaning for themselves. Jenkins says, "Fandom is not about Bourdieu's notion of holding art at a distance, it's not that high art discourse at all; it's about having control and mastery over art by pulling it close and integrating it into your sense of self" (2006a, p 23). Jenkins' fan-fiction writers appropriate media products, rewrite their content and meanings in the context of their own lives, and create meaning.

I argue that this is not limited to media products and is part of the identity creation, maintenance, and defense projects of consumers. Some nightclub patrons engage in poaching of the 'texts' in the consumption environment in their playing with

meaning in identity creation. They engage with given meanings and accept, modify or reject those meanings in enacting various identity activities.

Jenkins describes how writers of fan fiction move from socially and culturally isolated individuals to members of a [consumption] community through their active engagement with these media products (Jenkins, 2006b). Again, the active engagement with products (some media, some not) in the nightclub environment allows consumers to 'rewrite' the story those objects tell and enable them to use them in new ways for identity construction. As others engage in similar rewritings of these cultural 'texts', they too are drawn into communities. It is the ability to recognize others playing the same, similar, or compatible identity games that draws them together. Muniz (1995) describes this as 'consciousness of kind'.

Turkle takes the idea of rewriting the story of consumption objects further. In her writing on virtual worlds she argues, "we can use them [player narratives in online games] to become more aware of what we project into everyday life. We can use the virtual to reflect constructively on the real" (1999, p 647). This meshes with the idea of the nightclub as a liminal space (not reality, but another world unto itself) wherein consumers use the performances of identities to reflect upon the real world. Identity construction in these playscapes can reflect constructively on the consumers' real world. This is in line with Levy's writing on interpreting personal narratives in regards to consumer behavior when he states, "they [housewives in his case] can be encouraged to go beyond descriptions [of food attributes] to explanations of how the preferences came about". He continues, "The stories are then susceptible to all the modes of analysis various disciplines may apply" (1981, p 94-5).

Our identity used to come from a system built upon the pillars of race, gender, class, and religion. Authors like Thorsten Veblen and his classic *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1898) described how American consumer culture—and the meaning creation system within it—grew out of the act of (conspicuous) consumption but was determined by productive forces. At the time Veblen was writing, class and status were inseparable. Wealth may have been an important contributing factor to class, but it certainly did not guarantee elevation—class was certainly more than just wealth. Class was a constellation of possessions and behaviors that separated the ‘man of money’ from the ‘leisurely gentleman’ and both from the rest of the society. Scarcity of supply and quality of workmanship drove conspicuous consumption. Both were production-based factors that the man of leisure identified through knowledge, training, and time.

With the increase in productivity in the West and the availability of even the most exotic of consumer goods to anyone willing to spend for them, conspicuous consumption as an effective way of establishing claims to class has faded (there is also, I believe, good argument for implicating advances in, and access to, communication technology and increased overall wealth in this decline). Class elevation is no longer the driving force it once was. “The metanarratives of modernity are either diminishing in value or ceasing to function as motivating concepts” (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995 p263). The ability for consumers to forge the purchasable symbols of class status (Goffman, 1951) means that they have lost much of their communicative power and the ‘chase and flight’ (McCracken, 1988) class status game seems less important. Rather than a simple devaluing of class symbols and their replacement with other symbols (which would themselves be forgeable) the result has been a fragmentation of the very status symbol

game from a mono-focused competition into a multi-focal game of independent fields of social competition—each with its own rules, goals, and capital. There is no longer one social project, one ideal, one game. Individuals are liberated (or perhaps condemned) to pursue their individual personal identity projects—to make their own games—with whatever rules and paradoxes they are willing to accept. The old class-based system that drove much of conspicuous consumption in the day of Veblen is being supplanted by a multi-focal system of social and cultural capitals. There is no longer one social (class) game to be played, there are now many. And, increasingly, all these games are driven by identities that are reinforced (if not outright created from) consumption practices.

Consumption has now become a means of signaling which identity games we are playing. We signal our beliefs, our values, and our very identities through our consumption. Some still play this as a classic class game and reproduce the priorities and beliefs of that particular game—chasing Louis Vuitton [knockoffs] or other material trappings of a social class to which they aspire. Accepting the old standards and the old rules, they continue to play the old game. But now there has emerged other games for the consumer to play. We can choose to play different cultural games, each with their own rules. There is no one monolithic popular culture, ‘high society’, or privileged class to which one aspires (if, arguably, it ever existed). The playing field has fragmented and there are many games going on. We can play the ‘green’ game with its requirement of environmental consciousness, the ‘rebel’ game and its eternal chase of cool, or the ‘connoisseur’ game with its pursuit of the esoteric and exotic, to name but a few of the possible games. We can completely withdraw from some of the games—or choose to

play them to varying degrees—and participate only in those that we choose to play. We can choose to play multiple games at once and they can be games with contradictory rules and objectives. For all their differences, what these and other social and cultural games all have in common, however, is consumption.

What were once only activities or hobbies have now become entire lifestyles. The playing field of these games has pushed further out and pushed our everyday worlds farther to towards the fringe. These games have taken a more prominent place in our lives as they have become associated with the consumption practices that are more central to our lives as consumers.

This is perhaps most noticeable in the area of popular music. Musical styles have increasingly become associated with other consumptive practices. The leather jacket of the rock and roller, the mohawk of the punk rocker, the pancake makeup of the goth, or the flannel shirt of the grunge rocker have become distinctive ‘looks’ associated with their particular music. One is no longer just a fan of the music but a member of a lifestyle. The degree to which people choose to adhere to these typifications (Berger and Luckman, 1966) is a reflection of the level of their participation in the lifestyle. Some play, some trifle, some cheat, and some spoilsports refuse to play at all.

We now can create a web of elective identities that form who we are. We “create arenas of consumption that are fluid and non-totalizing, which means that consumers are free to engage in multiple experiences without making commitments to any” (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995 p251) [notice Firat and Venkatesh’s use of ‘arena’, another form of playground]. We enter into these games freely. We can play multiple games simultaneously.

b. Consumption, Authenticity, and the Postmodern

The modern and the postmodern live side by side in our world. Elective Identity processes are grounded in the postmodern as a supplanting, modification, and/or rejecting of the ascribed identities carried forward from modernity. Not everyone is influenced by the postmodern—much like there are still island tribes in the Indian Ocean who still live a stone age existence and remain relatively uninfluenced by the iron, bronze, and other ages right on through the modern that changed around them. Arnould and Price (1999) identify three conditions of postmodernity—Globalization, Deterritorialization, and Hyperreality—that are integral to understanding identity construction through consumption. I should address each of these briefly. I think they bear mention in that they frame some of the context in which this elective identity work is taking place. Each is a way in which the postmodern has influenced how we go about identity construction and what it means to be authentic.

Globalization involves the fading away of culturally-defined elements of the self by detaching shared elements of culture from particular times and places. (Arnould and Price, 1999). We are separated from the local and the parochial in identity construction and become free to pull the elements of our identity from a wider context—an ability the market is all too willing to facilitate. Those ascribed elements of identity (class, race, gender, nationality, etc.) can be devalued in the identity projects of consumers and replaced with elective identity choices. This element is important for my arguments of separation from traditional means of identity in favor of new, elective forms of identity. Globalization represents a break with many of these former identity determinants.

Deterritorialization involves the fading away of the importance of national boundaries and national identities in the formation of individual identities of self. "What you are is what you are recognized as being. We exist not 'in ourselves', but in an intersubjective social context" (Fukuyama, 1994, p 239). Personal identities are no longer static. Identities become relativistic and contested and are being separated from the places (communities) that once defined them (Arnould and Price, 1999). We all become tourists as the communities we belong to become separated from place (territory) and start to be defined by affinity, consumption, and other defining concepts (Belk, 1998, Arnould and Price, 1999). The nightclub is a social context that facilitates this identity construction around affinity and consumption. Life is lived inside the product. Deterritorialization is important in that it leads to the reconstruction and re-identification of the role of place in identity.

Hyperreality is the ability of the media to blend reality and dream. The world itself becomes filled with situations and spectacles as consumption replaces production as a defining characteristic of identity (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). We are less and less 'what we do' for a living (production), and more and more we are becoming what we consume (and play). Simulations take on a life of their own as members "realize, construct, and live the simulation" (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995, p 252).

Hyperreality can lead to a search for new forms of authenticity around which to build identity or attempts to manufacture 'authenticity' (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995, Belk, 1998, Arnould and Price, 1999) as the old definitions and institutions fade. "The world of fairy tales, adventure stories, romances, pop heroes gives fantasy a richer quality: we can deliberately act as if we are someone quite different. Very little is needed to trigger

off this type of fantasy, and once the images get going, they can be of a totally absorbing, or even of an obsessional kind" (Cohen and Taylor, 1992, p220). Hyperreality is important in that it points to the new ways in which we build elective identities, including the search for the authenticity some feel missing from our postmodern world and its elective identities. It also points to the media and to markets as the resource providers in these identity projects.

C. Place Attachment

The literature on place and identity, specifically *place attachment*, offers a lot of possibilities for my research and adds some significant and needed linkages. It finds its home within the marketing field on the periphery—in areas like place branding, place marketing, tourism, and hospitality. It has had limited inroads in the journals of the field but has attracted the attention of some rather luminous names in the field—Sherry (1990) and Belk (1988), to name just two. Place and identity can be linked in the form of *place identification*—when membership is defined by location or a person has an expressed identification with a place (“I am a New Yorker”) or it can be *place identity* (New York is cosmopolitan—and, by implication, so am I) and involve the socialization of the individual with his physical world (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996).

Most of the place attachment literature has focused on the home, neighborhood, and community. It has extended to national and regional attachment as well. It has been used in research on natural environments (state parks, wilderness, etc.). Where it has seen limited application is to commercial and retail settings. I think this provides a great

opportunity to extend this literature to the marketing field. It links well with what marketing generally refers to as 'atmospherics'.

Within the place attachment literature, Korpela (1989) shows how favorite environments can support self-esteem. Duncan (1973) shows how individuals choose environments congruent with the self and how they can be modified to represent or present a new self. Lalli (1992) shows how individuals can feel pride by association with historic or other significant environments. Specific attributes can be attributed to specific locations (neighborhoods) by individuals in their attempts to differentiate themselves through their place attachments (Eyles, 1968). Places can provide a continuity of identity (Rowles, 1983). Hormuth (1990) demonstrates that changes in locations can be paired with changes in identity (old place/old self, new place/new self). Winkel (1981) discusses the ability of members to manage and control elements of their environment that support their values and goals. Korpela and Hartig (1996) link favorite places with restorative qualities. All these are easily applicable to the direct concern of nightclubs and identity but also to larger issues of retailing, atmospherics, and servicescapes.

Twigger (1992, 1994, 1995) and Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) show the linkages between place attachment and identity along four components—self-efficacy, distinctiveness, continuity, and self-esteem—drawn from Identity Process Theory (Breakwell, 1986, 1992, 1993).

D. PLAY

a. Introduction to Play

Play is a complicated subject. Even experts in play have a difficult time defining what it is—when they try at all. Like a Supreme Court justice looking at pornography, they know it when they see it but they can't necessarily define it. Play is 'amphibolous'¹ (Spariosu, 1989), 'liminal' or 'liminoid' (Turner, 1969), 'ritual' (vanGennep, 1960), 'metacommunication' (Handelman, 1976), 'exploration' (Piaget, 1952), 'wish fulfillment' (Vygotsky, 1933), a 'paradox' (Bateson, 1956), a 'source of skills' (Fagen, 1981), 'the nature of being' and 'creation' (Schechner, 1993), 'a dramatistic negative' (Burke, 1966), 'irrational' and a 'social construction' (Huzinga, 1956), a 'protective frame against the world' (Kerr and Apter, 1991), 'variability characterized by quirkiness, redundancy, and flexibility' (Sutton-Smith, 1997) and 'life itself' (Carse, 1986). It is the proverbial elephant in a room full of blind men.

Play can be about power, progress, identity, the self, fate, frivolity, or the imaginary and the phantasmagorical (Pellegrini, 1995; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Play is fraught with contradictions; it can be meaningful or meaningless, finite or infinite, productive or nonproductive, serious or fun. "Groos (1898) argued that play is instinctual, Eifermann (1971) argued that play is learned. Ellis (1973) described play as arousal-seeking, Patrick (1916) described play as relaxation. Berlyne (1960) claimed that play serves no function, Welker (1961) claimed that play serves a biological function. Pieper (1952) argued that play—or leisure *par excellence*—is a mental and spiritual attitude; Gadamer (1975) argued that play has its own essence..." (Duncan, 1988 in Frost, 1991, p14). The difficulty of providing a scientific definition of play is best

¹ amphibolous is 'heading in two directions at once'

summed up by Frost, “After having reviewed major theories of play spanning the last 3,000 years, from Plato to Piaget, it is still not possible to arrive at a simple, clear, scientific definition of play. Erikson advises that play has a very personal meaning for each individual. Perhaps the best thing that was adults can do to discover this meaning is to go out and play; to reflect upon our own childhood play; to once again look at play through the eyes of a child” (Foster, 1991, p21).

Play is a subjective experience. It is my assertion that adults continue to play, especially in our consumer culture, long after childhood, but that we don’t always recognize the play we engage in. Where early play in childhood—Piaget, Freud, Vygotsky, and others—is about learning and ego development, later play is about, among other things, social identity and self expression. It is about fantasy and imagination. In a typical play contradiction, play is opposed to seriousness, and yet the one thing it is most serious about is play itself.

b. Johan Huizinga

Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* is generally recognized as the first scholarly work to treat human play seriously. In it he lays out the vital function that play has played in throughout the development of civilization. For Huizinga, play is not a product of culture, but the other way around—play is ‘older than culture’ and ‘the source of culture’. Huizinga argued, “The great archetypal activities of human society are all permeated with play from the start” (p4) and that “pure play is one of the main bases of civilization” (p5).

Huizinga thought play to be the very foundation of civilization. He argues that all of civilizations great achievements were the product of play. He makes the case for play as a necessary component of civilization and that without it mankind risked everything. If play created civilization, the loss of play would undo it. Huizinga argues we need to understand play because:

"We are living in a demented world. And we know it.... Everywhere there are doubts as to the solidity of our social structure, vague fears of the imminent future, a feeling that our civilization is on the way to ruin. They are not merely the shapeless anxieties, which beset us in the small hours of the night when the flame of life burns low. They are considered expectations founded on observation and judgment of an overwhelming multitude of facts. How to avoid the recognition that almost all things which once seemed sacred and immutable have now become unsettled, truth and humanity, justice and reason? We see forms of government no longer capable of functioning, production systems on the verge of collapse, social forces gone wild with power. The roaring engine of this tremendous time seems to be heading for a breakdown" (Huizinga 1956,)

Penned in 1938, the words are prescient of what would befall Europe, and the rest of the world, in the coming years. Arguably, these words are equally applicable today.

Huizinga identifies seven characteristics that most researchers have adopted or adapted since:

- **Play is voluntary activity.** It is superfluous and free. It cannot be forced.
- **Play is not ordinary or 'real' life.** It is a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all its own. It stands outside the immediate satisfaction of wants and appetites. It interrupts the appetitive process.
- **Play is distinct from ordinary life both as to locality and duration.** It is played within certain limits of time and place. All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course—within which special rules obtain.

- **Play is governed by rules.** The rules of a game are absolutely binding and allow no doubt. As soon as the rules are transgressed the whole play-world collapses. The game is over.
- **Play creates order.** Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection. Play demands order absolute and supreme. The least deviation from it “spoils the game”, robs it of its character and makes it worthless. Play casts a spell over us; it is enchanting and captivating.
- **Play involves tension (and solution).** Though play as such is outside the range of good and bad, the element of tension imparts to it a certain ethical value in so far as it means a testing of the player’s prowess: his courage, tenacity, resources, and, last but not least, his spiritual powers—his fairness; because, despite his ardent desire to win, he must still stick to the rules of the game.
- **Play creates community.** A play community tends to become permanent even after the game is over. It creates an ‘us’ (the players) and a ‘them’ (not playing). We are different and do things differently. The differentness and secrecy of play are most vividly expressed in dressing up. Here the extraordinary nature of play reaches perfection. The disguised or masked individual plays another part, another being. He is another being.

He summarizes it best himself, “play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is “different” from “ordinary life”” (Huzinga, 1956, p28).

Play separates us from the concerns of daily life and imposes a new set of priorities and a new set of behaviors. It is the construction of a social reality (Berger and Luckman, 1966) separate from our everyday life.

For Huizinga, when we play, we play voluntarily. This is probably one of the more contested elements of Huizinga's description of play. For him, if an activity is part of daily survival it is not play—it is something else. This is not to say that the activities of daily survival cannot be engaged in playfully, but that in order to be play the individual must have freedom of action within the bounds of voluntarily accepted imposed conditions (boundaries, rules, etc). When the primitive hunter gathers up his tribe to go out for a hunt, his actions cannot be called play because he is engaged in a survival activity. When the modern hunter grabs his buddies and heads into the woods, they can be engaged in play because if they shoot nothing, there will still be food on the table at dinner. The further an activity is from necessity, the more room there is for play. When we play we step out of ordinary 'reality' into a new reality with its own goals and rules—therefore, we cannot be involved in the activities of reality if we are to step out of them.

Within the game there is a situation or condition that is arbitrarily constructed but accepted by the players. The Bears have the ball on their own twenty-yard line and need to get it into the end zone eighty yards away. The Packers want to stop them. This is what delineates the game being played from 'reality', establishes the tension, and sets the game in motion.

The game has the goal within itself; it is part of the game. The motivation to play the game (to achieve the goal) is the joy and tension within the game. The rules of the game are in place to create challenges to be overcome. The 'tension and joy' within the game come from the setting of a challenge in the form of an as yet unachieved goal for the game (the tension) and action toward the achievement of that goal (joy). It is the accomplishment of the possible within a challenging context. When the game is either

too easy or seemingly impossible the tension is either lacking or overwhelming and the joy disappears—replaced by boredom or frustration.

Extrinsic motivation to play, for Huizinga, removes the player from the realm of play and puts them into some other category—usually work. For Huizinga, the professional athlete is not a player, he is a worker. This new world that the player operates within has its own set of boundaries—both temporal and physical—that set apart the activities occurring therein. Play is consciously separate from ordinary life in that it can say “this is play” (Bateson, 1956).

c. Robert Callois

Callois takes up the issues of play after Huizinga in his work, *Man, Play, and Games* (1958). The parallels between their work are substantial. For Callois, play is:

- *Free*: in which playing is not obligatory; if it were, it would at once lose its attractive and joyous quality as diversion;
- *Separate*: circumscribed within limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance;
- *Uncertain*: the course of which cannot be determined, nor the result attained beforehand, and some latitude for innovations being left to the player’s initiative;
- *Governed by rules*: under conventions that suspend ordinary laws, and for the moment establish new legislation, which alone counts;
- *Make-believe*: accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life.
- *Unproductive*: creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, except for the exchange of property among the players, ending in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game;

Callois too provides his own summary:

“There is no doubt that play must be defined as a free and voluntary activity, a source of joy and amusement. A game which one would be forced to play would at once cease being play. It would become constraint, drudgery from which one would strive to be freed. As an obligation or simply an order, it would lose one of its basic characteristics: the fact that the player devotes himself spontaneously to the game, of his free will and for his pleasure, each time completely free to

choose retreat, silence, meditation, idle solitude, or creative activity...Finally and above all, it is necessary that they be free to leave whenever they please, by saying, "I am not playing any more"...In effect, play is essentially a separate occupation, carefully isolated from the rest of life, and generally is engaged in with precise limits of time and place. There is a place for play: as needs dictate, the space for hopscotch, the board for checkers or chess, the stadium, the racetrack, the list, the ring, the stage, the arena, etc. Nothing that takes place outside the ideal frontier is relevant. To leave the enclosure by mistake, accident, or necessity, to send the ball out of bounds, may disqualify or entail a penalty." (Caillois 1958, p6-7)

Caillois' thinking aligns pretty uniformly with Huzinga's on all these characteristics. Play must free, separate, uncertain, rule governed, its own reality and unproductive. It is the last point, being unproductive, where distinctions need to be made. 'Unproductive' is Caillois's version of Huzinga's 'intrinsically motivated'. Perhaps there are some subtleties lost in the translation between Huzinga's Dutch, Caillois' French, and the final translated English versions of both, but this difference is not irreconcilable. Caillois', when he talks about being unproductive, is addressing the idea of the professional and the motivation to be involved in the activity at hand. He says,

"Play is an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often of money for the purchase of gambling equipment or eventually to pay for the establishment. As for the professionals—boxers, cyclists, jockeys, or actors who earn their living in the ring, track, or hippodrome or on the stage, and who must think in terms of prize, salary, or title—it is clear that they are not players but workers. When they play it is at some other game" (Caillois, 1958, pp5-6).

What Caillois' prohibition against productivity in play does not preclude are incidental or secondary effects which are productive—consequences, rather than motivations, which are, in themselves, productive. The cyclist who enters the hippodrome to compete for prize and title is not playing; he is working. The cyclist who

enters the hippodrome motivated by the enjoyment of cycling is at play and may still reap benefits from his play which were inconsequential to his motivation to play.

Recent scholarship in the field of Marketing suggests that separating production and consumption is meaningless. This has been reflected in the field in the resurgent attention paid to prosumption (Tofler, 1980; Kotler, 1986; Humphreys and Grayson, 2008; Xie et al, 2008; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). Prosumption rejects the division of production and consumption and recognizes, instead, that we engage in both when we do either. The producer consumes resources and the consumer still produces some of what they consume—whether cooking a meal at home or being part of the overall production process in a fast food restaurant (as a waiter when we carry our own food to the table or as a busboy when we clean up after ourselves) (Ritzer and Jourgenson, 2010).

Callois (1958) also adds some important distinctions for the current study. Importantly, he points out that “very different games can be played in the same place” (p11). At its simplest, a field can be used for many different sports, a stage for countless productions. In the performance of identity, the playscape can serve multiple elective identity games simultaneously. Like the field or stage may facilitate or hinder certain performances, so too can other playscapes.

Like the playscape, the role of the physical components of games (props, pieces, and equipment) can also serve multiple functions within and across games—“the same implement can fulfill different functions, depending on the game played” (Callois, 1958, p12). Within the identity playscape, it therefore becomes necessary to know the game

being played since the pieces, props, and equipment can have multiple interpretations. As symbolic elements, they are subject to misinterpretation.

Caillois also emphasizes an important distinction in the nature of play and games, placing them at opposite ends of a spectrum. On one side he recognizes the playful, chaotic component he terms “paidia”. This is “an almost indivisible principle, common to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety” (Caillois, 1958, p13). It is that element we most recognize as free, spontaneous play unbounded by rules. On the other side of the spectrum he puts “ludus”. Ludus is the growing tendency to bind it [paidia] with arbitrary, imperative, and purposely tedious conventions” (Caillois, 1958, p13). What we are left with is a continuum that ranges between improvisation and structure. That which we most recognize as the playful is paidia—pure play. When paidia is structured with rules (‘purposely tedious conventions’) it moves toward ludus—or what we think of as games. In between is a spectrum of activities that we call play and games. For any activity within that spectrum no precise place is set—since none are pure play or purely structured game. Play can have structure added to it to make it more game-like. Players of games can add spontaneity, turbulence, and improvisation to games to make them more playful. The location of any activity within the continuum is subject to interpretation and reinterpretation by the players on an ongoing basis (Carse, 1986; Suits, 1978). We can change the rules by mutual agreement of the players involved. When combined with the fact that multiple games can be played within the same playscape, we are left with the possibility that people may be playing similar, but not identical, games side by side. In social games—where rules are often implicit rather than explicit—this can lead to confusion and conflict as these differing games interact.

d. Frivolity and other people's play

Play has a number of inherent contradictions. One of the most significant contradictions is that while we consider our own forms of play to be significant, meaningful, and valuable, we simultaneously devalue the play of others. *Our* play is serious; the play of others is frivolous (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Labeling something as frivolous is a way to denigrate it. It denies it meaning and purpose. It trivializes. Schechner (1993) says it is a 'rotten category' and calls it "an activity tainted by unreality, inauthenticity, duplicity, make believe, looseness, fooling around, and inconsequentiality. Play's reputation has been little uplifted by being associated with ritual and game theory" (p27).

And yet, play has been recognized by scholars as important to human learning and skill development (Piaget, 1952; Welker, 1961; Fagen, 1981), as serving recognizable social functions (Turner, 1969; vanGennep, 1960), and as providing a protective frame against the world (Kerr and Apter, 1991). The defense department takes play very seriously when it plays war games and uses simulators to teach basic skills. Every business school course that uses a simulation recognizes the value of play.

When this rhetoric of frivolity is applied to elective identity play it can be perceived by those players as an attack upon the very identity being performed. "Much of the time most of us continue unwittingly with our frivolous play pursuits, unaware that we are despised by others except when the hegemony of those others suddenly makes itself felt as forms of rudeness, censorship, banishment, annulment, or cancellation" (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p208). When different games are being played simultaneously within a playscape, there is the real possibility that players of one game can view the

games of others as frivolous. When these games involve things as important as identity, these conflicts can take on serious implications for all involved. The interpretation and valuation of play (its seriousness, rather than its frivolity) can thus be viewed within a system of (sub)cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Thornton, 1996). The games of those with capital are supported and praised, those without capital are denigrated (Sutton-Smith, 1997).

e. 'Playing to win' versus 'Playing to play'

While we can categorize games by the type of play they involve, as does Callois, we can also categorize them according to the nature of the goal of the game. Games that are played 'to win' end when someone reaches a particular goal (first across the finish line) or meets a particular condition (more points) when time runs out. These are 'closed games'. The goal is to end the game by winning. Competition in these games is directed toward winning the game—either for oneself or one's team.

Other games are not played to win; they are played in order to continue playing. These are 'open games' (Suits, 1978) or 'infinite games' (Carse, 1986). In open or infinite games the object of the game is the continuation of the game itself. Everyone loses when the game ends. Competition in these games is not 'to win', but to play better—to enhance the experience for oneself and/or one's teammates.

f. Types of Play and Games

Callois proposes the following useful classification of games—though he recognizes that this doesn't cover the entire universe of play:

- **agon**: competition (football, chess, or billiards)
- **alea**: chance (roulette or lottery)
- **mimicry**: simulation (playing pirate or fire truck, performing Hamlet)
- **ilinx**: vertigo, dizziness, and disorder (twirling, swings, rollercoasters)

Where most examinations of games look at agon and alea, when it comes to the play of elective identity it is actually mimicry and ilinx that are more important. Mimicry—as a creative activity as well as replication—is important from the theatrical perspective (Schechner, 1993). Ilinx is important for the tourists (walk on the wild side) and from the idea of playing with forbidden identities and subverted values (Young, 1971; Matza and Sykes, 1961)

i. Agon

Agon is what most of us think of when we think of games—competitions. Competitions try to create initial situations of equality (for example, the starting line) where the competitors can prove their superiority through the enactment of play. We start equals, but finish winners and losers. When players are clearly unequal, we handicap in some way to make the competition as close to equal as possible again (strokes in golf, removing a piece in chess). Superiority is clearly determined because we attempt to equalize all factors but one—the quality or trait being tested in the contest. “It is therefore always a question of a rivalry which hinges on a single quality (speed, endurance, strength, memory, skill, ingenuity, etc), exercised, within defined limits and without outside assistance, in such a way that the winner appears to be better than the loser in a certain category of exploits” (Caillois, 1958, p14).

ii. Alea

Callois spends the least time on alea, and so will we. Alea describes games of luck or chance where players cannot affect the outcome. Winning “reveals the favor of destiny” (Callois, 1958, p17). While alea might be an important consideration in ascribed identity—the favor of destiny reflected in birth—it is less important in elective identity. Like agon, alea attempts to create initial positions of equality (the dice are balanced and fair, the roulette numbers are equally likely to come up) so that fate or destiny becomes the deciding factor. Some games combine agon and alea—poker, backgammon.

iii. Mimicry

Mimicry provides its own pleasures. “The pleasure lies in being or passing for another. But in games the basic intention is not that of deceiving the spectators...At a carnival, the masquerader does not try to make one believe that he is really a marquis, toreador, or Indian, but rather tries to inspire fear and take advantage of the surrounding license, a result of the fact that the mask disguises the conventional self and liberates the true personality...It is only the spy and the fugitive who disguise themselves to really deceive because they are not playing” (Callois, 1958, p21). If we are to consider elective identity construction to be a form of play, it is mimicry in Callois’ formulation. It is the pleasure of being or passing as another. It is pretend and make believe. This also alludes to another important consideration in the area of identity—authenticity. Authenticity is important for identity (Goffman, 1959; Erickson, 1995; Koontz, 2010)—so important, in fact, that it is sometimes staged for us (MacCannell, 1973; Cohen, 1987).

Callois argues that mimicry adheres to all the rules of play but one—it is not rule bound. It is here that I disagree with Callois. Mimicry is ultimately *very* rule bound. While mimicry may have the boundary of stage or arena, it also has the role boundaries of the part being played. To step outside of these bounds is an offense that ends the game as much as any other breaking of the rules. It is why the child can say “trains don’t hug” when dad tries to break through the play to hug his child who has taken on the identity of a train. While we are conscious of playing when we play, play—especially mimicry play—requires maintenance of the illusion that ‘this is real’. While in a role, we must remain role consistent. Trains don’t hug so, if Johnny is now a train, Johnny can’t hug dad. Mimicry’s rules are boundary setters in a less physical sense and the boundaries they set are more permeable and fluid. It is more ‘open play’ (Carse, 1986) in that it challenges the boundaries of acceptable ‘moves’ within the game. It often seeks to expand the playscape beyond its existing confines.

iv. Ilinx

While we easily recognize the childhood versions of ilinx—swings, twirling, and other activities of disorder and unbalancing, we don’t always consider it in adults.

“Men surrender to the intoxication of many kinds of dance, from the common but insidious giddiness of the waltz to the many mad, tremendous, and convulsive movements of other dances. They derive the same kind of pleasure from the intoxication stimulated by high speed on skis, motorcycles, or in driving sports cars. In order to give this kind of sensation the intensity and brutality capable of shocking adults, powerful machines had to be invented. Thus it is not surprising that the Industrial Revolution had to take place before vertigo could really become a kind of game” (Callois, 1958, p25).

The play of ilinx is the play of inversion and reversal (Kerr and Apter, 1990). Reversal Theory says that the normally anxiety-provoking sensations of vertigo and disorder can

be experienced as pleasurable when they can be held within a protective frame (Apter, 1982; Apter et al, 1985; Apter et al, 1988; Apter, 1989). It is how we can experience enjoyable horror at the movies and enjoyable vertigo on the rollercoaster.

g. Elements of Games

In this section I look at the various elements of games. These are the things that are needed to have a game and to play it.

i. Rules

A rule is any limitation or constraint upon the activity of players. Rules are freely accepted in order to play the game and absolute once accepted. To break the rules is to no longer be playing—or to now be playing a different game. The act of playing a game means to be within the rules. Rules create the fiction of the game (Caillois, 1958). Rules establish the artificial reality of the game. For some games the rules are obvious; they come in written form in a rule book or manual. Some games have organizations—NBA, NFL, U.S. Chess Federation—that codify, monitor, and modify the rules of the game. Other games have rules that are all but invisible—playing with dolls, cops and robbers—but there are rules nonetheless. The rules of these forms of play are not explicitly stated, but they are there. Agon and alea games, in their attempts to create initial conditions of equality that result in the contest of specific attributes, tend to have explicit rules. Mimicry andilinx games, that are boundary challenging, improvisational, flexible, and often cooperative, tend to have more implicit rules. These more flexible rules allow

more room for the improvisation necessary for these games to proceed. The 'as if' character of these games performs the same function as explicit rules.

Rules are best expressed in the form "one cannot..." rather than "one must..." because rules are about setting boundaries and limiting behavior, not compelling it (Sutton-Smith, 1986). It is in the nature of games that they remove the easiest path to success in favor of some constrained (and therefore challenging) means of play. Rules provide *the challenge* within the game. The underlying, often unspoken, ideology in games is that enjoyment comes in the overcoming of challenges. The easy win is not the enjoyable win; the hard-fought struggle is. In chess the easiest way to capture an opponent's king would be to reach across the table and snatch it from the board. The challenge—and the enjoyment—of the game is in the imposition of the rules that require capturing the king through the movement of pieces. Similarly, the evenly contested competitive game is the enjoyable game rather than the unevenly matched one. "The confused and intricate laws of ordinary life are replaced, in this fixed space and for this given time, by precise, arbitrary, unexceptionable rules that must be accepted as such and that govern the correct playing of the game." (Caillois, 1958, p7)

Adherence to the rules is important, if not instrumental, to the existence of the game. "The game is ruined by the nihilist [spoilsport for Huzinga] who denounces the rules as absurd and conventional, who refuses to play because the game is meaningless. His arguments are irrefutable. The game has no other but an intrinsic meaning. That is why its rules are imperative and absolute, beyond discussion. There is no reason for their being as they are, rather than otherwise. Whoever does not accept them as such must deem them manifest folly" (Caillois, 1958, p7).

Herein lies the core of so much of what I am writing about. It is the spoilsport who points out the folly of any game—fashion, status, prestige—and thereby invalidates the game for those who play by and accept those rules. Rejection of the rules is a rejection of the game. Rejection of the game—especially when that game involves the identity of the players—is a rejection of the players themselves. The spoilsport invalidates the games that many people consider important, *nee* integral, to their identity. Invalidate the game, invalidate the identity, invalidate the person.

ii. Goals

A goal is generally an end-state for players involved in the game. It's how one wins or loses and generally ends the game. Because players accept the goal of the game as important within the game, play and games can seem meaningless to outsiders while simultaneously extraordinarily meaningful to participants. When playing them we treat them like they matter. In fact, it is in this suspension of reality that games develop into the absorbing activities that they are. It is where play becomes flow (Cziksentmihaly, 1990). The degree to which one pursues the goal of the game is the difference between a player and a trifter.

In some games a goal can be the continuation of play rather than the end of play ("let's see how long we can keep passing this ball back and forth without dropping it"). Goals can take many forms. For example, they can be time-constrained (most points within 15 minutes) or objective (first team to 21 points). Games can have one way to win (racing: first person across the finish line) or multiple ways to win (boxing: knock out your opponent or score more points according to the judges). In some games there is a

winner and many losers (a lottery) and in others we may play for placement (second place, third place, etc). What is important to remember is that goals determine when games end (whether ending the game is desirable or not is an entirely different issue).

iii. *Playscape*

“The power of a truly transcendent customer experience lies partly in the successful, if temporary, alignment of fantasy and reality. Certain combinations of product, service, and context can be instrumental to achieving TCEs [transcendent customer experiences], and in their instrumentality they neither disappoint nor become irrelevant once the desire is fulfilled” (emphasis added, Schouten et al, 2007)

When we play ordinary time and place are suspending and the time and place of the game rules the day. This is the foundation for the idea of the playscape. A playscape is the boundaries (physical and/or temporal) within which a game is played. All games have an 'in-play' area and an 'out-of-play' area (a possible exception could be made for Dark Play). These are the boundaries within which the game is played. In the game of basketball one cannot score points by shooting baskets unless one is an active player (not on the bench), in bounds (not on the sidelines), and the clock is running (not during a timeout). Some playscapes have clearly marked boundaries—the basketball court, the opera stage, the chess board—and others are less clearly marked—the professional wrestling match with its in-ring and out-of-ring violence, a child's tea party, some theater forms. In some games the boundaries are so vague that players may cross them without intending to do so (the social game of 'banter' can end when someone “goes too far”—we even metaphorically recognize the boundaries in the language we use).

Players involved in a game are a temporary community of interaction. They need to distinguish inside from outside, in-play from out-of-play.

"Boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or other with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished (see Barth, 1969). The manner in which they are marked depends entirely upon the specific community in question. Some, like national or administrative boundaries, may be statutory and enshrined in law. Some may be physical, expressed, perhaps, by a mountain range or a sea. Some may be racial or linguistic or religious. But not all boundaries, and not all the components of any boundary, are so objectively apparent. They may be thought of, rather, as existing in the minds of their beholders. This being so, the boundary may be perceived in rather different terms, not only by people on opposite sides of it, but also by people on the same side." (Cohen, 1985, p13)

Like real-world communities players have different levels of marking the boundaries of their play and they have groups (non-players, players of other games) from whom they wish to be differentiated. In some types of games these boundaries are only held 'in the minds of their beholders' and may be perceived differently by people on either side of the boundaries. Some boundaries may be obvious to some while being entirely imperceptible to others. "The ideal boundary is the physical obstruction across which danger and traffic cannot advance at all" (Suttles, 1972, p234). A line on the floor or chalk in the grass is a boundary, the walled and encased rink of hockey is better. An empty lot allows play within it, the fenced playground provides a clearer demarcation and communication of the purpose of the space.

Time is also a boundary for games and play. Games start and end with some recognizable signal—whether bell, buzzer, whistle, flag, or curtain rising. It provides the temporal boundary of in-play and out-of-play. The duration can be fixed in advance (15-minute quarters, 18 holes) or upon the achievement of a specific condition (scoring 21

points, capturing the king, completion of the script). In either case, while the game is 'in play', it is the world whose rules and goals prevail.

Play within a playscape is framed by our approach to that context. Playscapes allow us to play particular games by removing certain strictures of the real world and providing an alternate environment where other behaviors, not normally allowed, are permitted if not encouraged. They allow participants to play different games than they would be able to play in the 'outside' world. If I slam you against the wall while on skates in a hockey rink during a game, it's called a 'check' and may be perfectly legal within the rules of the game. If I engage in the same action in the hallway of the building, it might be categorized as battery. It is outside the physical boundaries of the game. That same behavior during the warm-up skate before the game also is not valid. It is outside the time boundaries of the game.

Several authors have shown how various playscapes are more conducive to certain behaviors than others (Penaloza, 1999; Belk, 2000; Thornton, 1996; Goulding et al, 2008). Penaloza's contribution to our 'understanding of experiential and spatial dimensions of consumption' addresses issues of consumer creation of cultural meanings within consumption playscapes. The consumers' presence within the consumption environment and their interaction with it produced their unique experiences by placing them in 'altered referential positions' with meaningful cultural objects. It is in subcultural environments that we see the spectacular, the extraordinary, and the deviant in consumer behavior. These contested sites are where identity is constructed and performed and where orthodoxy is challenged (Penaloza, 1999).

Belk (2000) argues that Las Vegas infantilizes consumers, allowing them to play the Las Vegas games (not just gambling) that they would not otherwise be as willing (or even able) to play. In particular Las Vegas allows consumers to play certain games of excess, deviance, and licentiousness that they could not otherwise play.

Both Thornton (1996) and Goulding et al (2008) argue for the 'clubbing' environment being one of hedonic excess and permissiveness. They describe several ways in which the elements of the nightclub experience—lighting (and darkness), music (both tempo and volume), and crowds—all combine to facilitate a surrender to pleasure. The overwhelming of the senses ultimately providing an excuse to surrender rational processes to the affective and hedonic.

Our consumer culture provides various playscapes which can affect the processes of elective identity construction. Much like baseball (or the identity 'baseball fan') can't be played on just any field, certain elective identity games are going to have playscape requirements as well. Some games require a specific type of playscape, some playscapes only allow a certain number or type of games. Games are defined by their rules along with the playscapes in which they are played. A large, flat, rectangular field can serve as either football or soccer field. The rules players follow while on that field (as well as the props they use while doing so) help define which game is being played on it.

iv. Pieces, Props, or Paraphernalia

Play does not lie in the bat and ball but in the use of them to play a game. So too in consumption; the play is in the use. Postmodern, post-industrial consumer society

provides a playground chock full of equipment with which to experiment and play (Arnould, 2007). Consumer culture provides a stage, fellow cast members, an assortment of audiences, all the props one could possibly want, and a ready catalog of scripts to perform identity. If none of the scripts are to your liking, consumer culture also offers opportunities for improvisation and creation with a stable of co-authors waiting in the wings. There are, however, also critics, hecklers, and ‘that guy in the third row with bad hearing and a cell phone he insists on using right now’.

My arguments on the consumption side are grounded in semiology/semiotics, the idea of the commodity as a sign or signifier, coming forward through the work of Saussure, Baudrillard, Douglas and Isherwood, Levy, Holbrook, Mick, and others. Kehret-Ward (1988) argues that products qualify as linguistic signs—and I agree. A product’s meaning, especially for its owner, can change because of the actions of the consumer, the marketer, or the market itself and this can affect syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic relations of the product (Kehret-Ward, 1988). In this vein, consumption must not be understood as the consumption of use-values but primarily as the consumption of signs. The commodity-sign’s meaning is “arbitrarily determined by its position in a self-referential system of signifiers” (Featherstone, 1987, p57). A game *is* such a referential system. This is the foundation for other elements of the field of consumer culture integral to this study including consumer identity (Belk, 1988; Ger, 1997; Holt, 1998), consumption communities (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Muniz and Schau, 2005), and ludic agency (Kozinets et al, 2004). As such, the study of play is the study of signs and symbols—in their production and use.

I contend we need to look at products (both goods and services) as props in a performance or as pieces in a game. As commodity signs, products have meaning and it is that meaning that is manipulated when we play with them. Ritual (Rook, 1985; Featherstone, 1987) and performance (Goffman, 1959; Grove and Fisk, 1983; Deighton, 1992; Schechner, 1993)—both considered forms of play (Huizinga, 1956)—are ways of looking at consumption as play. Consumption is ultimately a semantic game.

Because “neither [the object] nor the owner is an autonomous, unarbitrary sign; each is a symbol made meaningful by its distinction from and relationship to competing symbols” (Mick, 1986, p203), we need to look at these symbols when they are in said relationships with competing symbols. We need to see them in their playscape—the natural setting in which a particular type of play occurs.

v. *Players*

A player is anyone voluntarily playing the game. Anyone not free to stop playing is either a victim or a piece in the games of others (see *Dark Play*). Just because someone is 'playing with' you, does not mean that you are a player—you could be the ball. To be play, a player must be free to quit—otherwise it is not play for that person. Similarly, to be play, the players must be able to say who is not playing—unless, of course, that is part of the game. To be a player is to choose to play and also to be recognized as a player by the other players. To play football is to be a football player, to play soccer is to be a soccer player. These are painfully straightforward. But other

games (and their concomitant players) aren't always as clear. In elective identity games, as less structured games, the players aren't always as easy to identify.

E. Play and Consumption

*“Consumers in a developed market society are not left to wander alone and unaided amidst heaps of goods, computing and recomputing to some decimal place the most advantageous fit between their yearnings and their places. They do not—nor do they wish to—form their tastes and preferences in the private bliss of ratiocination and then descend upon innocent merchants to scrutinize their shelves with cold and wary eyes. Except when (as is too often the case even today) groups are pressed hard against the limit of deprivation by exploitation or an inhospitable environment, **consuming is an elaborate social game**, as it has always been in human cultures.”*

*(Leiss, Kline, and Jhally, 1986, p. 255, **emphasis added**)*

a. Introduction

In this section I develop the links between consumption and play. Consumption is developed as a *potential* play activity—it being in the nature of play that one is never compelled to play; one chooses to play. I develop the idea that, as we move away from necessity, have a greater variety of options, and are given more externally attached meaning the possibility and range of play increases, if we choose to play.

Developed market societies allow us the possibility of playing elaborate social games with our consumption. Like all games, we need not play if we don't want to—though most of us seem to want to play most of the time. It seems the only time we don't play is when we find ourselves in conditions of deprivation.

The possibilities of play in consumption are quite varied, but, in the end, not all consumption can be play. We need a means to differentiate the playful in consumption

from the non-playful. It is my contention that play emerges in consumption under three circumstances:

- Distance from Necessity
- Variety with Combinatorial Freedom
- Degree of External Input

We can look at how each of these factors *makes possible* play during consumption.

Play is never a *necessary* outcome of any of these conditions, but play is more likely or there is a greater possibility of play when they occur.

b. Distance from Necessity



Figure 1: Distance from Necessity

Necessity and play are contradictory; the more necessity there is in a consumption act, the less room there is for play. Play is free, spontaneous, and improvisational (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Necessity is neither free, nor spontaneous, nor improvisational. Play and Necessity are opposite ends of a continuum. The further one is from necessity, then the more room there is for play. This is not to say that play always or must occur when there is less necessity, only that there is the potential for play—since play cannot be compelled. Therefore, it is the consumption acts with the least (or no) necessity that lead to the greatest possibility of play. The less our consumption is constrained by necessity, the more room there is for play. The

consumption of everyday necessities, as necessities, allows little play and conveys little meaning. We must consume and therefore are not free to play. It is when our consumption choices are freely entered, without compulsion of necessity, that we can engage in the playful. When the real world weighs too heavily upon our actions we are unable to create the liminal and liminoid spaces (distinct, marginal, and/or transitional spaces) necessary for play.

In order to be play an act must be voluntarily engaged in. If someone is forced to play, they are not playing. They are doing something else. Necessity is an extrinsic motivation, so, as such, it cannot inspire play. Play is intrinsically motivated. It is in non-essential consumption acts—or essential acts removed from impending necessity—that we play. Perhaps an example can make it clearer. When a cat starts to hunt a mouse for food it is engaged in an extrinsically motivated activity to satisfy hunger. It needs food. It stalks prey as a serious activity. When a cat in the course of its hunt corners a mouse, there is less necessity in the situation. It has found prey and has limited the possibility of escape by cornering it. It now gains the ability to play with its quarry—batting it around, catching and releasing, toying with it, etc. Once the mouse is dead there is more freedom to play with the mouse in the consumption act—were a cat so inclined, choosing to eat it like a child consuming a chocolate Easter bunny.

For humans a similar process can be seen. Hunters and gatherers have little room for playing with food. Finding food is a serious process. For consumers in a modern economy, on the other hand, the location of food is more certain—it's in the store. The process can be more playful. It can involve more meaning and

communication—where we shop becomes as important as (more important than?) what we buy.

A subsistence consumer cooks their food within a limited range of possibilities. They do not have the luxury to play with their food in the form of recipe experimentation or other ways of playing. As food becomes more plentiful and the supply more reliable we can vary our diet and begin to dine. We can begin to toy with the mouse. A ruined meal becomes less consequential, necessity is reduced. In a culture completely removed from direct necessity in the acquisition of food there is room for play and we see it in the modern discourses of cuisine and the gourmet. The gourmet is a product of distance from necessity—playing with food in the form of exotic preparations, unusual ingredients, and even presentation techniques. The gourmet is able to play with food, in part, because food no longer functions under the restrictions of direct necessity—play is now possible and allowed. We move from being just eaters to diners and eventually, if we choose, to gourmets.

Conspicuous consumption, conspicuous leisure, and conspicuous waste (Veblen, 1898) are all potentially forms of playing with consumption. Any kind of distinction through consumption (Bourdieu, 1984) becomes a way to play with consumption. Distinctive consumption establishes its own boundaries, rules, and goals. It requires different levels of (sub)cultural capital (Thornton, 1996) in order to play the games properly and to fully enjoy the act of consuming (Athay and Darley, 1982; Holt, 1998). The more they are driven by necessity, the less playful they become. Consumption activities once engaged in for the enjoyment of the activity itself

(intrinsically motivated) can become status pursuits and status symbols (Goffman, 1951) and engaged in for non-playful reasons (extrinsically motivated).

c. Variety with Combinatorial Freedom

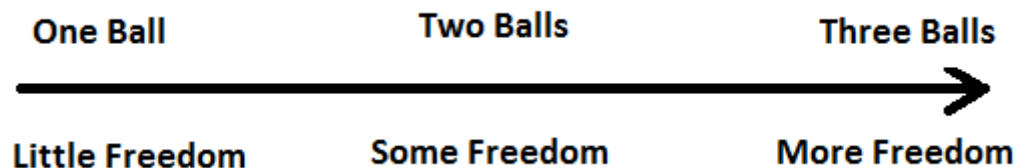


Figure 2: Variety with Combinatorial Freedom

It is when we have variety that we are able to engage in more play in our consumption. If I have one ball I can only play the games that ball allows. I can play, but my play is limited. I can't play baseball with a football or football with a baseball. Basketball, golf, tennis, jai alai, all require different balls. More balls, more ball games. Variety means choice among alternatives. Choice among alternatives, like distance from necessity, makes room for play. More choice means more meanings that can be communicated. To describe oneself as a basketball player will have a different meaning than to describe oneself as a golfer. Both players are athletes but both games carry different social and cultural meanings.

This is how the consumption choices we make regarding the basics of life can also be playful, but it is only when choice (variety) is added that it is possible. The ability to play through consumption is a function of the options available to the consumer as communicator. The greater the selection among alternatives—even when the bare necessities are involved—the more room there is for meaning to be added to the process. If play is meaningful, then the greater variety of objects I have to choose from

the more ways in which I can communicate meaning in my play. It is in this variety that play can emerge. If consumption objects are semiotic objects, then which ones we choose—when we have a choice—indicate the meanings we have chosen in that situation. We have chosen one meaning over another, one semiotic object over another. Since consumption objects are semiotic objects, they can be joined together to create meaning like words create sentences. Variety provides the flexibility and the room for improvisation characteristic of play. Variety allows for more combinations of objects into new and different meanings—provided these combinations can be done in such a way as to ‘make sense’. The flexibility to combine objects within a set in new and different way is called combinatorial freedom. We do not have only one way of saying things when we have sufficient vocabulary because the power of words is that they can be combined in many ways to create meaning. The range within which items can be combined is the freedom. A greater degree of combinatorial freedom is greater playfulness.

McCracken (1988) describes the metaphor of clothing as a language (though he ultimately rejects it as insufficient—something I will take issue with momentarily). He argues that the most valuable aspect of language, combinatorial freedom—the ability to combine elements into larger communicative strings—is lacking in the ‘language’ of clothing. He uses the example of how mixing garments from different outfits confuses those attempting to interpret or translate the outfit. Since it is possible to construct meaningless, nonsensical, and conflicting ‘statements’ with clothing, he argues, the language metaphor is insufficient. It is with this element of McCracken’s argument that I disagree.

Any language can create gibberish and this does not invalidate it as a medium of communication—it signifies those who are able to use it with more proficiency or less. The ability to construct viable ‘statements’ with the language is a display of competence. The ability to do so with consumer goods is a display of (sub)cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Thornton, 1996). It is the basis for things like ‘style’—acceptable combinations of the semiotic objects of clothing (or furniture, or music, or any other category of goods where style can be applied). Consumer goods are a very structured language that can have more or less combinatorial freedom, but they are still a language.

More variety is comparable to the availability of a larger vocabulary. Selection from variety provides the possibility for both a wider range of meaning and for finer gradations of meaning. McCracken’s argument is that ‘the outfit’ is the smallest syntactical unit in communication with clothing. Clothing, as a language, requires larger units of ‘speech’ than individual garments, in McCracken’s formulation, in order to avoid gibberish. The ‘outfit’ becomes a single syntactic unit in a larger communicative structure. I disagree. The more varied the selection possibilities, the greater the potential to find that precise meaning rather than a more general one. The selection among alternatives does afford a certain degree of combinatorial freedom once the ‘language’ is learned and the vocabulary expanded. One hundred years ago a man couldn’t wear denim pants, a turtle neck sweater, and a suit jacket together without seeming absurd in most circles. Now, while possible unfashionable, the combination would be acceptable and understandable. Perhaps McCracken’s example of “clothing gibberish” is only an issue of jargon or poesy that the ‘reader’ did not properly understand. There may have been meaning present that was only unavailable to this

consumer's (player's) particular set of readers but not to others. It is variety (in consumer choice) that leads to an expanded 'vocabulary' of communication and the possibility of play through combinatorial freedom. The more combinatorial freedom an object has to be combined with other consumption objects, the more play is possible with that object.

d. Degree of External Input

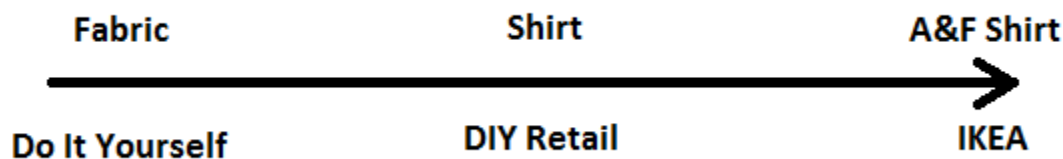


Figure 3: Degree of External Input

Economists have long argued that labor adds value—and I see no reason to disagree with them now. Marketing recognizes that producers and marketers attempt to add meaning to consumer goods through processes like branding. With this addition of value and meaning comes room for play. The greater the degree of external input in an object, the greater the opportunity for play to emerge. This external input can come from the manufacturer, the marketer, the society at large, or any other relevant audiences. Consumers are increasingly being recognized as prosumers (Levy, 1981; Kotler, 1986; Humphreys and Grayson, 2008; Xie et al, 2008; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010)—both producers and consumers of goods and services. Consumption has moved beyond being the destruction of meaning that it was in classic economics; it is now a locus of meaning creation (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). The consumption act is also an act of

meaning creation (Mick, 1986; McCracken, 1988) and this meaning that is present in the object provides the ‘thing’ with which consumers play. We need words to play word games and we need semiotic meaning embedded in objects to play with consumption objects. The good with a higher degree of external input is a ‘better defined’ semiotic object than that object without external input—having already had meaning added in production, marketing, and social context. To some extent there is a give and take between this function and combinatorial freedom. The more specifically ‘defined’ an object becomes, the less combinatorial freedom it may have—its meaning becomes more precise and therefore limiting. This is the difference between a ball and a volley ball. On the other hand, the process of adding meaning to the object (for example, through branding) opens other domains of play to the user not otherwise available. A branded ‘Wilson’ volleyball allows Chuck Noland (Tom Hanks) to ‘play’ with this added information in “Cast Away” to give a name to his imaginary raft companion. The marketer (Wilson) adds meaning in the form of branding to a volleyball. The player—in this case Chuck Noland—takes that meaning and plays with it to give his imaginary raft companion a name. The audience understands the playing involved because they recognize Wilson as both a brand and a man’s name. A generic, unbranded volleyball makes this playing difficult if not impossible.

The consumer learns the vocabulary and the syntax (rules) of consumption play in the market and in the consumption playscapes in which they find themselves. Both advertising and the shopping experience itself serve to educate consumers about the preferred definitions of these semiotic objects (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998).

Specific consumption contexts will develop specific definitions—arguably their own form of ‘jargon’.

A piece of uncut fabric lacks much in the way of meaning. When cut and sewn into a shirt it loses some of its physical play possibilities (it is less able to function as a cape) but gains greater depth of meaning as a shirt. We gain added play ability with its ‘shirtness’. When someone adds prints or designs—whether tartan plaids, kente prints, or an Abercrombie & Fitch logo—that piece of fabric sewn together as a shirt gains additional depth of meaning to those who know and recognize the symbol system in use. A tartan plaid signified where a Scotsman was from and indicated clan affiliation, an ascribed identity. Kente communicates elements of status and standing. They communicate identity to those who can ‘read’ the language of tartans or kente. In the modern world brands like Abercrombie & Fitch, Ed Hardy, or Armani serve a similar expressive purpose for elective identities. The branding provides a meaning ‘toy’ with which consumers can play—if they can read the language of the brand. Ritson and Elliot (1996) show how some UK lesbian consumers used the meaning present in the brand ‘IKEA’ to create both group and individual interpretations around the term Dikea. “First, the subculture alters the symbolic meaning of Ikea to create group identity. Second, that altered symbol is again reframed by each individual member in creating the self-construct” (p127). ‘Dikea’ can’t exist as a play object and system of meaning unless IKEA exists before it. The same happens when consumers use the brand ‘Abercrombie & Fitch’ to play and create ‘Abercrombie & Bitch’. Without the presence of A&F in the marketplace and their brand meaning creation attempts, there cannot be A&B as a playful reconstruction of the meanings already embedded in the brand and its

products. External input in each of these cases allows for a greater depth of play—Dikea with DIY, home decorating, and lesbian stereotypes and A&B with fashion, gender, and self-concept.

The consumer can accept the meaning embedded in an object by other external sources of input, s/he can choose to alter the meaning offered, or s/he can reject that meaning altogether and offer an alternate interpretation which other consumers are now free to accept, modify, or reject. It is the meaning already present in the consumption object from the production, marketing, and (social) use processes—from all the possible external sources of input—that playful consumption builds upon. The amount of meaning already present within the object determines how much ‘vocabulary’ the player has to play with.

From these three continuums; *Distance from Necessity*, *Variety with Combinatorial Freedom*, and *Degree of External Input*, we can construct ways in which play can emerge in consumption. Those circumstances that provide the greatest opportunity for play are those that involve greater levels of all three. Distance from necessity allows for the necessary liminoid space in which play can emerge. It allows the freedom to play. Increased variety gives a greater number of objects with which to play and allows for more combinations of those items depending on their combinatorial freedom. External Input allows for a greater depth of the meanings already present within the consumption objects.

F. Dark Play

Dark play is a special type of play and especially relevant for this study. It is a form of playing *with* play. Dark play often breaks the rules that make play play. Where play needs its players to be voluntarily playing, dark play allows that some (or all) the players may not know they are playing. Where play requires that rules be freely accepted by the players, dark play can hide the rules from some players. Where the goal of play is stated, in dark play it may only be known to some of the players. Play has a fixed start and end; dark play can be fleeting, spontaneous, and indeterminate while not telling some participants when it has begun and if it has ended. Play sets out a bounded playscape; dark play recognizes no necessary boundaries. “Dark play occurs when contradictory realities coexist, each seemingly capable of canceling the other out” (Schechner, 1993, p36). Play says “this is play”, dark play does not feel the need to announce its presence and may even say “this is *not* play”—even when it is play. Dark play is seen in the Indian story of the Brahmin who dreamed he was an untouchable who dreamed he was a king but couldn’t tell which was real because they both tested true (O’Flaherty, 1984). Where Huizinga (1956) describes play as creating order; dark play subverts order. Kerr and Apter (1999) emphasize the framing necessary for play; dark play dissolves frames. If the inversions of the carnival, of clowns, and of the festival are open and public; dark play’s inversions are “disruption, deceit, excess, and gratification” (Schechner, 1993, p36). Play acknowledges non-players, but doesn’t necessarily need them; dark play doesn’t acknowledge non-players, but can’t be performed without them. Dark play puts itself in danger of being revealed and destroyed

if the game is uncovered—either through guile of the non-players or ineptitude of the player(s). And yet, despite all this, dark play can still be playful.

Schechner gives two instructive examples from an acting seminar. Both are from students asked to describe their own dark play experiences:

First: “When I am feeling especially depressed or angry about the world and my life, I will play a form of ‘Russian Roulette’ with the New York city traffic: I will cross the streets without pausing to see if it is safe to do so or not—without checking the lights or the traffic...At the time of “play” there is a thrill in abandoning precautions and in toying with the value of life and death”

Second: “I was on vacation with a friend who is not my boyfriend. During a bus ride I was teaching him a song when an old man turned to us, interested in where we came from, etc. Instantly the two of us made up a romance story of where we met, why we were there on vacation, and what we were planning to do—none of which was true. Since we both felt we were being approached as ‘a couple’ we reacted to it as such, having a lot of fun doing so.” (Schechner, 1993, p37).

From these and other examples Schechner constructs five characteristics of dark play that apply to the construction of elective identity. Dark play:

- Is physically risky.
- Involves intentional confusion or concealment of the frame “this is play” (often to the point that players do not recognize their play as play until they retroactively construct the narrative to describe it afterward)
- May continue actions from early childhood
- Only occasionally demands make believe
- Plays out alternative selves

Though overall very useful, I take issue with one element of Schechner’s formulation of dark play. Dark play *is* risky, but the risk need not be physical. While carelessly walking into traffic certainly is physically risky, lying to a man on a bus is not—though it could be considered socially risky if uncovered. I accept the risk element in dark play, but, in marketing we recognize many types of risk—social, financial, as well as physical— and I think more than just physical risk can be included in dark play. Dark play could involve financial or social risk without necessarily involving physical risk. The

other four elements of his construction—confusion or concealment of the play frame, continuation of childhood actions, occasional make believe, and alternative selves—are all important to elective identity construction.

Dark play describes what some players are doing in elective identity play. Arguably, playing out alternative selves is exactly what players are doing in elective identity and the other four elements merely add to it. The masking that goes on in these performances (mimicry) allows these players to, in the words of Schechner, “sneak off, not be recognized, play out selves that cannot be displayed at work, or with family. The thrill and gratification of such play is to perform anonymously, in disguise, or in a closet what one cannot do publicly ‘as myself’” (1993, p38). In lying to the man on the bus, the dark players that Schechner describes are engaged in a form of masking—they have hidden their ‘true’ selves behind a story that they have constructed. Dark play can allow us to explore elective identities we dare not elect in the real world but can within the safety of the boundaried, rule-bound, playscape. Masks allow “multiple personae to emerge from the multiphrenic self, harnessing play in the service of self-discovery and self-disclosure” (Sherry and Kozinets 2007, p125).

Dark play may be either extrinsically or intrinsically motivated. Something may look like playful activity but may in fact be extrinsically motivating (Biesty, 1986). A clown ‘playing’ with children may only be motivated by his paycheck and therefore not really playing while seeming to do so (Grayson, 1999). Knowing whether we can apply a play frame to an activity is important and dark play raises the possibility that what appears to be play may in fact be quite serious and what appears quite serious may, in fact, be play.

Dark play is important because it means that everyday activities cannot be taken to be playful or not by mere appearance to the observer. The playfulness of an act often lies in the motivations of the actor. The possibility of elements of everyday life becoming part of (dark) play means we need a 'critical gaming literacy' (McGonigal, 2006) to read our everyday environment and recognize the ludic opportunities around us—to know which games are (potentially) being played around us and to identify which games we should and should not be playing. Understanding the playful behaviors of everyday actions may allow us to structure real-world situations to create desired interactions with consumers (Avedon and Sutton-Smith, 1971; McGonigal, 2006).

The social sciences—especially psychology but anthropology and sociology as well—have long recognized the presence of these types of games (Goffman, 1959; Berne, 1964; Laing, 1967; Suits, 1978; Carse, 1986)—though they don't always call them 'dark play' In his impressive work on the hidden moves we make in daily life, the psychologist R.D. Laing describes them well:

"People have a repertoire of games based on particular sets of learned interactions. Others may play games that mesh sufficiently to allow a variety of more or less stereotyped dramas to be enacted. The games have rules, some public, some secret. Some people play games that break the rules of games that others play. Some play undeclared games, so rendering their moves ambiguous or downright unintelligible, except to the expert in such secret and unusual games." (Laing, 1967, p30).

Elective identity games can be these secret, undeclared, ambiguous, stereotyped, 'secret and unusual' games we sometimes play in dark play.

G. Elective Identity as a game

Elective identity is predominantly a mimicry game in Callois' formulation. Theater and dramatic presentations are the most recognizable form of mimicry, but any putting on of a mask, playing of a role, or imitation/simulation can be mimicry. The role of masks and license here is very important. Masks—both physical and figurative—are props to facilitate the performance of identities. Like masks, elective identities can be put on and taken off. They conceal the real and allow the fictional face to be put forward. They aid in forgetting 'the real' in favor of the reality of the performance. "The mask disguises the conventional self and liberates the true personality" (Callois, 1958, p21). Also important is that the same actions in mimicry can be 'play' or 'not play' depending on the context and motivation of the actor. The child mimics a train and is playing; the spy mimics, but does not play.

Elective Identity games are open or infinite games rather than closed games. The goal is to be able to continue playing rather than to win (not that play can't still be competitive in these games). Players play elective identity games in order that they can continue to play them in the future. Sometimes they are ongoing performances and sometimes they are episodic. In either case, the goal is to play the game well so that it can be played again.

H. The Liminal and Liminoid

An understanding of the concepts of the liminal and the liminoid is integral to understand the role of games. Because games involve the invoking of their own time

and space, their own rules, and their own goals they are liminal/liminoid,. They involve a transition from one world to another, from the 'real' world to that of the game.

The liminal and the liminoid are states of transition for individuals undergoing some transformation or life change—generally either a rite of passage (vanGennep, 1960) or a pilgrimage (Turner, 1973). They are the transitions between different 'statuses, states, ages, or places' in our lives (Hetherington, 1996). Birthdays, bar mitzvahs, fraternity and sorority initiations, weddings, and housewarmings are all rites of passage for the individuals involved and are marked with rituals to symbolize the transition from one state, status, age, or place to another.

These ritual transitions occur in three stages according to vanGennep (1960): separation, margin, and re-aggregation. The individual is ritually stripped of their old existence—often involving physical separation. They then exist in a marginal space where the normative structure of society is suspended.

"Liminality is associated with a transgressive middle stage of a rite, the threshold, margin or point at which activities and conditions are most uncertain, and in which the normative structure of society is temporarily overturned...In the liminal phase, acts of transgression occur, inversions of everyday practices take place and through this a weak initiate is empowered" (Hetherington, 1996, p37).

The initiate usually undergoes ordeals, humiliations, or challenges to signify their worthiness to (re-)enter the society. The completion of this process marks the (re)integration of the individual into the community as a new (or full) member. They have been symbolically reborn. In different forms but to similar effect, wedding ceremonies around the world often involve the individuals entering separately, being ritually bound (sometimes literally, sometimes figuratively) to each other in the sacred bonds of matrimony, and finally leaving the ritual together, transformed. Thus marriage marks the union (transformation) of two individuals into one couple; bar mitzvahs mark the

transition from boy to man; or a housewarming marks the transition of a house into a home.

Liminal rituals differ from liminoid rituals in that the former are obligatory, the latter voluntary (Schechner, 1993). Liminal rituals are ascribed and generally do not involve a choice—they are going to happen upon the achievement of certain conditions (age, betrothal, etc.) and the participant generally has little choice in whether or not they will take part. Liminoid rituals are achieved and usually elective. Because of their achieved status they are considered weaker (Turner, 1982) and are more ludic because they are voluntary and profane (Hetherington, 1996). Where liminal spaces tend to be purposive and sacred, liminoid spaces need not be so dedicated (Shields, 1991). For Turner (1982) liminoid spaces are significant because they become “sites for the production of new symbols for new modes of living” (in Hetherington, 1996, p37). It is this significance that matters most for this research as well.

Festivals (Communities at Play)

Festivals are the game a community plays with itself, for itself and relevant ‘others’, to demonstrate to all who and what that community presents itself to be. Like any game, festivals have a specific time and place in which they are played; recognizable roles (both within and without the game); rules that differentiate them from normal time and space; pieces, props and paraphernalia for playing them; and endstates (goals) that terminate play.

Western cultures have liberated their members to some extent from the obligations of ascribed-identity liminal festive rituals and replaced them with less

powerful elective-identity liminoid rituals in the form of holidays. Similarly, as consumers exercise their ability to create elective identities, these identities can themselves have liminoid rituals of self-celebration which convey messages to internal and external audiences about their beliefs and values and how the community wants to be perceived. These liminoid festivals are the texts of these subcultures that allow us a window into their world.

As the work-life of the Western worker has shifted from a seasonal emphasis of an agrarian culture (planting/fertility in Spring, harvest/thanks in Fall) to the weekly emphasis of an industrial culture (Monday-Friday, 9-5), so too has our festival cycle switched from seasonal festivals to weekends. The seasonal festivals—Christmas/Hanukkah, Easter/Passover—remain, though often in diluted or modified form. These festivals were supplemented by civic religious (Bellah, 1967), though still seasonal, festivals—Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day—added in the pre- or early-industrial period. The industrial cycle (work weeks rather than seasonal plantings) changes festive celebrations to a weekly (weekend) cycle.

Liminoid festivals are weaker in their influence than liminoid festivals because we can choose not to take part in them. They lack the social, cultural, and religious power of (unavoidable) liminal rites. They are not compelled; they are elective. Liminoid festivals are more frequent, but still significant, in the lives of their celebrants.

a. Festivals as Liminal or Liminoid

Festival performances are shared rituals of social renewal and integration. They refresh and energize a community by providing a temporary release from its rules and

obligations. Festivals are a community's entering into a liminal state in order to emerge transformed afterward. Schneider (1994) argues that the ways in which people play and tell stories when they celebrate in festivals allows us to discern a lot about a (sub)culture. They are a means for a community to reinforce bonds between its members and to recognize and celebrate their unity with each other and their separateness from 'others'. Festivals are community performances for the sake of reinforcing the public identity of the community to its own members and external publics. They are "the special moment in civic life when a community reflects upon, celebrates, and ultimately presents an image of itself" (Proctor, 2004, p132). They are "vivid aesthetic events that depict, interpret, inform, and celebrate social truths" (Manning, 1983, p6). They allow us to see and experience a community's symbolic, economic, social, and political life (Farber, 1983, p33). Festivals are when a community publicly celebrates itself (Lavenda, 1992) and provide us with a narrative 'text' about themselves (Marsden, 1994). For Falassi (1967), festivals are a 'time out of time' devoted to special activities of the community that perform and celebrate cultural truths. They are 'temporally autonomous mythic narratives' that create their own moment in the life of the community.

Aercke recognizes the festival as performing the important functions of philosophical and political rhetorical discourse and as celebration and play. His study of Baroque festive celebrations describes the elaborate rhetorical discourses they had become. He says,

"One of the objectives of the game was to prove, time and time again, that the Baroque ruling class could indeed correct what it perceived to be the principal defect in Nature: namely, the upsetting fact that without the accouterments

invented by Art and Artifice, it is usually impossible to distinguish a king from a valet or a princess from a peasant” (Aercke, 1994, p8).

Baroque festive play was, according to Aercke, an attempt by the Baroque nobility to denounce Nature’s democratic egalitarianism in favor of a support and justification for an elitist, hierarchical social structure favorable to the festival’s sponsors. An ethnic festive performance in a modern American city is an attempt to put forth a positive presentation of the community and its beliefs and values to outsiders as well as an affirmation of those beliefs and values to insiders. It allows the community to celebrate its identity. It provides a text of the community to be read (and potentially misread) by all who see it.

b. The Nightclub as Festive Playscape

“It was a liminal or liminoid space where normal roles and class distinctions disappeared and there was a feeling that anything goes (vanGennep, 1960; Turner, 1969). It was a place on the margin (Shields, 1991), a place of inversion, excess, and carnival (Bakhtin, 1968; Stallybrass and White, 1984)” (Belk, 2000, p113).

Belk is describing Las Vegas, but the shoe fits... I argue for the nightclub as the quintessential elective identity and self-presentation playscape. The elective-identity play of the nightclub is the liminoid play of the festival (Schechner, 1993; Falassi, 1967; Turner, 1969; Fernandez, 1991; Noyes 1995). Participants engage in the same identity supporting, reinforcing, and distinguishing activities. In the nightclub we see all four of the cardinal behaviors of the festival—reversal, intensification, trespassing, and abstinence (Falassi, 1967). Reversal is the inversion of priorities and values. Where we are expected to maintain the importance of certain values in daily life, the nightclub endorses a different set of (subterranean) values (Matza and Sykes, 1961; Young,

1971). Intensification occurs in the excess of drink and sensations—loud music, bright lights, and compact crowds. Trespass is in the freedom to engage in activities in this environment that would otherwise be restricted or forbidden. Abstinence is in the rejection of work and other obligations of the outside world that are removed from this world and its particular time and place.

Drawing from the festival and ‘ritual as play’ literature (Turner, 1969, vanGennep, 1960) we can see how the nightclub is not only a playscape, but an *ideal* playscape for the study of consumer play and elective identity. “The clubbing environment is an orgy of excess in which the normal social protocols surrounding noise, space, physical proximity, light, and communication are exceeded” (Goulding et al, 2008). They are places of play.

Much of what Belk has to say about Las Vegas as a place of adult play applies to the nightclub as well. “At least part of the appeal of Las Vegas appears due to its playful treatment of what is real through the interplay of manipulated scale, theatrical lighting, nostalgia, and pastiche (Belk, 2000, p109). This playful treatment of what is real is exploited by the nightclub as well. “Las Vegas is instructing us through its farcical architecture and spectacles to adopt a playful mood of irreverent disregard for our normal behaviors and sensibilities” (Belk, 2000, p111).

The nightclub also encourages the adoption of ‘a playful mood of irreverent disregard for our normal behaviors and sensibilities’ through its creation of various themed environments in which consumers can enact elective identities. The nightclub serves a festive function, it is ‘hedonic and experiential’ (Sherry, 1990). It lets us indulge in subterranean values of expressivity, hedonism, excitement, spontaneity, and

autonomy through non-alienated activities which are intrinsically motivated—in contrast to the workaday world and its more conventional values of conformity, deferred gratification, control, predictability, and subjugation while engaged in alienated labor which is extrinsically motivated (Young, 1971).

Like the elite festivals of the Baroque nobility, the late night nature of the nightclub highlights a sense of exclusion. “The nocturnal setting emphasized the exclusion of those who led a working life, and at the same time celebrated the unrestricted freedom of the ruling class to substitute its own schedule for the natural, temporal organization of the cosmos” (Aercke, 1994, p33). Most (American) night clubs don’t get going until after 11pm. On a weeknight this can be prohibitory for those who need to work the next day. Even on a weekend, there is a commitment to a late night—and therefore significant effect on activities of the following day. The nightclub is exclusionary in this regard. It very effectively communicates a set of values and desired perceptions—it establishes an element of separation from ordinary consumers. It sets participants apart in their ability to consume the night as well as the day. Pubs and bars are for common folk who work—that’s why they are open right after work hours. The nightclub is for the hedonic.

Nightclubs provide an ‘other place’, separate from the everyday world. This separation—both physical and psychological—creates the liminoid spaces in which play occurs. These other places become important to individuals and acquire a social centrality in the lives of their inhabitants which makes them significant. “They act like shrines for those who live outside of the norms of a society” (Hetherington, 1996, p34).

III. METHODOLOGY

“In short, satisfaction, enjoyment, fun, and other hedonic aspects of the consumption experience have been widely regarded as the essence of play and other leisure activities (Neulinger 1981; Unger and Mernan 1983; Wilson 1981). This means that playful consumption must be understood in terms of the emotional responses that compose its phenomenology” (Holbrook et al, 1984, p729)

A. Introduction

This chapter describes the research methods that were used in this study. I begin by explaining the rationale for choosing this research site and why it was important for this study. The next section addresses the choice of specific research methods to examine my research questions. I then detail the process for selecting the sample. I discuss each of the methods and how they will be approached. Finally, I conclude with the approach to the data analysis.

I have been involved with the community under consideration long before I began to research it. I have been involved as a member of the community for just under 20 years. I have been involved as a ‘reflective participant’ for over 10 years (since exposure to writing in the field of consumer culture on consumption communities). Direct observation has been going on for over 6 years since I knew it would be the subject of consumer research for me. Interviews and formal observation has been ongoing for more than 2 years. It was my exposure and familiarity with the environment that made it possible to see many of the processes (and conflicts) going on in the environment and to identify appropriate members for interviews—I have the (sub)cultural capital necessary to understand and interact with this community. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) describe their need to engage in a process of

‘progressive contextualization’ in order to develop the knowledge and experience necessary to understand Harley Davidson riders.

*“The evolving nature of our ethnographic involvement allowed us to experience and interact with different elements of the subculture as insiders. In a process of progressive contextualization, we began as outsiders and gradually became accepted members of various groups within the HDSC. Along the road (literally and figuratively) toward the core of the subculture **we gained insights and perspectives that would have been difficult, if not impossible, to achieve through less sustained involvement.** For example, as neophyte members of the subculture we recorded certain experiences and observations; later, with increased time and stature within the subculture, we were privileged to understand those same neophyte experiences from a new vantage point as more seasoned insiders.” (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995, p44, **emphasis added**)*

I began my research with a level of immersion that Schouten and McAlexander sought.

My journey has been the reverse—extricating myself from personal involvement in order to step back and objectively analyze those same goings on. My challenge is to step back and express these understandings in ways the outsider can understand. This naturally brings up concerns which I have done my best to mitigate.

There is an obvious danger of bias on my part in both subject selection and data interpretation. Being aware of this I have made a conscious effort to include as broad a variety of subjects in the interview pool as possible. Of my 32 subjects interviewed, most were known by little more than their name—and often not even that was known prior to their interview. With one exception (Leslie), I have had little to no contact with any subjects outside of the research setting except to conduct interviews. I have also, wherever possible, tried to let my informants speak for themselves. When an informant said something relevant to my research (whether in supportive or contradictory), I attach their comments to my interpretations wherever possible rather than relying solely on my interpretation. Finally, I have done my best to enforce a critical stance in relation to the material. The insider must still separate themselves from the context to examine it

objectively—‘manufacturing distance’ (McCracken, 1989) whenever possible. The ever-present nature of this danger has enforced a diligence in relation to it.

B. Selection of the Field Site

In looking at how individuals play to create and maintain identities it was necessary to use a site where this activity was both recognizable and frequent. Several researchers have shown how various playscapes are more conducive to certain behaviors than others (Penaloza, 1999; Belk, 2000; Thornton, 1996; Goulding et al, 2008). For ascribed identities one of the most significant locations for the creation, maintenance, and communication of a group’s identity is the festival (Schechner, 1993; Falassi, 1967; Turner, 1969; Fernandez, 1991; Noyes, 1995).

The nightclub space provided an ideal venue for the examination of consumer construction and maintenance of elective identity through play. It provided persistent, frequently recurring, episodic environments in which to examine these processes. For some elective identities, the nightclub provides a substitute in the modern world for the (ascribed identity) festival. In the nightclub we can see all four of the cardinal behaviors of the festival—reversal, intensification, trespassing, and abstinence (Falassi, 1967). Nightclubs establish liminoid spaces where rules of the outside world are reversed. “The clubbing environment is an orgy of excess in which the normal social protocols surrounding noise, space, physical proximity, light, and communication are exceeded” (Goulding et al, 2008, p767). Nightclubs allow participants to play different games than they would be able to play in the ‘outside’ world. And finally, nightclubs, like festivals, invoke certain themes and archetypes in their construction of identity—they provide a

frame. Festivals have been the venue for identity construction and maintenance in the past. Nightclubs, for some, are the festivals of the modern world.

The nightclub, like Las Vegas, facilitates (and even encourages) certain behaviors through the construction and manipulation of the environment. “At least part of the appeal of Las Vegas appears due to the its *playful* treatment of what is real through the interplay of manipulated scale, theatrical lighting, nostalgia, and pastiche” (Belk 2000 p109, *emphasis added*). All these elements—along with noise and physical proximity (Goulding et al, 2008)—are exploited by the nightclub as well. “Las Vegas is instructing us through its farcical architecture and spectacles to adopt a playful mood of irreverent disregard for our normal behaviors and sensibilities” (Belk, 2000, p111). The nightclub also encourages the adoption of ‘a playful mood of irreverent disregard for our normal behaviors and sensibilities.’ The nightclub enables us to express subterranean values of expressivity, hedonism, excitement, spontaneity, and autonomy through non-alienated activities which are intrinsically motivated (Matza, 1961; Matza and Sykes, 1961; Young, 1971)—in contrast to the workaday world and its more conventional values (conformity, deferred gratification, control, predictability, and subjugation while engaged in alienated labor which is extrinsically motivated).

C. Selection of Methods

Qualitative methods, especially ethnography, are important techniques which can focus on the ‘rich symbolic worlds’ and subjective experiences of consumers and consumer groups (Kozinets, 2001). The world of consumers and elective identity construction is such a rich symbolic world.

Given the nature of the phenomena under consideration I took an existential-phenomenological approach to this research. Existential-phenomenological research attempts to arrive at a first-person, context-based understanding of the matter under examination (Thompson et al, 1989). Existential-phenomenological research is premised on the idea that some phenomena are better understood *within* the situation or context in which they occur. In examining phenomena, we strive to understand the consumer's perspective. Subjects' experiences are recognized as situated within their own 'life-world' and that to remove them from such a context would be meaningless. We are concerned with *why* they do what they do. The researcher engages in a process of helping subjects to examine their experiences to allow "reflected meanings and symbols to emerge from the ground of unreflected experiences" (Thompson et al, 1989, p137).

Data was collected from three main sources—participant observation, depth interviews, and, to a lesser extent, the internet. Each source provided a different window into the communities being observed and each showed the different ways in which consumers play in creating elective identities. This allowed for triangulation of findings across sources providing greater reliability.

a. Participant Observation: The Site

Participant observation is especially relevant for gathering data about socially and culturally patterned behaviors (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). As cultural construction sites conveying (sub)cultural meaning (Penaloza, 1999), the nightclub space provides an ideal venue for the examination of consumer construction and maintenance of elective identity through play. Cultural construction sites are those

places where consumers display the behaviors and artifacts that communicate to relevant audiences the messages and meanings about who they are. For ascribed identities these sites are best represented by parades and festivals.

Most previous consumer behavior research on the effects of the retail environment or servicescape focuses primarily on perceptions of quality or customer satisfaction (Arnold and Price, 1993; Zeithaml et al, 1990; Richardson et al, 1994). Some research even suggests that situations determine much more behavioral variance than do dispositions (Scheibe, 1995; Mischel and Peake, 1982). While goods and services can provide cues to consumers to indicate quality, there are other cues available in the consumption environment that signal elements other than quality (Shimp and Bearden, 1982; Baker et al, 1992). These cues can suggest allowed and disallowed—encouraged and discouraged—behaviors (Penaloza, 1999; Belk, 2000). I look at what characteristics we can see in the nightclub that facilitate elective identity processes. What elements of the site itself contribute to the construction and maintenance of elective identities? Spatial organization, lighting, sound, and other elements influence the consumer's experience of the nightclub environment (Goulding et al, 2008) and will therefore influence the elective identity games therein. The physical site privileges certain behaviors; it facilitates certain actions and restricts others. Similarly, the identity of the site itself also influences the performance of identity within. The degree to which this is explicitly and implicitly represented in the site should be unpacked.

As an example of the influence of spatial organization on consumer responses Penaloza (1999) describes how the interspatialities—the paths consumers take through

the environment—of Niketown placed consumers in differing ‘spatial and visual relations with the displays’ (p341) allowing the architectural space itself to be ideological. Spatial organization puts consumers into particular perspectives in relation to the objects (individuals and experiences) to which they are exposed that influences their interpretations and responses to those objects. The nightclub environment also has interspatialities that influence the festive performances within by affecting the spatial and visual relations of the consumers. The management and organization of space and the sensory inputs in the environment contribute to the shared experience of consumers and their understanding and interpretation of the consumption environment itself (Goulding et al, 2008). The space itself becomes a ‘text’ that can be read. Just as many of the casinos and other spectacular displays in Las Vegas are designed to shift the consumer’s self perception and relation to their environment and others within it in order to facilitate the play of the games Las Vegas wants consumers to play (Belk, 2000), so too can the nightclub be designed to facilitate (or hinder) the performance of identity within. I identify those spatial elements within the nightclub context that inform and influence the identity performance.

b. Participant Observation: The Employees

Participant observation of the site includes an understanding of the role played by the employees (Kozinets et al, 2004). Are employees in these environments part of the servicescape or do they play a role as part of the community? For the nightclub night, employees like the DJ are often contractual employees with loose associations with the venue—they are often one-night-a-week employees associated with specific

events rather than the venue itself. Very often the 'night' is identified with the DJ, not the nightclub, and the DJ often has closer links to the customers than to club management. They are a hybrid institutional/community entity—and yet not a full member of either. Employees (bartenders, doorpersons, security) often fill roles in the nightclub environment similar to the roles played in real world communities by community actors (the media, real estate agents, and the police) within, but not necessarily part of, the community (Suttles, 1972). They can have a direct impact on the community though they need not be *of* the community. In *The Social Construction of Communities* Gerald Suttles describes many of the ways in which community actors—city administrators, highly-placed politicians and leaders in important businesses (like real estate and construction) provide (or fail to provide) a protective shield for a community. The bar manager is that 'highly-placed politician' who can direct or allocate resources and administrative capital; the doorperson is the real estate agent who determines who will and will not get into a nightclub much as a real estate agent can steer potential residents toward (or away from) a particular building, block, or neighborhood. Bouncers are a nightclub's beat cop. As institutional actors employees potentially straddle the boundary between environment (venue owners and managers) and the community (consumers). In either case, they can provide insight into the community's workings and identify its key players. Trusted or respected employees can provide a direct liaison for the researcher to members of the community from a trusted source (Henry and Caldwell 2007).

c. Participant Observation: The Customers

Because this research emphasizes the social construction of elective identity by consumers within a playscape, it is necessary to be immersed in the social context. This immersion allows the researcher to observe and record actions of consumers in their natural setting that would not be otherwise accessible. It is more than data collection (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994), it is a process of understanding the culture and clarifying the researcher's understanding. Because identity is both constructed and maintained (as it is being performed) within these contexts, there is an ongoing process that must be experienced and observed as it happens. The observation of these performances can provide insights into those behaviors that may not be apparent to—or may remain unexamined by—the actors themselves. They may remain as part of the background of their experience if they are not questioned about it. By being present, the researcher has access to contextual forces and cues acting upon the subjects and can be the mirror that reflects them back for the consumer to examine. These observations are then available to the researcher to inform the subsequent interview process.

Participant observation allowed for the confirmation of both online and interview data. Direct observation will allow the researcher to confirm that informants practice what they preach and can guard against reporting or recall biases that may be present in interviews.

Taking notes within a nightclub environment would be obtrusive, drawing undue and unwanted attention to the observation process. This posed a threat of inaccuracy or incompleteness of data (Maxwell, 2005) if too much time passed between observation and note taking. Several opportunities were exploited to avoid this problem. In order to

avoid memory bias, notes were taken after observation trips. Because the nightclub experience in and of itself can have an invigorating effect (Goulding et al, 2008) on participants—including participant observers—a ‘decompression’ period is often required to relax afterward. This was an opportunity for reflection on the evening and additional note taking.

A second opportunity was afforded by the city’s indoor smoking ban requiring smokers to go outside. As can be witnessed outside any large building in any city where indoor smoking has been prohibited, this outside area is a social environment in and of itself. While not a smoker, this nevertheless afforded the researcher the opportunity to remove himself from the club under reasonable pretext (socializing with others who do smoke), record important observations or quotes in the relative quiet of the smoking area compared to inside the club [N.B. by this I mean recording of ‘notes to self’ not the surreptitious recording of the conversations of others who are here], and return quickly to the club when finished recording. The ubiquity of smartphone technology with voice recording capability means that stepping outside ‘to make a call’ is equally an opportunity to step outside and record observation notes without *looking like* one is recording field notes (and thereby drawing undue attention to the research process).

A third opportunity also offered by the smoking ban and subsequent exterior social environment was the opportunity to interview and observe some subjects, on site, with little distance (in time or space) from their experience. The smoking area provided a place to approach individuals and interview them briefly. It also provided the opportunity to listen to (but not record without their expressed permission!) subjects interacting with each other like Holt (1995) listening in to exchanges in the bleachers at

Wrigley Field. In conducting member checks, this provided a quieter, better-lit area to complete surveys.

d. Physical Artifacts and Photography

Physical artifacts and photographs—both useful secondary sources of information (Penaloza, 1999, Schouten and McAlexander, 1995)— provide additional evidence and support.

“Culture is now, itself, a marketable commodity. This is true for traditional cultures, those based in ethnic, national, religious histories, and even more so for the new cultures (such as, American, pan-European, pan-Asian, yuppie, punk, green, techie) that transcend these boundaries” (Firat, 1997, p81).

Due to the service-oriented nature of the primary research site, physical artifacts are limited. Flyers and other promotional material provided some evidence, offering an insight into the relation between the service provider and customers. Other physical evidence, other than the site itself (see below), is limited.

Photography in this particular site provided some interesting challenges. As a nightclub lighting is less than optimal for photography in general without very obvious (and disruptive) flashes. This makes any photography overly intrusive. Independent of the physical limitations posed by the environment, there were also issues with the subjects themselves. As a marginal community, members expressed some concerns about photographers. Control of images—and the final destination of those photographs in the age of the internet—was a concern for some members. As an example, an informant (Ernest) was seen politely dancing with several female newcomers who had approached him on the dance floor. When one of the women pulled out a camera (she had been ‘documenting’ her friend’s birthday all night), Ernest walked off the dance floor

and stood near the interviewer along the perimeter. When approached about the incident, the following dialog ensued:

Me: "What happened?" (motioning to the dance floor)

Ernest: "They were nice enough about it. They were just having fun and wanted to dance."

Me: "Why did you walk away?"

Ernest: "She took out a camera" (pointing to the woman with the camera)

Me: "What does that matter?"

Ernest: "I have no idea where it's going. It could end up on Facebook or something. I don't want people from work seeing that. I don't want them thinking that I spend my weeknights out at clubs." (Nov 4th, 2010)

Ernest went on to relate an anecdote to reinforce his point about an acquaintance at a reunion who had refused to hire someone because of something he had read on Facebook posted by the potential hire. All of this points to the sensitivity of photography in this environment.

As an elective identity space—often involving marginal cultural identities—members are protective of their identity and image within the space. For a community where elective identity construction is taking place, there can be issues of where that identity fits in in the larger, outside world. If that identity can be stigmatized ‘out there’, there is every reason to engage in protective activities ‘in here’. This nightclub was seen as a safe haven, a sanctuary, by many of my subjects. Photography risked bringing images of that safe space out into a world where that safety might be threatened. There were circumstances where cooperation with photography was witnessed—most circumstances involve prior approval from the photographed—and instances where patrons engaged in obstructive behaviors (positioning themselves between

photographers and subjects). If asked first, most regulars did allow some photography by outsiders. Photography, when used in my research, was done only with the explicit permission of those photographed; club photos were only taken with the explicit permission of management.

e. Selection of the Interview Sample

Initial identification of participants was a product of the participant observation process. Presence in the environment allowed the researcher to identify frequent attendees from transient or infrequent attendees. I engaged in a purposive sampling approach. Purposive sampling techniques are more appropriate to this research over random sampling because I am only interested in certain participants in the environment—the ‘players’. As such, I needed to be able to filter out mere attendees from community members. In a large, public space like the nightclub, there will be transient and incidental attendees to the phenomenon under examination. These individuals are not of direct interest to the current focus of the research (though they do offer other possibilities for future research). Since the interviewing techniques used to collect data in this context were labor intensive, it was important to interview only members of the specific sample target.

Attendance frequency was one indication of involvement with the context. Those individuals who showed up to the event week after week were more likely to experience more involvement with what was going on in the context. While lack of regular attendance did not rule out significance as a research subject, regular attendees were more likely to be relevant to the study and can point to less regular attendees of

significance as part of the snowballing technique (see below). I have been present as a participant/observer for approximately four hours every Thursday, for roughly 45-50 weeks a year. I have been doing this for approximately 10 years. This gave me a familiarity with the comings and goings of members and the ability to distinguish different levels of participation by consumers. It also meant I was familiar to patrons when I approached them for interviews.

Recognition also served to identify prominent members of the community. Those whose arrival were greeted with approval and/or recognition by many and/or diverse elements of the community were more likely to be prominent members of the community. Recognition by more individuals implied breadth of ties to the community—though this was paired with attendance frequency since a ‘big greeting’ could simply mean the individual was the last to arrive of a big, but one-time, party. Diverse member recognition (recognition by many different members from throughout the environment) implied deeper ties to the community. Depth and breadth of recognition served as a signal of status and was used to distinguish high-status members from low-status members from non-members.

Having familiarity with the community’s behaviors and symbolic elements (dress, music, etc), it was also possible to identify members through these indicators. Successfully identifying members can serve as a check for the researcher in the development of ‘subcultural capital’ (Thornton, 1996). The ability to identify members from non-members is a form of subcultural capital and points to an understanding of the symbolic elements of the community by the researcher.

From the initial subjects research proceeded with a snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is used by qualitative researchers to reach inaccessible, deviant, or hard to identify populations. Snowball sampling can be important for understanding social structures and the relationships of individuals within these populations. It has been used to reach populations as diverse as heroin users (Kaplan et al, 1987), HIV/AIDS patients (Watters and Biernacki, 1989), and Sudanese children in refugee camps in Northern Uganda (Paardekooper et al, 1999). Initial subjects were asked to identify other subjects for interviews. When possible, introductions were sought from interview subjects to act as a trusted liaison to these other subjects. Snowball sampling continued until no new data was provided by the process.

A relevant potential weakness of snowball sampling is selection bias (Maxwell, 1996). There are several factors working against selection bias in the current research. The researcher already has several years of exposure to and participant observation of the population. The researcher has developed a level of subcultural capital which limited choosing a flawed key informant. Secondly, this study did not build from one key informant, but from several (starting from the tops of several hills). This allowed for a deeper and broader sample as multiple social networks were explored and linked.

f. The Interview Process

Phenomenological interviews focus on identifying recurring existential patterns (Thompson et al, 1989). They are in-depth interviews targeting the respondent's understanding of the subject and can take us into the lifeworld of the individual (McCracken, 1986). The interview process privileges the knowledge of the respondent

over that of the interviewer (Kvale, 2007) and its course should be set by the respondent as well. Ideally, the interviewer has only an opening question and all subsequent questions follow upon the discussion the initial question generates. Previous exposure to informants in the context under consideration had shown remarkable enthusiasm for the consumption experience. The researcher expected (and experienced) few difficulties in eliciting more than enough material with an opening question as simple as, “Tell me about Neo.” (one respondent went on for an entire hour, uninterrupted, from that simple start). Follow-up questions were based on subject responses. The existential-phenomenological interview should more resemble a conversation than a question and answer session (Thompson et al, 1989). The interviewer targets descriptions of the experience *as experienced* rather than abstractions and interpretations. “The ideal interview format occurs when the interviewer’s short descriptive questions and/or clarifying statements provide an opening for a respondent’s lengthier and detailed descriptions” (Thompson et al, 1989, p139). Most respondents were able to talk at length without much in the way of interviewer intervention. Some interviews started off slower than others certainly, but all respondents eventually opened up to this process.

Overall, I conducted twenty-seven formal customer interviews (15 males, 12 females) and four formal staff interviews (3 males, 1 female) lasting anywhere from forty-five minutes to over two hours. Informal discussions took place on-site if interview subjects were present and available after they had completed a formal interview. Incidental, non-directed contact with customers—often in the smoking area outside the club—provided additional material either in the form of overheard comments or being

approached by patrons naïve to my research who just wanted to talk to someone while outside. All formal interviews were conducted away from the research context (at a location of the subjects' choice) to avoid the noise of the nightclub and to allow for a more conducive environment to talking. Most were conducted in coffee shops, two in a nearby pub, two in restaurants, and one in the subject's home. No subjects were compensated for their participation beyond the cost of coffee, drinks, or (in the cases of restaurant interviews) a meal of less than \$20 (though neither subject knew their meal would be paid for in advance). These external sites allowed subjects to 'speak freely' without fear of repercussions should they mention fellow patrons (any such mentions have been anonymized), employees (also anonymized), or speak negatively of the establishment itself—this was especially important for the employee interviews. Subjects were informed of the nature of the research, ensured of anonymity, and told they could refuse any line of questioning—including ending the interview itself—at any time. Only one question was refused throughout the entire interview process and that involved an unrelated question in post-interview socializing regarding what they did for a living.

g. Netnography

Netnography, or Internet ethnography, is a relatively recent qualitative research technique that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities online (Kozinets, 2002a). Netnography uses publicly available information in online forums to identify and understand the needs and decision influences of consumers and consumer groups. Compared to traditional ethnography, netnography is

less-time consuming, unobtrusive, more naturalistic, less costly, and timelier than traditional ethnographic techniques. Netnography can provide a window (though sometimes a narrow window) into consumers behaving without being conscious of being observed. Because it is both naturalistic and unobtrusive, netnography allows ongoing access to consumers in online situations (Kozinets, 2002a).

The limitations of netnography in general start with its more narrow focus on online communities. Since the present study is using netnography to further inform real-world ethnography, this is less of a concern. Kozinets also identifies 'greater researcher interpretive skill' as a weakness of netnography. Thirdly, netnography can be difficult to generalize to the general population since many of the informant identifiers observable in traditional ethnography are missing.

There are multiple online sources from which to mine data in order to compare and crosscheck the consistency of information (Denzin, 1989). The community under observation has several Facebook pages (independent of individual member personal pages) from which data was drawn. Online data from these sources provided an opportunity to witness patron-to-patron interactions that might be missed by the participant observer in a crowded nightclub. Infrequent attendees often provided community input through this medium. These pages allowed access to less frequent participants and provided another medium for reaching subjects that were otherwise hard to reach. As a moderated group requiring approval to join, there is some protection from non-members of the community being involved in the discussions. Establishing a presence in an online forum is a way for the researcher to also establish some

subcultural capital (Thornton, 1996) with subjects who might otherwise be reluctant to speak in person.

D. Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is often an iterative process. Initial field notes, interview transcripts, physical evidence, and site observations informed subsequent data collection and analysis. Since the evidence in existential-phenomenological research should drive the interpretation, it is important to let the data suggest the categories. Development of codes and sorting data into categories follow, not precede, data collection. The coding process begins when the researcher is familiar with the data and can, only then, identify themes (Strauss, 1987).

Participant observation notes were gathered and examined for relevant themes. Interviews were transcribed and coded for recognizable themes. This involved categorizing all quotes from interviews as they related to the two primary lines of research—player archetypes and elective identity.

During interviews participants were asked if they wish to participate in member checks when the research was complete. Subjects will be presented with collected, transcribed, and interpreted data from the study and asked to provide feedback and (dis)confirm analyses and understandings. These provide the researcher with feedback about interpretations made from the interviews. Member checks and feedback can help increase the generalizability and credibility of the research (Maxwell, 1996; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and help with error reduction and validity (Mays and Pope, 2000).

IV. FINDINGS

A. Introduction

This research set out to look at elective identities—the identities we choose for ourselves rather than those that are ascribed to us. Starting from Breakwell’s (1993) *Identity Process Theory* and its application in Twigger-Ross and Uzell’s (1996) linking of place attachment and identity, I show how consumers use the nightclub to support elective identity construction, maintenance, and defense and to show the benefits they derive therefrom. In doing so I also identify the different ways players play these games—because they don’t all play the same way or towards the same goals. I demonstrate that we can develop a typology of player types that help explain the why consumers play these games the way they do. Ultimately, it will be our ability to understand the games they are playing and the satisfactions they derive in playscapes that will enable businesses to better serve their customers in the designed experiences they create.

Elective identity is, “that sense of self that is developed by choice and change. It is the identity that people are able to self-fashion from the world around them, to pick up and discard at will” (Cornwell and Drennan, 2004). Where Cornwell and Drennan look at how globalization and fragmentation affect elective identity, my concern is on the local, personal level. I break from the usual conception of identity ‘projects’ or identity ‘work’ (Harre, 1983; Schwalbe and Mason-Shrock, 1996) and look at elective identity from the frame of play and games—a view so far only explored in marketing by Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010) and, even then, only in the context of work roles and work identities.

Ibarra and Petriglieri provide an important distinction between identity work and identity play in that,

“Identity work and play have different purposes. Whereas, identity work fundamentally seeks the preservation of existing identities or compliance with externally imposed image requirements, we propose that identity play is concerned with inventing and reinventing oneself.” (Ibarra and Petriglieri, 2010, p14)

As voluntary activities removed from necessity, I agree with Ibarra and Petriglieri when I argue that elective identity is more of a game we play than a project we work.

Elective identity games are individual ludic and/or paidic acts of invention and reinvention. To call them games is not to say that elective identity games aren't serious (games and play are often a quite serious endeavors for those involved in them) or that there isn't a significant amount of effort that goes into these games. Quite the contrary, elective identity games are effortful. I look at why elective identities are constructed, maintained, and defended from the hedonic and ludic choices consumers make—specifically, in the nightclub environment.

All of this leads us to the research questions to be addressed here. I set out to answer three main questions:

1. “Why take the effort to construct, maintain, and defend an elective identity?”
2. “What role does the environment (the playscape) play in affecting elective identity consumption processes?” and
3. “How do players differentiate between other players and spectators within a playscape?”

The answers to these questions can be found in the ways in which consumers consumed the nightclub environment and the relationships they developed to it and its inhabitants.

B. Why take the effort to construct, maintain, and defend an elective identity?

The nightclub itself is used as both a symbolic and material resource to construct, maintain, and defend identity. For some of my informants it provided a location to celebrate an otherwise stigmatized identity—in doing so it enhanced self-esteem and efficacy. It was a location where otherwise marginalized identities could be celebrated within the confines of a sanctuary that rewarded, rather than condemned, this identity. Informants described ways in which the nightclub helped them maintain and defend elements of their identity that were important to them but that they otherwise felt difficult to express outside of this environment. More importantly, in the context of this research, they described how they were able to achieve intrinsic rewards from the generation of fantasies of identity (Moore, 1994; Thornton, 1996).

“When I dance it’s a time when I am not thinking about anything. It’s a break with all reality. When I’m dancing I’m not thinking at all. Everything just flies out of me. When it’s gotten real busy I’ve gone and danced behind the pole because I don’t want people looking at me. I tell people that if I could do my life over again I would want to be a professional dancer: I enjoy it that much. I never had the opportunity.” (Ernesto)

"I made a conscious effort to not be who I was outside when I was there."
(Debby)

Debby and Ernesto describe ways in which the club allows them to positively break with reality. It is a chance for Ernesto, for the evening at least, to enact a fantasy of a life course not chosen. Though performed in public, it is a very private affair for him. Ernesto is able to live an identity as a dancer that he never had the opportunity to pursue. For a few hours every week he can be that person that he never had the opportunity to be. Debby uses the nightclub as pretend play when she chooses to not be who she is outside of this place.

We can look at several of the ways that the construction, maintenance and defense of elective identities in this environment was supported in the ways it enhanced all four components of the Identity Process Model—self-esteem, efficacy, distinction, and continuity (both place congruent and place referent) for informants. When it comes to addressing issues for my first research question, I find that these are most addressed by self-esteem and efficacy—the components most connected with actively playing.

a. The Role of Self-Esteem

We can see a link between elective identity and a place when being in the environment positively impacts self-esteem. For informants this was reflected in two important ways—a sense of belonging and a sense of joy while in this place. Many informants reported a sense of finding a home away from home in this place. It became a place where they were encouraged to be ‘who they really were’ in contrast to who they needed to be on a daily basis in the outside world. ‘Out there’ who they were was not appreciated, here it was. Subjects reported that this place was important to being who they ‘really’ were. The ability to let them be who they could not be in the rest of their lives was a source of great satisfaction and happiness for many informants. The belonging component was driven, more often, by others in the environment and resembles Consciousness of Kind from Muniz and O’Guinn (2001). The Consciousness of Kind experienced in this environment was different from what Muniz and O’Guinn describe because it wasn’t built around positive correlations (I am this and I recognize you are this too) but, often, around shared negative correlations (I am *not* that and recognize that you are *not* that too). It became “Consciousness of Not Kind”. This later feeds into distinction.

i. Self-Esteem and Belonging

The language used to describe the nightclub is one of sanctuary, haven, or retreat from an inhospitable outside world. Informants describe several ways in which they got significant benefits from the nightclub. Many described it as a type of second home, or what Oldenburg (1999) might call a third place.

"It feels like home, like a second home. When I started going there it was the safety." (Joyce)

"It was one of the few places you could feel at home." (Cindy)

"I felt like I belonged, people were genuinely friendly." (Bret)

"It was like going back home. It allowed me to be myself, to breathe. I know them, they know me, but we don't have to talk—nobody bothers me. I feel good when I see the same people. (Irene)

Informants equated this place with a home they might not have elsewhere. The place was identified as providing a positive emotional impact, usually associated with a sense of belonging that allowed them to be who they really were—not who they were for the outside world. The nightclub provided something that the outside world didn't—or couldn't.

"Neo is clearly constructed in a classic theater style where the dance floor is the middle and the lowest so that people can see you from all around. If you're on the dance floor, there's really no place that people can't see you from. It feels very much like you're the center of some kind of spectating. That's one of the things that is the appeal of Neo and Late Bar. The reason they tend to be so much of a destination and so much of a haven for so many of us is that if you like to live outside the norms of style or fashion or expression, it's not only a place where you can express yourself—because you can do that in your living room—but you can express yourself amongst people that are going to appreciate what you are doing but also be doing some similar things and therefore validating what you are doing as well. Similar, not necessarily in terms of the specifics, but just in terms of similarly following their own taste." (Leslie)

The nightclub provided more than a space for subjects to be who they wanted to be; it provided validation of that identity. Leslie compares it to a theater performance where the audience validates the performance—in this case because some of them are performing too. The club for Leslie provides mutual validation among members who may not be performing the same performance, but who recognize the similarities of the performances in which they engage (Consciousness of Not Kind). It's not enough to 'be yourself' in your living room at home; it is important to have a community of others who are also 'being themselves'. This is not about conformity to an externally-imposed set of norms; this is about setting their own standards and authentically living up to them. The subjects are not trading one set of externally determined norms for another; they are instead trading an external set of norms for a new set that they feel they are creating. They have chosen the standards by which they will be judged. Throughout the interviews subjects compared what they were doing to a judgmental and stifling mainstream, Leslie continues that thread here. Leslie and her peers are doing what they cannot do elsewhere.

When asked to clarify her use of the word 'haven' above, Leslie expands on the role of this place as someplace that enhances self-esteem. Leslie continues:

"I distinctly remember the first time I went into Neo and the first time I went there by myself. The first time I was able to go by myself and stay all night and just talk to other people and be completely comfortable. I remember coming home and writing in my journal. I guess 'haven' means to me a place that you can come and feel comfortable without having to do or be a certain way. It doesn't matter. You can be dancing, or can be sitting, you can be watching, you can be talking and just be accepted. I think that the ironic thing to me is that, if you go to a, for lack of a better shorthand, 'fratty' bar, like a Lincoln Park bar or a Wrigleyville bar, those places, even though people look more like each other than people do at Neo—there's much more of a uniform and people are much more in tune with a mainstream style—that, there's far less friendliness and far less willingness to

talk to strangers or talk to people because you've seen them once or twice or to start up a conversation and be outgoing." (Leslie)

This place makes her feel comfortable. There is no obligation to be a certain way and therefore the subject can be exactly how she wants to be. Regardless, she will be accepted. Here everyone can be different and *that* is what they share. 'Out there', where everyone is so similar, they are less friendly and less welcoming.

The idea of difference providing a sense of unity runs throughout the interviews I conducted. The emphasis for subjects was not on the commonalities shared by members, but on the ways in which each person's uniqueness was embraced. It was not a community of 'you are like me' but of 'you are different too'. It didn't have to be the same difference (if ever there was a way to use that phrase correctly, it's here). In a world full of greens, the blues and the reds share their difference and find commonality in 'not being green'. It was the camaraderie of "The Island of Misfit Toys"—'we are all out of place out there but *here* we embrace our differences as a commonality'.

Informants positioned themselves in reference to different salient groups based on their own identities.

"I got a tremendous sense of gratification from seeing a bunch of my age/my body type dancing next to a batch of young Mexicans. PE gave me a sense of belonging if only for those few hours." (Don)

Don (Puerto Rican, male, early 50s) focuses on his age, ethnicity, and body type as the relevant identifiers for himself. While it was important to him that there were others of his type (body and age), he sets these identifiers against the 'others' (in this case 'young' and 'Mexican') in the environment. There is a sense in Don's statement that these two groups would, elsewhere, not be compatible. Don expresses no desire to meet or know these others in the environment. What he values is the ability of these

different groups to be in the same place and enjoying the same things together. It is not about positive interaction but a lack of negative interaction. This is a theme we will also see later in place congruent continuity—the idea of a place being a representation of certain values that we consider important.

The anonymity of the place and the interactions therein was, ironically, seen as a positive thing. It seemed to provide a purity to the interactions in that they weren't based on other factors—like the innocence of children. Belonging was based more on the consciousness of kind than on personal, individual identities. Members recognize each other as fellow members of this community and that's enough. They shared a consciousness of kind.

“You like what I like. I feel good. I feel welcome. I know if I ask someone 'can you spare a quarter?' I get one. It's good that we don't know names. It's like we're kids. You know how kids can go to a park and just play, they don't need to know names. When I don't go I feel like I'm missing something. I go back to the park and play. These are my imaginary friends.” (Irene)

Irene doesn't care that she doesn't know names; names are irrelevant. She knows she will get a quarter if she needs one—in a sense, Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) 'moral responsibility'. Irene explicitly equates the whole experience of the nightclub with a child's playground. It is the activity (play) that is important, not who it is done with. All that matters is that one plays. I find it amazing that she calls the other participants her “imaginary friends”, since, after all, she's talking about real people. Since they don't have names and since they don't have identities outside of this environment they can be imaginary in the sense that they can be whoever she needs them to be to play the games she wants to play. She doesn't seem to objectify them and she doesn't seem to devalue them in any way, they are just there. They are part of her playscape and they fulfill a certain role within it. They are her dolls. She appreciates them, she wants to play

with them, and feels that not being there is to miss something. But, at the same time they are interchangeable because they don't have names. And yet, they are, in her mind, her friends:

"When people ask me where I was the night before I tell them I was 'visiting friends'." (Irene)

Irene is married to Joe, one of my other subjects. She and Joe would arrive relatively early in the evening, before crowds would arrive. Doors opened at 10:00p.m. and I don't think I ever saw them arrive later than 10:30 (I have, myself, arrived no later than 10:30, every week, for most of the last 10 years). They would take up a place in one corner of the dance floor and put their drinks on the same table every evening. They would dance together, interacting with no one, before leaving as the place would start to get crowded around midnight. Of all the subjects I interviewed they were the ones who knew no one's name when I tried to snowball my interviews (the only name they were able to provide was for someone who had stopped going there 7 years prior). They could suggest others to talk to, but it was by way of descriptors ("the guy who dances like...", "the one who always wears...", etc.).

Belonging, for most of the informants, did not necessitate actually knowing people. In fact, knowing them could get in the way of the experience of the place.

"That's another thing I like about Neo—I don't have to talk to people, it's all visual, it's all visual. For me, if I can go in and not say a word to anybody, that's just fine. I may form a relationship with somebody only visually, through dance. And that's very, very nice. Poetic." (Oscar)

"You end up having these non-relationship relationships. Sometimes that's what's good about it. We can have this respect for each other at a distance or a recognition which is beyond mere recognition but which is recognition without necessarily having to be BFF with everyone. There's something great about that." (Helene)

Oscar is building relationships and yet not talking to people. His relationships are built visually and he sees this as a place where he can do that. If he doesn't talk to someone then that is fine with him. The relationships he's interested in building are transitory—they exist within this space and do not go beyond it. Helene is having 'relationships at a distance', and, for her, there's something great about that. There is an unspoken communication for Helene, a "recognition which is beyond mere recognition". Helene is describing consciousness of kind. She is describing a sense of belonging to something that community members not only share, but know that they share without having to talk about it and become BFFs. They have respect for one another as members of this community without having to talk about that membership—they can just recognize it.

In a world of elective identity this is a useful tactic. Socializing and becoming friends provides an opportunity for real world identities to intrude on *this world* identities. If interactions are minimized to the visual and 'relationships at a distance' then there is less opportunity for there to be dissonance between the identity constructed here and the one that an informant resumes outside of this place.

i. Self-Esteem and Joy

"Walking in that place was the first time I felt joy. I was so adrift and so lost and then I found Neo." (Albert)

Self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves. Those things that bring us joy can be said to enhance that self-esteem—especially when the things that bring us joy are linked to who we are or how we define ourselves. There were plenty of ways in which self-esteem was enhanced through participation in the activities in these environments.

Gordon describes what Csikszentmihalyi would call flow. Gordon, like Irene and Joe, would often arrive early in the evening when few patrons were there. He could be seen bounding around the dance floor in ecstatic fits.

“I loved the feeling of coming into the place empty and giving everything I have until it was just exploding and when I look around and the place is full. That feeling of being a part of that explosion...that’s really...I love that.” (Gordon)

He is so intent on his dancing that he doesn’t even notice that the place has filled with patrons. Gordon continues this theme later in the interview when he talks about how the club facilitates that experience of joy:

“One of the things about Neo that’s great is that it’s such a theater. So the stage just opens up [N.B. there is no ‘stage’ in the club, he is referencing the dance floor here]. The architecture just makes the place. This idea that it just comes around you and it’s really dark so you can just kind of dissipate into the place. This place has a spirit and it’s alive. It’s got a vitality. It’s just as alive as you are. If I’m going to heaven, so is Neo.” (Gordon)

The nightclub, this club, allows him to dissipate into the place—to become one with it. He attributes spirit and life to it. It is fulfilling a positive role for him in his interaction with it.

When it comes to experiencing joy in the nightclub, it’s not surprising that I would see a connection between the music and the patrons. Music is, in many ways, the identifying element of the night under consideration—it is, after all, an 80s/New Wave themed event. It is the music that first brought most of the informants to the club. Helene, like several patrons, used the club and its music to cathartic effect. Several times she described how the music allowed her to let go of the cares of the week and experience joy.

“For me, music plays a part in it. I couldn’t dance it out to just any music. Something to do with the music, how much I love it and it makes me happy, in and of itself. The direct relationship to the music is so important.” (Helene)

Don sees the music as affirming and it elicits a markedly emotional response.

“There was a time when I would squeal like a Next Top Model contestant when some songs came on. I still squeal on the inside. It’s hard to find an affirming place.” (Don)

In both cases the informants are identifying more than a positive affect from the music. They describe deep emotional responses that influence how they see themselves.

Co-consumers played an important part in the enjoyment of the environment.

Informants saw their fellow insiders as direct contributors to their enjoyment.

“It’s just a simple moment of joy, and we get to enjoy one another.” (Joe)

“It’s like a family. We all meet there. It’s a weekly family reunion. Even though you don’t see them outside there, you love to see them and you hug. You don’t get that feeling elsewhere.” (Franklin)

“There’s this sense of heartfelt, warm community. This kind of one for all, all for one mentality. I see this constantly at Neo. If one of us falters, we all falter.” (Bret)

The enjoyment of these individuals is exclusively within this environment—because that is where these identities reside. Despite using words like ‘love’, ‘family’, and ‘community’, most informants maintained no contact with fellow community members outside of this environment—though some lived mere blocks apart, I discovered, in the course of my interviews.

b. The Role of Efficacy

Feelings of efficacy are maintained if the environment facilitates (or at least does not hinder) a person’s everyday lifestyle—they believe they are able to carry out their chosen activities in that environment. For some, that means they are free to live their everyday lifestyle free of harassment that they may experience on an ongoing basis in

the outside world. In Neo this is sometimes extended—this place is where they are allowed to be what they *can't be* every day in the outside world (but want to be). For these patrons, it is the everyday lifestyle that is being rejected—they experience self-efficacy here in that this place allows them to escape the false everyday lifestyle for their true, but repressed, desired lifestyle. People see play in this environment as a way to take control of their lives where they may not have that control outside this environment. This is someplace where they can be themselves—with the obvious implication that outside of here they cannot be themselves.

This efficacy expressed itself most often for informants in the form of freedom to dress as they wanted.

“When I was 12 years old, it was summer, I was watching Jenny Jones because I was supposed to be doing the laundry. There was a Club Kid on there who I wanted to be like. He was very well-known in Chicago. His name was Joey Orgasmo. I saw him on tv at 12 and they had all these other Club Kids too. Now, mind you, everything from Goth to very colorful. And I decided at 12 I was going to be a Club Kid. It took me until I was 25 when I started clubbing and it took me until about then until I finally got to go, okay, that's when the big hair came out and the big makeup. I had gone a couple of times but I had been very toned down because I didn't want to make a fuss yet. The I decided that if I'm going to be a plus-sized girl in a very heroin-chic world I'm going to be big and above the top—as my friends call me, a drag queen stuck in a woman's body. So I always had big hair and my boobs pushed up to my ears (accompanied by a inward and upward squeezing motion reminiscent of the corsets) and corsets and ball gowns. Now it's my gypsy skirts so I twirl and I dance as best I can and I try to keep up as best I can. I've done pretty well considering. That's probably where the costuming...I feel the need for, because of my aspirations as a 12 year-old. And as far as all my dreams as a kid, that's probably the only one I've ever achieved where people knew me by my first name and that was it. Because no one else in the scene legitimately had my name. It's fulfilled personal aspirations; I always wanted to be somebody. I don't know if it's an only child thing; I don't know if it's because my parents were always busy because they both were working and they always had their own issues. I always wanted to be something.” (Beryl)

The nightclub allowed Beryl to fulfill lifetime aspirations and be who she wanted to be. In the club environment she could 'be someone'. As a girl from Indiana with a

high school diploma she could avoid Bourdieu's 'social aging'. She can reject or postpone addressing the lack of opportunities presented to her and instead can, for a few hours every week, be the center of attention, or, as she said elsewhere, "a sightseeing object".

Gordon represents the other side of the coin. Despite his success in life climbing to the top of the corporate ladder, he, nonetheless, also felt a lack of efficacy.

"I had spent a lot of time climbing the corporate ladder and I made it all the way to the top and then I wanted to collect. Collecting meant I wanted to get my life back. They take your life away from you as a little child. They take it away from you. Everybody. Your culture. Your parents . Your school. Your church. Everybody. If you want love you have to give back what they're giving and you have to do what they want. I spent my whole life just trying to wear what I wanted to wear. What the fuck is that?" (Gordon)

His corporate life had taken away all the elements of his 'real' self as he had to trade them in for corporate success. Now, at the top of his career, he wants to cash in and get it all back. He sees this place as someplace where he can do that. Gordon is almost militant about his rejection of the corporate ethos that has given him substantial material success and little personal satisfaction. He returns to the subject later in his interview:

"I have no idea how I appear to anybody else exactly. I do know that I go to die. I said to the bartender, "if you're not dead in the first hour you're not really trying". I felt that way. You should die in action and you should kill yourself. No one should be able to kill you—not cancer, not a bus, not the fucking business people. You should be allowed to die in a romantic manner, the way you lived your life, something you believed in not something they imposed upon you. Neo for me is really an escape from those restrictions." (Gordon)

Gordon is a professional at the top of his field and should, by all rights, be experiencing more freedom than most people when it comes to a work environment. Still, he feels it necessary to escape and here is where he does so.

Freedom to wear what people wanted in their everyday life ran the gamut for the nightclub experience. In the course of his interview Albert discussed his brief career

doing drag and, several times, compared nightclubbing to it. In response to a direct question comparing the two he responded:

Interviewer: "Is going to Neo like drag?"

"Sort of. How you're expected to look and act a certain way for 8 or more hours a day for five days a week. But how you're expected to look and act is not really who you are. So, Neo is similar to drag in that I can put something else on and be somebody else that I can't be during the day. On special nights, like prom night or the anniversary—any night where you amp it up a little bit—I love those nights." (Albert)

Albert also escapes who the corporate world makes him be. It is the assumption of an elective identity for the night. It is during the work day that he is forced to be 'not really who you are'. He gains special satisfaction from special nights where he can let loose even more.

Leslie is freer than most in her work environment. As a university-level educator (with tenure), she has more freedom than most of my other informants in regards to dress.

"I think that for me, personally, when I first came to Chicago and I'd just finished grad school, I felt this need to sort of, like, definitely, I felt internal pressure to act or to look a little bit more conventional and professional and formal than tends to be my instinct. That quickly fell away and fortunately <work> is a place where you don't have to do that. Finding a place where I could be freer than I was when I was in grad school was really important. So, for me, I guess, a lot of it is the music I listen to and what my politics are. But it's certainly dress and hair and (used to be) more piercings than it is, and tattoos and body modification. I also tend to be pretty changeable in that, I'm going to look a lot different when I'm going out than I probably would just out on the street because I'm so often on my way to a work thing when I'm on the street. That being said, obviously I don't mind going into the classroom with purple hair, whatever, because I think it's really important for students to see that you can be all the things you want to be, you don't have to pick and choose. That you should challenge what people think and you don't have to. That you should challenge what people think and you don't have to look a certain way to be smart or serious or intellectually engaged." (Leslie)

Leslie sees the freedom to dress in distinct ways as a way of rejecting societal prejudices. It is her way of asserting that a woman with purple hair, tattoos, and piercings, dressed in an unconventional style, can still be 'smart or serious or intellectually engaged'—though even she acknowledges that she often restrains her self-expression during the day.

Arlene echoes these sentiments

"I spent a lot of my life showing people what they would be comfortable seeing. Here I can do and wear whatever I want. I was home because I still fit in. There's room for me to be here, even if no one knows who I am. I was welcome to be there because I was there." (Arlene)

Again and again informants credited this nightclub with allowing them to be who they wanted to be—and that expression took the form of dress. The other form the rejection of expectations took—and the freedom the club allowed—was when it came to dance.

Irene brings us both:

"I feel young, I feel 24, I can dress the way I want and dance the way I want. I can do what I want." (Irene)

Dance was frequently mentioned for both its intrinsic rewards and, instrumentally, as a cathartic release mechanism.

"I've thought about this before. It is this important experience for me. Each week, if not each week then every few weeks, it's an exceptional experience for me... The pure physicality of the dancing is cathartic. There's definitely the bodily element of it. Working out you're working out toward an ideal. I understand working out because I run, there's been times in my life where I run. I've been an athlete and I participate in sports. I understand the physicality of that. To go to the gym to work out is still attached to some ideal toward which you're working out, which is different than dancing which is not a workout. It's not bound up with that same teleology, that same kind of working toward something other than itself. Working out often is for the sake of losing those ten pounds or maintaining health even—which is the goal as opposed to enjoyment as its own activity." (Helene)

Chris continues the thought and extends it to religious proportions.

“Dancing is a different thing to a lot people. To a lot of people it’s a mating ritual. To me, and a lot of people I know, it’s more cathartic. It’s kind of a dervish thing. There’s sort of a spiritual quality to dancing if you are really feeling it. And that’s the experience I’m going for. It’s a high. For me, it’s just like another narcotic. When it’s really right, when I’m really in it, it’s like being drunk or high.” (Chris)

Dancing is alternately a high, an intoxicant, or a narcotic for Chris. The music and dancing allows Chris to reach religious levels of self-awareness.

Informants described ways in which play in the nightclub—often in the form of dress or dance—allowed players to achieve personal satisfaction. It allowed them to be who they wanted to be when the outside world did not allow them to be so. Play in the nightclub created a safe space for otherwise challenged identities to play freely. It was a liminoid space where these identities could exist freely in a world (playscape) that operated under a different set of rules from the one they left behind before they entered.

C. What Role Does the Environment Play in Affecting Elective Identity Consumption Processes?

I answer the question of the role of the playscape in elective identity games by showing how the nightclub provides continuity—both place congruent continuity and place referent continuity—for these elective identities.

a. The Role of the Nightclub

The nightclub is a servicescape and a designed experience with recognizable tangibles—the décor of the space itself, drinks, and music are obvious examples. But the value of the nightclub experience went far beyond the assumed services and tangibles offered. The environment itself was seen as playing an important role in the identity play informants were able to engage in. For many of my informants it moved

beyond a mere servicescape into a playscape for identity play. Yes, they consumed space (dance floor), drinks, and music. But they also consumed the nightclub symbolically. They derived value from the club beyond—even in contrast to—what the service provider was providing. For many of my informants the nightclub provided a kind of backstage (Goffman 1959) for their identity play—and when that backstage was intruded upon, they felt threatened.

The playscape of the nightclub allowed informants to leave behind their real-world identities and, for a brief period of time, assume whatever fantasy identity they wanted. It provided continuity in the form of being a referent for identity in and of itself—it had an identity that informants could refer to and attach their identity to—and it was seen to express values which informants could find congruent with their own identities. As such, we can link it to elements of identity and place attachment—specifically *place referent continuity* and *place congruent continuity*.

The nightclub was highly influenced by the others in the environment. It provided a validating (and, sometimes, an invalidating) audience for the identity performances therein. It is in the festival literature that we can see this most clearly. Festivals are a community's way of demonstrating its values and ideals to both internal (validating) and external (potentially invalidating) audiences. The festival celebration is a communication device. The nightclub is no different. The performance in the nightclub can be a means for communities—and especially elites within those communities—to communicate community values to both audiences. Where previous festivals are primarily celebrations of ascribed identities based on religion (Christmas) or nationality (Fourth of July); the nightclub offers the opportunity for elective identities to engage in the same

celebration and communication. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) point to the separation of place from community in consumption-based communities; I find that place can enhance community—adding an additional (arguably necessary) referent for identity and continuity for its members.

The nightclub, in many respects, is the natural progression of several trends in regards to the festival (and life itself) in the modern world. We are increasing in tune with a work week rather than seasonal cycles around planting and harvesting (our school system being the obvious anachronism here). The duration of festivals has increasingly shortened along with the work cycle. We no longer celebrate week-long harvest festivals at the end of seasons, but rather the weekend and the 'three-day weekend' (one could argue that Memorial Day and Labor Day in the United States fulfill something of a vestigial role as seasonal festival anchors on either side of summer). Festivals are increasingly institutionally-planned events with organizing committees, licenses, permits, sponsors, and the like rather than communities celebrating important events in their shared lives.

Consumers play social elective identity games in many contexts. Belk (2000) describes the various games at play in Las Vegas (pig out, etc.) and how Las Vegas not only allows these games but even facilitates them—the nightclub is no different. Consumer society provides individuals with the various props—symbolic and material—to play elective identity games and consumers adapt these props to the games they want to play. But one can't play just any game on any playing field. A playscape can influence the games played within it. It can facilitate or discourage particular games—an open, oblong field is better for soccer or football than it is for baseball; a square or

diamond-shaped field might be better suited for baseball with its need of an outfield. Elective identity games are no different in that different playscapes can facilitate different games. The ability of the playscape to do this, I argue, is the very reason individuals can build attachments to it—because it provides continuity of important identity elements that become inextricably linked with this place.

“When I first started going I could play ‘pretendsies’. I was using Neo as the romantic side of my relationship which I didn’t have. It filled a void. (Beryl)

‘Pretendsies’ filled a definite need in Beryl’s life that she wasn’t getting fulfilled outside the environment. The place enabled this game by being someplace she could safely play this it.

a. Continuity

Individuals will be motivated to preserve a continuity of their self-concept (Breakwell 1986, 1993; Twigger-Ross and Uzell, 1996). Here I am most concerned with continuity in two forms—*place referent continuity* and *place congruent continuity*. *Place referent continuity* is when the place provides a reference for identity through the continuation of past experiences and relationships with that place. The place itself is the referent to which the person attaches their identity. It is the difference between “I live in Chicago” (where Chicago is not a referent for identity and merely a place one lives) and “I am a Chicagoan” (where Chicago is a referent for identity). Place referent continuity can happen at different levels from the neighborhood to the nation. *Place congruent continuity* is maintaining continuity “via characteristics of places which are generic and transferable from one place to another” (Twigger-Ross and Uzell, 1996, p208). People seek places felt to be congruent with their own values and will look for places in which

to live that seem to represent those values. “This place is tolerant, like me”. When a place is seen to be no longer congruent, people leave (Feldman, 1990).

i. Place Referent Continuity and the Research Site

When it comes to a nightclub, place referent continuity would normally be hard to establish—and would be pushing the lower limit of the type of place to which people develop continuity—most place attachment research deals with home, neighborhood, or city (Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001). Place referent continuity is generally applied to places with a long enough history that they can establish an identity and have a reputation of their own or which are a significant part of a person’s life experience (the home in which they were born, for example). Nightclubs don’t usually have the long-term continuity of the places that are normally considered—neighborhoods, cities, towns, etc. Nonetheless, it is still possible to do so in the case of the nightclub under examination in this study. I am looking at a club that has been operating continuously in the same location for over 33 years. Despite the occasional media story or other rumors of its impending demise, it has remained open since 1979 without any name changes and only one change of ownership. During that time it has maintained a consistent reputation as a non-mainstream club. While the neighborhood it is in has grown and changed, it has remained the same—though some do point out the changing nature of some of the markers that have identified it as non-mainstream, particularly in music.

ii. Consumers and Continuity

Subjects recognize the longstanding nature of the club and see it as something positive—a recognition that its longevity is a sign that the club is doing something right.

“The core idea of Neo is a luck that they’ve been able to stay there and open for so long. To cater to a particular group of people.” (Kirk)

“There’s this kind of consistency there too where, in certain scenes, there’s a new club that becomes popular every couple of years. Whereas, Neo, yeah, things have changed on Thursday nights for sure but it’s been what it is to a certain extent for 35 years. It’s not at all about where’s the latest hot spot, or who’s the latest hot guy, or what’s the latest hot style, or what’s the latest music, it’s absolutely this kind of continuity that, because it’s not defined by the mainstream is not touched by a lot of mainstream changes. There’s a consistency in terms of that kind of commitment to individuality and commitment to allowing people to be who they want to be, and commitment to saying “Fuck you” to societal expectations. But also I think with that comes a commitment to individual friendships and those networks of friendships.” (Leslie)

Not only has it stayed open, but it is perceived as consistent in its identity². Leslie explicitly points to the continuity of the club. She sets it apart from ‘certain scenes’ where a new club becomes popular ‘every couple of years’. Its identity lies in a ‘not being’ as much as in ‘being’. It is not mainstream—and is therefore seen as being immune to some of the vulnerabilities of mainstream clubs (trendiness, changing music tastes).

This continuity is reflected in the relations of the people there. There is an obvious recognition of fellow insiders and a continuity of shared co-presence even when there is no interaction. Cindy demonstrates this when referring to people that she “knows” even though she can’t tell you their name.

“There are people I’ve ‘known’ for years and years and I say hello to but don’t know their name.” (Cindy)

² Consistency and continuity need not be the same. Consistency usually refers to being the same over time. Continuity can involve change as long as it continues along an extant trajectory.

It is their continued presence in the environment that is important in identifying them as an insider and community member. Their name is irrelevant, their participation is what defines them.

iii. Place Referent Continuity and a Golden Age

The place carries with it attachments to times and places that are important and the club becomes an emplacement of those times and places—it become symbolic of that golden age. Rather than using goods to displace meaning (McCracken 1988) to a golden age, the subjects I talked to used a place, the nightclub, as a bridge to that displaced golden age. It became a symbol of a better life in a better time and place and represented those idealized values.

“Neo is a return to childhood for me. The best way to escape to the other world is to dance. Neo is the invisible world.” (Gordon)

“It’s a continuation of how you used to be. Back in high school. You were a goth or a punk or a jock or whatever...But it’s still something that you like.” (Joyce)

“For a lot of people the music that [the DJ] plays is the music they were listening to in high school or college or earlier that very few other people were listening to. It was definitely the weird music that weird people listened to, because, you know those little markers are so important when you’re in high school. So, to have a place where you could hear it played out loud, not just in your room, and other people not only get it and like it but were listening to it in their rooms when they were the only person in their high school who got it. I think there is something about that, not just validation but glorification of something that was marginalized at a point in the past where it may have seemed that you were going to be marginalized forever. That is very validating. Most people just want to be able to be themselves and be accepted for that. That’s what you get in these places. You might not have anybody else who looks exactly like you or has exactly your style or like every single song you do but you can be whoever you want to be and be in a safe place to do it.” (Leslie)

This place, here and now, becomes a concretized symbol of something much larger. It comes to represent an idealized past that never was but could have been. In

this place the marginalization experienced in the past is lost and, instead, individuals are validated for the very thing that marginalized them previously. Then you were mocked and scorned, here you are celebrated. You were alone in your room then, you are amongst those who accept you now.

iv. These Values are Part of *This* Place

This place becomes the emplacement of ideals—specifically tolerance and acceptance. This exceptional place becomes someplace where subjects can escape the imperfections of the outside world and retreat to an ideal space

“A place where you can go and be yourself and dance to 80s music. Re-create your youth. Where you can be yourself, nobody bothers you. Nobody cares about the way you look or who you are.” (Kirk)

“It’s a time and place. It takes you back.” (Joe)

Subjects identify values as being associated with this particular place. This is not necessary something that could be encountered anywhere, it is a characteristic of this place

“You get it or you don’t. There’s a sense of meaning there that’s particular to the space that’s produced by the people that are there and their relationship to each other and their relationship to the music. My friend had said, “if you don’t go to Neo, you don’t get me” and that proclamation made perfect sense to me. This idea of there being this kind of meaning there.” (Helene)

The place has meaning that insiders understand. They are a part of it by their relationship with the elements that identify insiders from outsiders. The place is integral to who informants see themselves as being. “If you don’t go, you don’t get me” positions the place in the eyes of this informant as central to their identity, an inseparable part of who they are.

Some go so far as to add a spiritual element to it all.

“If you believe in the spirit world, and you believe in the Indians (that’s my thing), then you would dance until you reach the spirit world. That’s what the Indians would do. And that’s what Neo means.” (Gordon)

Later, Gordon compares the club to a Catholic church seeing symbolic references in the shared elements.

“Let me tell you about Neo. First of all it’s dark. It’s really important that if you’re going to have rituals or a sense of...you know, I grew up in the Catholic church which was dark. The spirit came through the windows. The stories came through the windows. The incense, the bells ringing, the pageantry. The colors represented something. If Jesus went to heaven it was gold or white. If we were in pain it was purple. When he died it was black. Well our club has colors too—it’s black. It celebrates death. Death is the key to rebirth. I love the idea that the punk scene is about killing something that doesn’t work and maybe something new will come out of it.” (Gordon)

Patrons even invoked the location and layout of the club as contributing factors.

While its address may be a mainstreet, the entrance to the club is actually down a long alley. This alley (see photos in Appendix), in and of itself, gave gravity to the location.

“Going through the alley sets it up as something special, something different. It has a mystique.” (Ernesto)

“There’s something about Neo, the way it’s structured (walking through the alley). You’ve changed the mixture.” (Gert)

“I like the layout of the club, I like the layout of the dance floor, I love the space. I love that it’s down an alley. There’s just a bunch of things that make it an interesting bar. I love that it’s been there forever and been true to what it is. Growing and changing and morphing over time but still remaining fairly...very few bars can claim that. I give them a lot of props for being what they are so well. They’ve carried an audience. I really respect and appreciate what Neo is...You would see that in a movie like ‘Desperately Seeking Susan’. That would be the bar they would go to. There’s this essence of ‘you have to know this place’. A throwback to a speakeasy vibe to it. When you are on Clark and you walk there and you turn the corner and you have this—what is it, 50-yard walk—that builds the anticipation. The second you turn that corner and start heading down that alley there’s a sense of event before you get to the door. I like that sort of sense of ‘I’m entering the inner sanctum now’. The music’s getting louder as you walk down the alley. It’s just an aesthetic; a cinematic appeal to it.” (Chris)

The place itself is given a sense of importance and significance independent of the activities happening within. The alley acts as a liminoid space signaling a transition from one state to another, from one world (the real world) to another (the world of Neo).

v. Place Congruent Continuity

Maintaining continuity via characteristics of places which are generic and transferable from one place to another is place congruent continuity. The nightclub also can demonstrate place congruent continuity. It is not the place where they will live, but, still represents a significant place in their life—a ‘third place’ (Oldenburg 1999). Place congruent continuity provides a great explanation for why this place, in fact, is a third place for many of my informants. It was seen as a representation of who they were and their values. It represented values that they considered important.

By looking at the terms informants used to describe the place we can see the values they consider important. Helene places an emphasis on the permissiveness of the place. This is not a sexual permissiveness, but a permissiveness in the sense of possibilities of relationships.

“I like the seeming contradiction of there being so many different people there. It’s a seeming contradiction because of course there’s no space that is a universal space, that’s an ideal. In terms of a permissive space or where people are allowed to have their own relationship to the music or the space, it’s really exceptional in that regards...It’s a permissive space. There’s this range of these possible relations to the music and the people and the space.” (Helene)

Gordon uses the place as a way of expressing himself and his creativity.

“I’m an artist, not a designer. My art is me. [note: subject is a world-class recognized designer.] In 2001 I re-questioned everything in my life and I ended up back at Neo. I ended up back at a place where I could express myself and my spirit could explode and become alive.” (Gordon)

Despite working in a creative job in a creative field, it is here that he comes to express himself. Gordon's daily activities at work are what most people would consider creative acts—architectural design work. His daily routine includes free time drawing on his commute and his home includes volumes of his own artwork. And yet, this is where he feels he can express himself.

Chris sees it as important that the activities here be seen as more than mere hedonic pursuits. This is a place for creative people who can think 'outside the box', who question things.

"In some ways I think it is a thinking person's bar. I don't mean academic, just a thinking person's bar. People that...think outside the box, to use a cliché, people who question things. People who do not just take what is fed to them, probably seekers. Whether that's just a musical seeker or that seeking goes further into other aspects of their lives. I felt an instant connection to the place when I walked in." (Chris)

He emphasizes agency (when he mentions 'people who don't take what is fed to them') and inquisitiveness ('seekers'). The place had these ideals and, through their presence, the place made an instant connection to him.

vi. Here is Where I Find *My* People

Finally, for some, it was the very continuity of the crowd. That because a certain type of person was found here, being here made it more likely that you too were going to be seen as that kind of person.

"The regulars gave a sense of continuity. You could go here to find people. I was amazed at the number of very educated, creative, artistic people I met there."
(Don)

Don, a writer, finds comfort in the number of educated, creative, and artistic people he found here—positive identifiers for a writer and academic looking for a place to affirm his own identity.

D. [How] do Players Differentiate Between Other Players and Spectators Within a Playscape?

With these weekly celebrations of consumption-based elective identities we are faced with the dilemma of identifying our fellow celebrants from the mere observers. Similarly, others may be celebrating at the same times and in the same places we are. With a wider range of possible elective identities offered by a wider range of consumption choices, how do we know who's who? Who's playing, who's watching, and who's in the way?

When we talk about elective identity games we need to remember that even though there may be many people playing at the same time in the same place, they may not be playing *with* each other. To some extent the identity games at play in these environments are solo games played in the company of others. Similarly, we need to remember that not all games are competitive, some are cooperate. They more resemble Carse's (1986) "infinite games" or Suit's (1978) "open games"—games that are played so that they can continue to be played, not so that they can be concluded. You don't 'win' these games so much as you get to continue playing. As such, the other players don't always matter—until their games somehow interact with the game the player is themselves playing. It is this interaction which is, ultimately, the determinant of how 'the other' is classified.

a. Us, Not Us, and Them

Players recognize other players, first and foremost, who are playing the same game(s) that they are. They are the 'Us' in the environment. They provide validation for the games the players are playing. What I find, however, is that this is not an "Us versus Them" dyad. The relations within the environment are actually more of a triad—Us, Not Us, and Them.

Those individuals whose play supports a player's play, or who are playing the same game as the player but playing it independently, are 'Us'. This can be seen in this research in the person of fellow insiders. It is why informants could identify others who were, by all appearances, significantly different from themselves as fellow insiders. They could recognize them as either playing the same or similar games or as the sympathetic and knowing audience—the fans and supporters. Even if they are not directly involved in the play of the game, they know the games being played and understand the rules. They appreciate the game when it is played well by others. Us can be fellow players but they can also be the spectators watching the game.

Those whose play is irrelevant to my play, neither helping nor hindering my play, are 'Not Us'. They serve as a reminder of the outside world against which many were positioning their identity. They were embodiments of that amorphous and ever-present entity, the 'mainstream'. The mainstream served as "who we aren't", which often seemed more important than "who we are". The mainstream provided a useful 'other' against which identity was constructed and the members of this group provided a safe reminder of that mainstream by being present yet, at the same time, also served as a

reminder of whose world this was by their lack of interference. They straddled the divide between being positively 'one of us' (because, for some, they could potentially become 'one of us') and negatively 'one of them' (because they also could move easily into this category as well). While present, they were an audience of acceptable outsiders to whom the community's 'festival' communicated its messages. They were necessary in the sense that a performance needs an audience of some kind. But the need for that audience did not mean that the performers felt any necessary camaraderie with the audience. They were the solid spectators who never took part or they were the non-participants, off in the corner, doing their own thing.

Those whose play disrupts or prevents one's play are 'Them'. They ruin the game for others playing it. In Bartle's typology, they were the Killers. In my research, they are represented most often by what the insiders called 'tourists' and what I call the shadow archetypes. Tourists were those individuals who entered into the environment in order to either gawk at participants (thereby bringing in the outside world against which this place was supposed to be a sanctuary) or to actively disrupt the goings on (thereby preventing the play of the game). They bring the outside world into a place where it has been consciously excluded, destroying its status as a sanctuary. They are the equivalent of streakers running across the football field (who turn the playing field into something else) or hecklers in a theater (who destroy the theatrical illusion of the audience being an outsider eavesdropping on the scene on stage). They destroy the otherworldly nature of the playscape—its bounded reality with its own time, space, and rules—and reassert the outside world's presence (and hegemony). Play creates an

illusory, temporary world; Tourists/Killers/Them collapse that world and reassert the 'real' world.

In order to differentiate themselves from these shadow archetypes, participants established some form of distinctiveness. This was done in several ways.

b. Distinctiveness

In looking at distinctiveness as an element of place and identity it is important to identify how the place plays a role in lifestyle and the special relationship the individual has with that environment (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996). How is this relationship different from the person's other relationships? What I have found in my interviews is that these consumers use the nightclub to provide distinctiveness in a number of ways.

There cannot be an outside without an inside. The first form of distinctiveness we can see is the recognition that there is, in fact, a community of insiders that can then be compared to other communities or outsiders in general. Patrons of these nightclub environments recognize all the elements of a community—shared consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). In a perhaps strange twist, the separation of geography from identity as a determining characteristic of community in favor of the brand now sees a return of geography to a central role as the nightclub provides a new locus of elective identity. Where the previous focus was on residence or neighborhood, the new focus is on activity and identity. The nightclub provides a home for the elective identity and thereby becomes the new place in identity. Where individuals attached to where they lived when dealing with ascribed identities, they now attach to where 'they are who they want to be'

with elective identities—especially when those identities are problematic in those other locations.

What I find is that we can look at distinctiveness around three important ideas: the recognition of the existence of a community, the characterization of outsiders, and the rules, rituals, and behaviors that divide one group from the other.

*i. **Consciousness of Kind***

The patrons I interviewed had a clear recognition of who were, and what constituted, an insider. They had a consciousness of kind. While they may not know their names—and in most cases they didn't—they recognized their fellow insiders and can pick them out of the crowd.

“I like Wednesdays because the crowd is always, like, 75% the same people. It's comforting to come in and see familiar faces...Part of what's unique about this place is that people respect what other people are about. They may not do the same things as them or like the same music, but they respect their differences.” (Florence)

Florence sets the place apart from other places (it is unique) in that this is a place where ‘people respect what other people are about’. It becomes the positive identifier for people who are ‘from’ this place.

“At one time I thought it was the education of people. I thought people there were more educated. But I found it wasn't that. There's something different about them.” (Kirk)

“I think what is great about the place is that you could look around and see all these different people doing their own thing. There's goths over here, punks over here, new wavers, transvestites, trixies, and a bunch of other groups [throughout this description the subject gestures as if visualizing the club space, pointing to different locations and 'positioning' each group described within it.]. They didn't always interact a lot but they respected what each other was doing. And if an outsider messed with anyone, they each had each other's back.” (Debby)

For Debby, the thing that distinguished this place from others—what made it great—was that here (and not somewhere else) all these divergent groups could come together. This is a place where they could be respected—even by those who might not share their flavor of divergence. The use of the word ‘trixie’ in this is rather interesting. Trixies, something of a Chicagoism, is a derogatory term that arose in the 1990s to describe a particular variety of post-college sorority girls, usually in their 20s or early 30s, populating the trendy Chicago neighborhood of Lincoln Park. The stereotypical Trixie drives a Jetta, carries a Kate Spade bag, and carries in her manicured hands a latte from Starbucks (with an overly long description) while being concerned only with social climbing, trendiness, and chasing their (also post-college) fraternity jock counterparts. Yet, Debby gives them a place in the menagerie.

ii. Similarity in Our Difference

The diverse nature of the members of this community presents an apparent problem for recognizing commonalities within the community. As an alternative nightclub there could be several similar, yet distinct, subcultures—goths, punks, new wavers—all together in one place. Chris expresses the idea more fully.

“For the people who are regulars, for the people that choose that place, there is definitely a continuum of type of person who goes there. It’s a broad spectrum but people tend to relate very easily. It’s a very welcoming bar in so much as—I’m a regular now—if me or a handful of other people who are regulars there notice that someone has been in there repeatedly (maybe 3 times) people will walk up to the person and introduce themselves and “welcome in the other freaks” if you will. You’re obviously coming here regularly and something is appealing to you. People try to make it a family atmosphere.” (Chris)

The importance here was not the individual consumption identities but a broader shared identity, defined by the place, which transcended those more visible identities.

While patrons certainly had relevant, salient identities attached to these subcultural consumption patterns, they also had a larger community defined by their mutual distinctiveness when compared to the outside world. Chris speaks of ‘welcoming in the other freaks’. “Freak”, in this community, shares a lot of commonalities with the words “nigger” and “queer” within their respective communities—a word that is accepted and embraced by (some/most) insiders when used *by insiders*, but unacceptable and condemned when used by outsiders. What “freak” does provide is ‘a useful identifier for members of the community and a central focus for imagining their community’ (Anderson, 2006). It provides a way for the disparate styles in dress and music within the scene to be reconciled and unified. They may share nothing but their common status as freaks, but this is enough. Future research—beyond the scope of this exploration—could fruitfully explore more fully the use of the word “freak”.

For some it was not necessarily about being this or that, it was about not being. They define themselves by what or who they are not. As a result, the only thing that matter was ‘not being’ something.

“That desperation to be different, I’ve always had that. I don’t know why. Sports was never a way I was going to stand out or get attention. I think I probably started to gravitate towards this direction really young. I guess looking for an identity.” (Albert)

“What I long for when I go to a Neo is maybe when there were more of us who were trying to be individuals but at the same time trying to find a community.” (Michael 1230)

While still looking for what he wanted to be, Albert could identify what he refused to be. He knew he wanted to be different, but what that would look like is undefined. Michael sees those who are here as trying to be individuals, while the undifferentiated others are not. His statement implies that others are not trying to be individuals and

says so in a way that clearly implies a superiority to that trying. At the same time he also seeks a community of those individuals. Uniformity is not necessary for this community. Members often define themselves more by who they aren't than by who they are.

E. Player Archetypes

In “Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, and Spades” Bartle takes on how players in MUDs—Multi-User Dungeons—approach play with the artificial environments and the way they derive satisfaction from their play. The research has since been extended and applied to MMORPGs—Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Games (*Everquest*, *World of Warcraft*, etc.). MUDs and MMORPGs are artificial (synthetic) worlds, often games but not necessarily so, that create a designed experience (Pine and Gilmore 1998) for those who play them. Synthetic worlds aren't always games. Sometimes they are environments for play where there is no ‘winning’. *Second Life* is a prime example. People *can* play games within *Second Life*, but it itself is not a game, it is a simulated, synthetic world. In any computer-mediated synthetic world players generally login to a server, assume the role of a character (represented by an avatar on their computer screen), and interact with the world and their fellow players. According to Bartle, different players get different satisfactions from different interactions within these synthetic worlds. Since they are created, designed, and populated by the programmers that create them (along with the players that play them in many cases), they are a designed experience not unlike the retail or service environment that is designed to create a particular customer shopping experience. A nightclub patron travels to a club, shows proof of age pays a cover charge (logs in), assumes a character (in many cases)

different from their everyday persona, and interacts with the synthetic world of the nightclub and their fellow patrons.

In business we deal with designed experiences in both retail and service environments—some subtly, others explicitly. Niketown, Rain Forest Café, ESPN Zone, and Medieval Times, to name a few, are designed experiences. A nightclub is a designed experience. Disney World is a designed experience. Las Vegas is a designed experience. Bartle is constrained by his particular type of designed experience—the MUD. There is much more explanatory power when the consumer experience of player is properly laid out—something which Bartle suggests in his approach, but doesn't achieve.

As previously discussed, play can be solo or group activity, against others or cooperative with others, explicit or tacit, and open or closed. It can involve competition (sports), chance (gambling), simulation (make believe), and/or vertigo (dizziness and disorder). Players can play several games—even contradictory ones—simultaneously and different players can be playing different games within the same playing area, the playscape.

It has been my contention that nightclubs are an ideal play environment where consumers play a variety of games. I start my revision of Bartle by applying it to the nightclub. In looking at the games being played in the nightclub I borrow from Berne and his *Games People Play*. While Berne focuses on the negative games that people play in relationships, I argue that we can also identify games, both positive and negative, that people play in nightclubs—games like *hookup*, *catch-and-release*, *look at me*, *drunk*, *gotcha*, and various forms of *elective identity* to name a few. These games consumers

play in nightclubs are a form of consumption distinctly free from necessity and closest to play.

What Bartle provides is a somewhat useful start for understanding how different types of players approach synthetic game worlds in which they can interact with other players. But I think he got it wrong, especially if we move beyond MUDs and MMORPGs. Bartle identifies his archetypes based on two axes. On one axis he puts *Players* at one end and *World* at the other. On the other axis he puts *Act Upon* at one end and *Interact With* at the other. We end up with the matrix in figure 4.

In the four quadrants created by these axes he puts his four main player types:

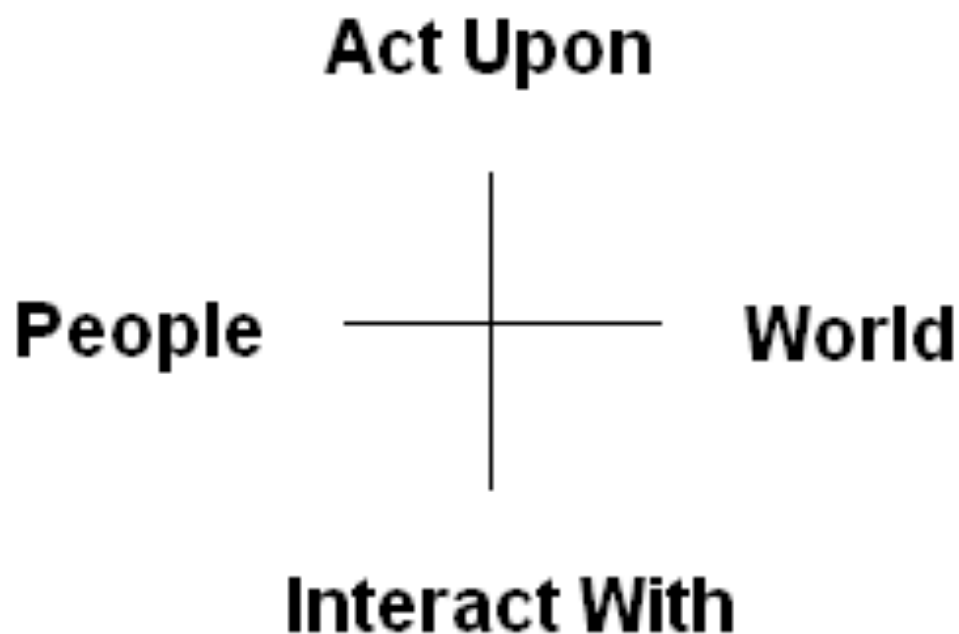


Figure 4: Bartle's Action and Object Axes

Achievers Act Upon the World; Socializers Interact With Players; Explorers Interact With the World; and Killers Act Upon other Players. We end up with figure 5.

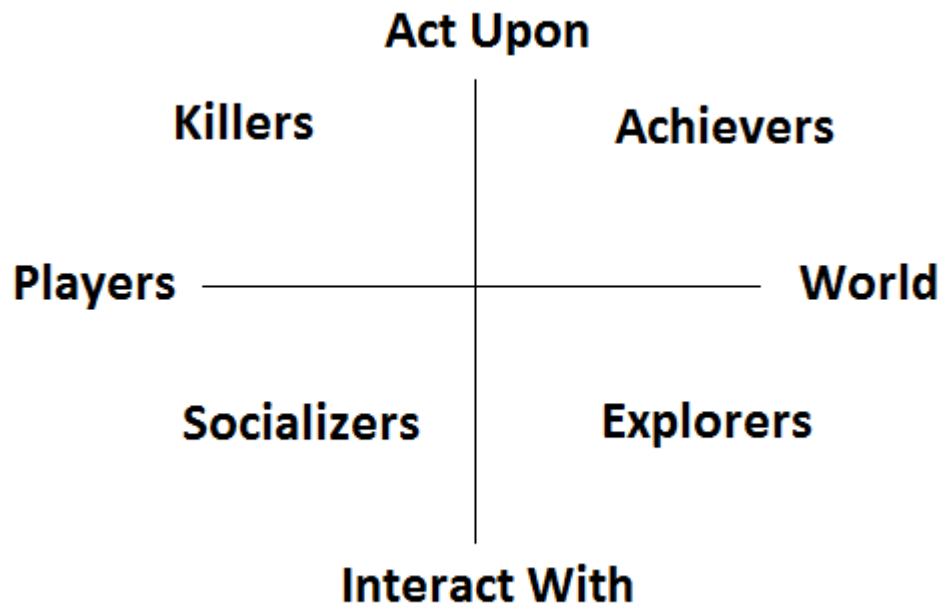


Figure 5: Bartle's Player Archetypes

There are several major flaws with this formulation. First, I believe that “Act Upon” should be “Actively Playing”. These are the participants who are *doing*. They are playing the game to ‘win’ or succeed. The polar opposite of “Actively Playing” should be “Passively Playing” not “Interact With”. These suggest the Active Participation and Passive Participation of Pine and Gilmore (1998). Acting and Interacting are too similar—they’re both active—whereas “Actively Playing” and “Passively Playing” are quite different. The audience is still part of the performance and the fan is still part of the game; they just don’t actively play in the game. I believe Bartle’s over-emphasis on the active is a bias created by the fact that he is dealing with explicit games (MUDs) and is

also a gamer and game designer himself. As such, I believe, he doesn't really consider the idea of someone who is there, in the game, but not participating in some way. People in video games *play* those games. What Bartle doesn't take into account is that not everyone is there to play in every game—at least not play the same game as everyone else is playing. This is especially relevant in a playscape like an online game that doesn't really lend itself to spectating. The basic matrix, therefore, should look like this:

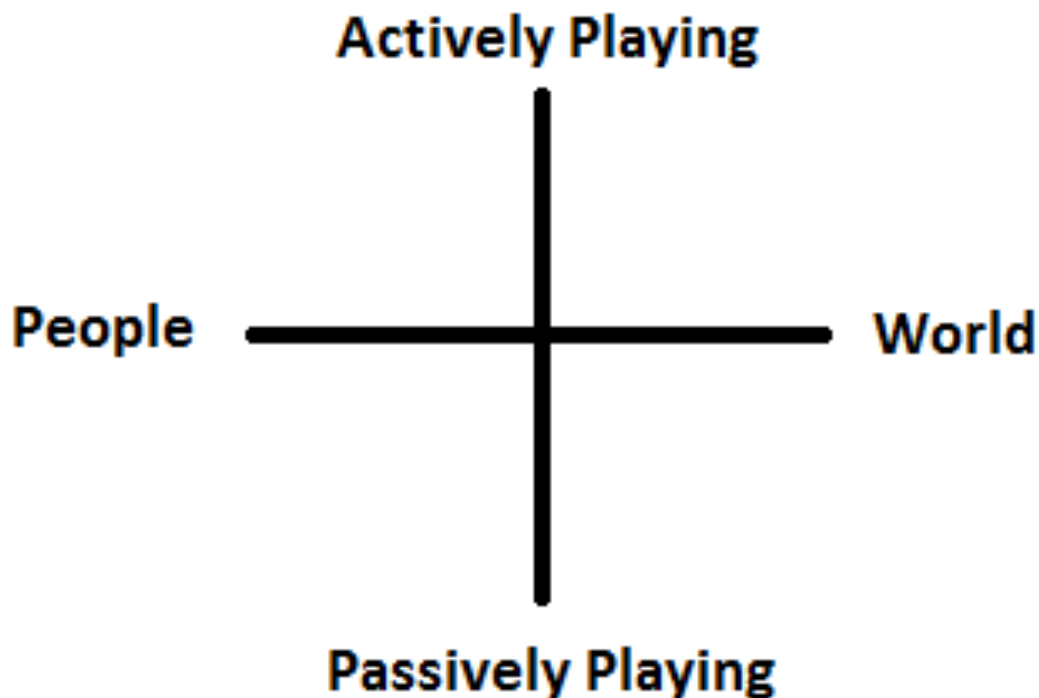


Figure 6: My Action and Object Axes

My second contention with Bartle is that Killers are not a distinct archetype. Bartle ends up with some awkward maneuvering in order to keep this category in this quadrant and is forced to consider acts like helping someone against their will as a killer

activity. I think Killer needs to be removed at the basic level—but not discarded. The idea of the Killer is correct and it has its place. His mapping and application is flawed.

Third, in Bartle as constructed, each type is limited to either acting upon or interacting with either People or the World. I don't believe that accurately describes what people do—especially once we replace “Act Upon” with “Actively Playing” and “Interacting With” with “Passively Playing”. I contend, the four archetypes belong across the ends of each axis. Achievers are primarily active and therefore tend to actively play with both People and the World; Socializers are primarily concerned with People (and therefore actively and/or passively play with them); Explorers are predominantly concerned with the World and therefore actively and/or passively play with it; and we are left with those who are passively playing with both People and the World—but we have discarded our fourth archetype, the Killers. What my research suggests belongs here is Spectators—those who do not actively play with people or the world but instead observe and take them in. They are acted upon much like a performance acts upon its audience. It affects them; it moves them. This results in Figure 7.

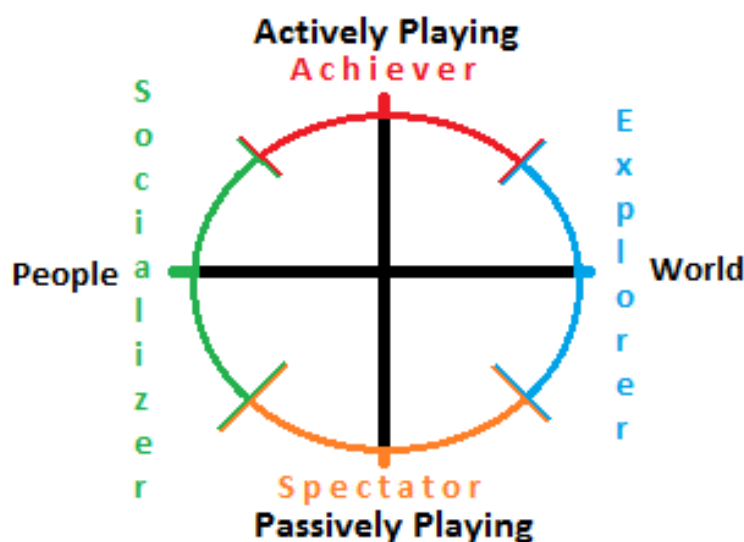


Figure 7: My Player Archetypes

Socializers now play with (act upon) and are played with (acted upon) by people in the environment as their primary motive for participation. They can be more active (the outgoing type who initiate contacts and encounters) or more passive (meeting people but not initiating contact or wanting someone to come up and talk to them)—but in either case their focus is on people. Explorers now play with (act upon) and are played with (acted upon) by the environment—they can actively influence the environment to ‘see what happens when...’ or they can watch and experience what it has to offer (for example, seeing what a different DJ does with particular songs). Achievers deal with both people and the world—playing with either in their attempts to accumulate the currency and capital this game has to offer. Spectators take in both people and the world—they do not actively play the same games as the participants but are effected by them as an audience is by any performance. For a better understanding of how they benefit from this, one should refer to Cohen (1979) and his typology of tourist experience—any of his five modes of tourist experience can apply to the Spectator.

F. My Player Archetypes

Informants approached the environment in each of these ways. We can see how each player archetype played within this environment differently and sought different rewards within it.

a. Achievers

Achievers, according to Bartle (1996), like to succeed in the challenges a game sets for them. They are not concerned with other players so much as they affect the achiever's play and success. Other Achievers provide a measuring stick (and audience) for their successes. Explorers, in the eyes of Achievers, are those who have stopped playing to win and are therefore pointless (except, maybe, as sources of information). Socializers are a source of information about other players—mostly gossip—but otherwise don't serve much purpose (except, of course, as a better-informed audience). Killers provide a challenge (in a gaming environment) but also a threat to their achievements (Bartle, 1996). Though Bartle is describing this process as it applies in MMORPGs, we can certainly extend these same behaviors here in the nightclub playscape as well. Players don't accumulate points like they do in a video game, but they can accrue capital (Bourdieu) and currency (Zelizer, 1994; Collins, 2000) of other sorts. In the nightclub environment patrons who were Achievers had two identifying characteristics—some kind of instrumental use of the environment and/or the people in it to achieve intense personal experiences and a commitment to 'rules of the game' (it is the serious player, most committed to winning, who is most bothered by cheaters—the players who invalidate the very competition at which the Achiever is trying to succeed). Rules define which game is being played within the playscape. In open games—those where you play in order to keep playing rather than to win—the Achiever is the one who strives to keep the game going as long as possible.

i. Every Day is Halloween

Leslie describes a great example from Halloween one year involving herself and Arlene. It is equally about her own achievement—as someone recognizing the importance and significance of Arlene’s costume—as it is appreciation of Arlene’s achievement (as Leslie sees it). While Achievers are concerned about their own personal successes, they also can cooperate with other Achievers when needed. Leslie describes their journey from the main context for this research (Neo), through an area many characterize as the territory of the enemy (Clark Street/Wrigleyville), on to another location recognized as a lesser sanctuary of sorts (Metro):

“Arlene last year did that Klaus Nomi costume and after Neo we were going to Metro which meant walking that gauntlet on Clark Street as all the bars were letting out and all these people looked at her and had no idea who she was and then we stepped into Metro and all these people were falling down on their knees worshipping her because it was such a great costume and such a great reference and people appreciate how he [Nomi] pushed forward and redefined a whole genre but that a huge portion of, especially younger people, are not going to get. Some of it may be generational, but that’s me speaking as an almost 40-year old.” (Leslie)

It’s as if Arlene had achieved this game’s version of slaying the dragon. She had found a reference with important subcultural capital—someone who, “pushed forward and redefined a whole genre”—and delivered that referential performance to appreciative (and properly capitalized) audiences at both her point of origin (she, in fact, won the costume contest at their point of origin) and her destination (where they ‘worshipped’ her) while also successfully navigating (overcoming) the unknowing philistines in between. Dante’s Virgil would be proud. Leslie marks her own achievement in this, as well, because she recognizes the genius of the costume—it isn’t just buying the right objects that is important in (sub)cultural capital considerations, it’s

recognizing that one has in fact made the right choice. It is knowledge of what the right choices are more than ownership of the right things (Goffman, 1951).

ii. *At Home He's a Tourist*

As important as displays of (sub)cultural capital can be, the acknowledgement of a lack of capital can be equally damning. Albert moved to the big city from a much smaller area. As such, he was very concerned about not knowing, musically, what he thought he should know. In describing an early experience of this particular nightclub, he is conscious of his own lack of discernment (taste) between two iconic bands:

“The two bands [*Smiths* and *Cure*] were indistinguishable to me and I had to stop and think to tell them apart sometimes.”

[interviewer]: did you think you needed to tell them apart?

“Yeah, there was this alternative mindset that ‘you’re not alternative enough or you’re a poseur’. You don’t really like this stuff, you’re just doing it to be cool. That’s why I feel dumb about that.” (Albert)

Albert is conscious of, what he perceives to be, a potential glaring gap in his subcultural knowledge and the concurrent risk that he will be perceived as a poseur, a Cheat. He recognizes that the accumulation of this subcultural capital is a form of achievement within this environment and that he has not fully integrated the necessary knowledge to be successful within it. He fears his commitment to the scene and his authenticity (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) can be questioned.

Recognizing obscure references is an important indicator of level of subcultural capital or authenticity—if you have a depth of subcultural knowledge you get it; if you don’t, you don’t get it. In a nightclub it is not surprising that this would show itself in music. Leslie points to this subcultural knowledge in regards to one of the main DJs of

the scene. She gives herself credit (for recognizing both the references and the DJ who creates them) while also crediting the achievement of the DJ himself.

“There’s also the fact that <DJ> will play a set of songs that don’t appear to have a connection to one another but if you know how one band was influenced by another or how members of that went off and started this other band, then you’ll understand how the songs all worked together. That’s something that’s made <DJ> such an important person for keeping this particular set of scenes alive. He’s been around for a while and he really gives a shit about the music. <DJ> knows music like nobody else and has this deep appreciation of how it all fits together. There’s someone there to, sort of, remind us of those cultural references.” (Leslie)

The average participant may know the songs, the exceptional member—one with high subcultural capital or one who is a successful Achiever—understands how all the songs work together. There are two layers of subcultural capital at play here: knowing the music and being able to recognize an expert or appropriate audience for a performance. Leslie signifies her own capital because she can recognize a fellow Achiever’s achievements and compare her performance to that person and others. When he plays songs that don’t have an apparent or obvious connection—but she can see the connection that this expert intends—she marks herself as an expert for seeing it when others can’t. She can then gauge the effectiveness of her performance by the responses of this relevant audience (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995).

iii. Touched by the Hand of God

One way this can manifest is in the form of a special acknowledgement from those seen to be at the top of the subcultural hierarchy. Their approval became a kind of blessing,

“When <DJ2> came to dance with you it was like a special blessing” (Don)

“I got my picture taken with him [the DJ] and got it framed and put it on my desk. The only DJ that matters.” (Bret)

The idea of a special endorsement from higher authorities *within this subculture* was important to informants because it validated what they were doing. There were recognized others who had ‘opinions that matter’. To be singled out by them was an indication, in the eyes of Achievers, of their own specialness.

iv. Games Without Frontiers

If games have rules, then the best way to know a fellow player was to recognize those who played within the same rules. Because Achievers put things in a competitive frame, adherence to the rules becomes important for them. It is the idea that winners never cheat and cheaters never win. To step outside the rules is to leave the game and is therefore to no longer be involved in the game (Callois, 1958; Huizinga, 1956). In the case of elective identity games in the nightclub, however, there are few explicit rules beyond those of the club itself. Within the environment many informants had very specific—and, in their mind, very serious—rules for what was and was not allowed in the environment. Often these rules were contrary to acceptable behaviors in most other nightclubs. Despite never being explicitly stated anywhere, they were also remarkably uniform across all informants. Most rules centered on the most visible arena of performance, the dance floor, but were not exclusive to it.

One of the clearest examples of an Achiever in this environment was Chris. He was able to catalog an extensive list of rules, all of which were endorsed, to varying degrees, by other informants in their interviews. Chris, however, was the most thorough in making the rules explicit:

"I have a lot of rules about the dance floor...One of my rules is 'No Parking on the Dance Floor'. It drives me nuts. If I'm there to dance, there's an entire rest of the bar for you to have a conversation in. I don't want to piss on anyone's good time, but by the same token I don't want anyone to piss on my good time."

"I don't like drinking on the dance floor. If you're dancing, you shouldn't have a drink in your hand. There's only one thing that can happen, and that's spilling. And then as soon as there's liquid on the dance floor it kind of messes up the dance space..."

"Dancing is a different thing to a lot people. To a lot of people it's a mating ritual. To me, and a lot of people I know, it's more cathartic. It's kind of a dervish thing. There's sort of a spiritual quality to dancing if you are really feeling it. And that's the experience I'm going for. It's a high. For me, it's just like another narcotic. When it's really right, when I'm really in it, it's like being drunk or high. The music at that point is the thing. So, I take it seriously. It's annoying when you are trying to reach that state of nirvana and there are others just having a mating ritual or just having a drink and shuffling back and forth. They're not really there to do it"

"I have an aversion to people who dance in circles—group dancing in a circle all facing inward. And if it's a group of girls then inevitably their purses are all in the middle of the floor and it takes up a lot of space. It's annoying when it takes up space."

"Other rules I have about dancing are mostly about respect and personal space. You can assess how much space depending on how many other dancers are on the floor. Oh, I only have four other dancers out here. I basically have as much room as I want. I can move within this [arms held wide]. And then as the dance floor gets a little more crowded you bring your space in a little bit [arms move inward]. You still have your moves that you can do but you can kind of sense where the edge of your space is based on where everyone is in proximity to you. And I notice so often that people have no respect for anyone else's space on the dance floor. You'll be dancing in your space and someone will decide that they want to come out and dance and they'll just dance right next to you when there's four feet between them and the wall. All you need to do is move over two feet. It's kind of like that crazy urinal rule, you know, when there's four urinals. That's kind of how I look at it. Well, okay, if it's a packed dance floor well, okay, everybody's got to do this but if you've got plenty of room you don't take the urinal right next to someone. I try to be very mindful of people's space."

"Another, it's inevitable that when you're dancing you're going to bump into someone who's behind you or to your side or whatever. Depending on the degree of the impact I feel it's always important to acknowledge, 'hey, I'm sorry', you don't need to go out of your way but if you step on someone's foot...you know. People have very strange reactions to that sometimes too. They freak out if you bump into them on a dance floor. Well, we're dancing. We're not standing

stationary. There's movement going on out here. I'm not slam dancing. I wasn't intentionally running into people."

"Don't make out on the dance floor! If you're lucky enough to be making out, more power to you, just not here." (Chris)

Games have rules and rules have to be followed for an Achiever to win. Chris' rules were pretty comprehensive for participants in this playscape—at least for those playing these elective identity games. None of my informants argued for rules counter to these, though not all mentioned all these rules and some considered some of these rules more important than others. His rules are also designed to facilitate certain activities—in this case, dancing. 'No Parking' and no drinks are both rules because they disrupt dancing. The mating ritual rule is most critical of those involved for not trying, not just for getting in the way. Dance circles is about taking up too much space. The remainder are more 'fair play' rules about respect and civility.

The dance floor was a particularly contested area with the most unspoken rules that everyone was expected to know. Several informants had rules for the dance floor that clearly mirrored Chris' list and that they saw as self-evident.

"They [outsiders] didn't get the subtleties; they didn't know the rules. Everyone knows you don't bring a drink on the dance floor. You don't smoke on the dance floor. You don't stand around and talk. You don't make fun of how other people are dancing—no matter what they look like when they're doing it...they [outsiders] wouldn't give them their sense of space. They bump into people on the dance floor, they push people, they stand behind them, and make fun of the way they dance." (Debby)

'Everyone knows'—and yet, quite obviously, everyone doesn't know. It is the outsider who is not included in that 'everyone'. The rules are spoken of with the same moral certainty of a stereotypical Victorian expounding on the proper fork to use for the oyster course. But 'they' don't know. Outsiders have an entire set of behaviors that

distinguish them from ‘people who know’. Beryl expresses a similar sentiment, in more detail:

“They dance on the dance floor with drinks in their hands or, back in the day, with their cigarettes. They didn’t respect space, personal space. People who go every weekend, they know. This person needs so much dancing space, we shall give them dancing space. Or if they bump into you they say “excuse me”. Tourists don’t say excuse me, they bump into you, they elbow you, kick you, push you—to the point where you have to get security to kick them out. They get really, really drunk really, really fast. They drink from other people’s drinks on the table. They spill drinks on your coats when they’re by your table because they’re at the rail above. They’re assholes. They’ll come right up in my face and say derogatory things about my weight and various things I’m doing. Whereas people who are of the scene don’t just go up and do that. But when they go, if I’m dressed up, I’m a sightseeing thing—and so are all my other friends, because that’s how we dress when we go.” (Beryl)

There is an assumed naturalness and certainty to the ‘rules’ of the club that everyone should know. There is an implied superiority for those who know the rules versus those who do not. Those who don’t know are inexperienced or naïve in the eyes of those who know the rules. Beryl is able to catalog a whole set of behaviors—dance with drinks in their hands, don’t respect space, bump, elbow, kick and push you, get drunk, drink other’s drinks, spill drinks on coats, make derogatory weight comments—which clearly differentiate insiders from outsiders. For Beryl they can and should know better but since they don’t; they’re assholes.

Many (rightly, I believe) see this treatment as a lack of respect on the part of the outsider, the tourist. Members of the community have defined this place as one in which certain activities take place (and, reciprocally, where others do not) and they see these tourist behaviors as inappropriate or worse.

“Thursday has a lot of ‘virgins’. They’re there for the first time. They’re all really young and they don’t know how to drink yet. They don’t respect your space on the dance floor. They try to play the meat market game, even though we don’t really do that at Neo. They don’t respect other people’s ‘fun’. You can see them

making snide comments. You can't always hear what they're saying but you can tell when you look at them that they're saying something." (Florence)

Florence's use of virgin suggests a more favorable disposition towards the outsiders. They are inexperienced, like a virgin, but this need not be a permanent situation. Like the virgin, this condition can be changed with experience. Florence still differentiates them as outsiders and still considers their behaviors to be inappropriate, but attributes their improper behaviors to a lack of experience—they just don't know any better. They're there for the first time and they're young. They play the meat market game, don't respect other people's fun, and make snide comments.

"You see these hipsters coming in and they're so irresponsible. They're loud, they're obnoxious. They don't belong there. They have a different mentality. They're just doing it because it's cool. It's not 'in' them. They don't understand. It's not in their heart or their soul. You need to have lived through it." (Katia)

Katia on the other hand attributes the difference to something deeper. It is not just about inexperience, it's about what's "in them", their mentality—"in their heart or their soul". It is not necessarily fixable because it's something someone has to have "lived through". They don't belong there. Ultimately what Katia is describing is 'authenticity'. The idea that they are doing it because it's cool and that it is not 'in them' or 'in their heart and soul' is the accusation of the authentic participant against the poseur, the Achiever against the Cheat.

Achievers certainly weren't the only ones with rules. They were, however, usually the most explicit about them. Socializers also had rules. One of the most significant rules, even for Socializers, was that there was a limit to the socialization. Where most nightclubs might be seen as places where people might 'hook up', it was frowned upon here and provided a way to differentiate insiders from outsiders.

"You never go to Neos to pick up people—if you made a list that's like the 50th reason, less than the 50th reason, you go there. I mean, it happens, I've done it. I've gone home with people I met there. But it's not why you go. Sometimes I do "catch and release", just to see if I can get them. But once you catch them you let them go." (Debby)

Debby points out one way in which the rules of this environment differ from apparently similar contexts—the idea of the nightclub as a place where people go to pick up people. Though a nightclub, this environment is seen as different by those identifying with it. It is distinctive in this respect. There is an interesting contradiction in that, while recognizing that this is an activity that should not be a reason for going there, it is, nonetheless, an activity in which she has engaged. Her justification is that it is not 'why she goes' even if it does happen once she is there. A further justification is offered in that, while she may see if she can get them, she never consummates the act. Her comparison to sport fishing ("catch and release") is a justification in that, like the sport fisherman, she leaves the prey in the environment.

The conventional place of courtship (or, more realistically, sexual relations) in the nightclub is subverted here. Helene expands the list of prohibited or restricted activities that might be acceptable in another nightclub:

"There are those who are there at Neo who take it like another club so they can dance ironically and be like (subject puts on a mockingly sing-song voice) "we're all here together and we're dancing for each other and we're going to do the chicken dance," or dance in this way to make each other laugh and it has no relationship to the music or something like this. It's about performing for each other in this particular way. Then there are those who are there who are like, "Hey can I buy you a drink?" or "Hey, do you want to dance?" My response to them is like, "hey, I'm not very good at dancing with people because I might punch you in the face"—and that has nothing to do with me wanting to punch them in the face, it's just the way I dance. At Neo that response makes sense. I could say that same response at another club and it wouldn't make sense." (Helene)

This place is exceptional. It is distinctive. In this place certain rules of the outside world are inverted. Otherwise acceptable behaviors—like asking someone to dance or offering to buy a drink as an introduction—are viewed as aberrant behaviors. Insiders routinely described pickup lines, or other attempts at ‘hitting on’ patrons, as a mark of an outsider. While an acceptable behavior in other nightclubs, here that was not the case. This place—the exception—is about dancing and about the music. Similarly, what wouldn’t make sense somewhere else—refusing to dance with someone for fear of punching them in the face—does make sense here for the informant. In her comments she points to both Vandals (dancing ironically is a challenge to the music, not people) and Instigators (unwanted socialization).

b. Socializers

In a nightclub environment we should expect to see Socializers—these are, after all, social environments. Many of them value the opportunities that the environment creates to meet people. The Socializers in the nightclub environment, as elsewhere, emphasize their relations with others. Sometimes it was just about the appreciation of simply meeting people,

“I wanna have a nice conversation with someone” (Ernesto).

The music and the environment are important to Ernesto only so much as they facilitate social interactions. Arguably, the music could even be a hindrance, as Michael (not a socializer) points out,

“I don’t seek out close person friendships at Neo. It’s pretty difficult to have much of a conversation in a nightclub with music. I’ve just never been very successful at talking about anything of great importance in a nightclub when people are drinking—or any bar for that matter” (Michael).

For some Socializers the appeal went beyond the chance encounter. There was the recognition among attendees that there is continuity from week to week and that their fellow patrons were integral to that continuity—they were a cast of characters to be experienced.

“Part of it was to see who was going to be there. It was a meeting place to find ‘the infrequent’. The regulars gave it a sense of continuity. You could go there to find people. I was amazed at the number of very educated, creative, artistic people I met there” (Don).

There was a sense of loss if a subject couldn’t attend,

“I felt like I was going to miss something if I didn’t go—the social atmosphere” (Franklin).

Others recognize that the music played a secondary role as a kind of filter for who would be there,

“They [regulars] are drawn by the like-mindedness, not the music” (Harvey).

It was music that brought Harvey to the club and initially had him coming back but it was the like-mindedness of the crowd that became the draw ultimately to keep him coming back. He continues,

“When it got to the point where I wanted to be there to see people and meet the cast of characters. It became more about the people than the music. It’s not like there’s new stuff being made...”(Harvey).

Being a retro-themed evening the music was viewed as limiting factor for Harvey—by definition there couldn’t be new stuff, so that avenue of exploration was closed. But people provided a potentially endless source of the new and interesting. The music provided the initial frame but the people came to define the evening for Harvey.

For Harvey, socializing extended to the staff as well:

“<DJ>s [the DJ] presence kind of brought everyone together. A large part of it was the people that were there. I’ve been to other 80s nights where the DJ just doesn’t get it. It would seem different without him. It was just as enjoyable if just

<DJ2> [the second DJ] was there, but they thought the same way. It was the crowd but he played a big part in getting the crowd together. He worked a lot to get the crowd coming back—socializing, posting.” (Harvey)

i. Panic (Hang the DJ)

The DJs, traditionally the source of the music and little else, play a central role by their presence socially, not musically, for Socializers. Harvey saw them as working to form social connections that he valued as part of the experience, independent of the music. Others comment on this phenomenon as well,

“<DJ> draws you in with acceptance and comfort. It was always a warm introduction. You didn't have to do something or prove anything” (Gert).

Gordon takes it a step further:

“I honestly think that <DJ> who was so obsessed with the music of that time has a sort of presence. There's something special about a DJ, you want that personality; you don't want it to be someone anonymous. You do want to have an interface with who's playing the music. It's like going to a silent movie and the piano player is playing. There's a dialog between the vision, the people, and the music. There's a dialog here between the music, the DJ, and the dancers. It's important that it's a personality and that somehow you're connected to it in some way” (Gordon).

The DJ is seen as being in a dialog with his dancers. It's not enough for him to be there but he has to be a personality and a presence. There has to be a connection and that connection is social.

It is the connections to others that are important for socializers. Socializers were quick to point out ties between members and the idea of a larger community of members, even when the members were effectively strangers.

“There are a lot faces I recognize, which constitutes a community. A few faces I know amongst strangers... some people I have to connect with me. This night gave me the gift of these people” (Arlene).

For Cindy there was a simple recognition that, “these are my people and my place” (Cindy).

ii. *Shy Boy*

What was surprising for this environment was actually how few actively playing Socializers there were. Members of the community recognized each other, spoke about each other, but many didn’t know a lot of their fellow members—nor did they care to. The community members were there to be enjoyed passively. They showed the markers of community without any close personal ties—instead choosing to keep them mostly at a safe distance. I think we can see something of an imagined community (Anderson, 2006) here. In this case the reality of the people involved is a potential threat to the imagined community, so people are kept at a distance. McCracken (1988) describes how we displace meaning when we invest objects with the power to fulfill our ideals but keep them a safe distance to avoid close inspection. The Socializers in the nightclub are engaging in a similar practice, but they are displacing people.

We can revisit Irene’s comment:

“When people ask me where I was the night before I tell them I was visiting friends” (Irene).

Irene’s referring to her fellow patrons as friends is telling. As mentioned earlier, she and her husband would arrive together early in the evening, dance together in one corner of the dance floor, and leave as the place got crowded—usually around midnight. They spoke to no one other than each other and they couldn’t really name fellow patrons. I would not classify them as Socializers (for obvious reasons), they were more Achievers (using people and the place instrumentally to achieve goals). It was obvious

that, while remaining anonymous, the people were very important to them. In fact the anonymity made them more valuable because that allowed them to fill the roles needed by Irene and Joe without any of the messy details of who they really were as people. The people played a significant role in their enjoyment of this environment as an imagined community.

iii. It's a Sin

For some there was a sense of social obligation to fellow community members—Muniz and O'Guinn's 'Moral Responsibility'—when potential kindred types were recognized. Muniz and O'Guinn demonstrate that members of consumption communities often feel compelled to behave in certain ways towards fellow members. Membership brings with it a moral responsibility to look out for the wellbeing of other members of the community. This responsibility compels certain actions.

“For the people who are regulars, for the people that choose that place, there is definitely a continuum of type of person who goes there. It's a broad spectrum but people tend to relate very easily. It's a very welcoming bar in so much as—I'm a regular now—if me or a handful of other people who are regulars there notice that someone has been in there repeatedly (maybe 3 times) people will walk up to the person and introduce themselves and “welcome in the other freaks” (subject used air quotes) if you will. You're obviously coming here regularly and something is appealing to you. People try to make it a family atmosphere” (Chris).

Chris experiences a sense of moral responsibility to 'welcome in the other freaks'. Their regular attendance and other visual cues mark them as someone who belongs. That something about the environment is appealing to them marks them as a potential new member of the community. In order to reinforce the positive values of the community (family atmosphere), Chris feels an obligation to welcome this person in.

Others downplay the importance of (actively) socializing while accepting it as a fortunate happenstance when it does occur,

“I don’t feel the need to meet other regulars but have enjoyed it when I do usually” (Arlene).

Arlene doesn’t resist socializing, she will accept and enjoy it when it happens. She is passively socializing.

What I find is that Socializers use the nightclub environment to create, defend, and maintain elective identities that provide intrinsic rewards in the form of enhancements to both esteem and distinctiveness. They are able to set themselves apart by defining insiders and outsiders in ways that favor their ingroup. They are able to find reinforcement and support for the elective identities they choose to take on within the context of this environment.

c. Explorers

Explorers are looking for the environment to provide novelty. They accumulate knowledge and experience of the night’s music, and sometimes people, and are looking to broaden those experiences. Explorers are less likely to ask a DJ to “play this song” and are more likely to ask “what was that song you just played?” or “Do you have <deeper cut>?” by a particular artist. They are looking for new experiences within the environment. For some this manifests as exploration within the confines of a defined genre. For others, it’s an attempt to push beyond the genre’s limits to see what is just beyond the border that might still be included.

“A lot of what I consider to be deeper cuts, like Ministry for example, I don’t ever remember hearing <other club> playing “Effigy” or “Revenge” and that Shriekback song “Nemesis”—I don’t ever remember hearing that—so a lot of that stuff I never discovered. I love discovering. First time I heard “Revenge” I said, “I

love this song, I have to have this song”. I loved discovering that but I was afraid to ask what it was because of that embarrassment that this was something I should know.” (Albert)

Albert faces an interesting quandary for the explorer in the elective identity environment with cultural capital expectations—while wanting to learn more and discover songs he didn’t know, he is faced with the problem of admitting his lack of subcultural capital in order to do so. He faces the challenge of authenticity and the being perceived as a poseur (Cheater). To learn more he has to admit he doesn’t know something, but he can’t learn unless he admits he doesn’t know. His fear is that this is something a true insider *should* know and to admit otherwise discredits him. He is insecure as to his own insider status though most insiders would acknowledge him as one of them.

i. Shake it Up

Explorers put a positive value on learning new things or finding interesting combinations of known things. Inquisitiveness, questioning, challenging are all attributes explorers find important. Chris describes how this place encourages, even embodies, these attributes.

“In some ways I think it is a thinking person’s bar. I don’t mean academic, just a thinking person’s bar. People that...think outside the box, to use a cliché, people who question things. People who do not just take what is fed to them, probably seekers. Whether that’s just a musical seeker or that seeking goes further into other aspects of their lives. I felt an instant connection to the place when I walked in.” (Chris)

Chris uses the word ‘seeker’ but he is describing what we are calling Explorers. He sees himself as an explorer and this place as one that is suitable for explorers. For him it is not just exploring music but ‘other aspects of their lives’ as well. He lauds the

explorer as a 'thinking person' who do not 'just take what is fed to them'. They don't passively accept, they seek.

Explorers look for new and novel experiences. For Gert, it's music,

"There's 80s music you would hear there and nowhere else." (Gert)

For Gordon it is the experience of novel, magical moments,

"One of the magical moments, the first time I was there, I saw this punk guy come across the floor dancing real rugged with the chains and I saw these little like high-school girls spring up. They looked like cheerleaders but like the punk shit and jumping up and down kind of crazy-like and I thought, 'what the fuck?' What is this? That's a beautiful feeling." (Gordon)

Gordon's surreal scene generates a beautiful feeling. This is certainly not the experience one would get at an average club.

ii. *Kings of the Wild Frontier*

Part of exploration was also the recognition of what *didn't* belong. In exploring the boundaries of the environment (in this case, the music), Explorers often expressed dissatisfaction when things went beyond the acceptable boundaries of the genre. Castronova (2005), also writing about video games (synthetic worlds), describes how they are about fantasy. Any synthetic world—whether the on-screen creation of a programmer or the real-world creation of club patrons—has its own set of acceptable and unacceptable objects. In an online fantasy world the intrusion of twentieth or twenty-first century branded products destroys the fantasy created on the screen—so too in the club environment. At a retro-themed event there is exploration that is possible within the genre but there is also a realm beyond the borders that, for many, should not be a part of the milieu. It's not that the selections are necessarily disliked—in fact, they

may like them—but that they are inappropriate for this milieu. They are, to borrow from Castronova, ‘Cokes on King Arthur’s round table’. Helene provides a great example,

“I love Hall and Oates and I will dance my ass off to Hall and Oates, but on Thursday at Neo it doesn’t make sense. Not acceptable. I like Hall and Oates and I would dance to them...but don’t do that to Neo. There’s a certain meaning that’s there and DJs have to respect that.” (Helene)

Helene has clearly defined—in her own mind at least—a boundary beyond which the DJ cannot stray. It is a genre boundary. For the nightclub the DJ is a sort of guardian of that genre border. She also recognizes that the patrons can play a role in enforcing that boundary. Helene was present the night Albert and another patron laid down on the dance floor in protest at a particular song being played. She comments:

“One of the best nights was when someone laid down on the dance floor in protest to a Kylie Minogue song being played. Absolutely appropriate response.” (Helene)

Helene recognizes that genre is more important than a DJ’s freedom to play any song he wants. That, like the marketer or programmer dealing with a video game, the DJ is responsible for maintaining the fantasy of the synthetic or imaginary world that is the playscape.

Several patrons recognized the play in what was occurring in their explorations.

Irene explicitly mentions it in her interview:

“The music takes me. Performance is important to me. I want to play with good music. I feel like a butterfly.” (Irene)

She recognizes music as a prop in her performance of dance. Music is something she plays with. When she gets to do that the music transforms her experience. She can, temporarily, enter another world of her own fantasy and creation.

iii. Just Can't Get Enough

Several informants describe ways in which the music was a personal experience for them. They came seeking diversity and novelty even though it was a retro night—which, by definition, should have a relatively closed set of available music and therefore little novelty. Within that closed set, however, there were significant possibilities both for selection and for combination. The challenge to the DJ posed by many Explorers was to 'keep it fresh' while keeping them entertained. Leslie talks about the ways in which the music became important for an Explorer:

“Hearing great music that you didn't expect to hear that either has an important cultural reference for you or brings back a particular memory or speaks to things that are important to you and that you can tell is also important to the people around you.” (Leslie)

Leslie's expectation is for the unexpected. She wants to hear things that can provide a reference to people and events in her life and which is also a referent for those around her. Those around her provide validation of the importance of these references for her. Leslie wants to be surprised by the music but it still has to be relevant to those around her who share this appreciation for the genre. When a DJ fails to provide these satisfactions it creates a problem for Explorers.

In expressing his dissatisfaction with a particular DJ (and expressing a complaint several others also voiced in regards to this DJ), Isaac says:

“The old DJ used to pull music out of thin air that I hadn't heard in years, since 1978, and the crowd would really respond. But this DJ, it's the same thing over and over. I actually have an 80s CD that we were listening to in the car and it was like the exact same set the DJ had played. He could have just dropped this CD set in the player and just walked away for the night. That's the big reason I walked away from Thursday nights. It started losing its appeal because it was the same thing. (Isaac)

An Explorer who no longer has anything to explore in the current environment looks for other places to explore. In the playscape of the nightclub this either means another night—if the person has a strong enough place attachment so as to not want to give up on the establishment—or another nightclub altogether. In this case the informant, his girlfriend (who is another of my informants, Joyce), and several other regulars migrating to a different night at the club. While, possibly, not as much of a concern for the club itself—they are, after all, still keeping the patrons just on a different night—it is certainly a concern for those running the night in question. Since nightclubs often use promoters for different nights and different events, this would certainly be a concern for the promoter losing their patrons to a different event (in fact, DJ bonuses at this club are often based on attendance above and beyond a certain number). For the club this shift moved patrons from a Thursday night—harder to fill for most clubs—to a Saturday night—an easier night to fill.

While some Explorers look for person connections to the music, others like to see novel or interesting connections to the outside world. That much like a play or performance can provide commentary on larger events, so too can the music selections in the club. While there is the desire to keep the outside world from intruding too much on this world—from imposing its rules and judgments on what happens here—there is, by contrast, a desire to still express an opinion on what is transpiring out there.

“I don’t make requests. The only time I go to the booth is to say thank you. I’m happy when I hear some Annie Lennox song or something by *The Clash*. It’s like, yes, this reminds me of what the president just signed today [NB: interview was conducted the day Obama signed the indefinite detention bill]. I like that.”
(Michael)

Leslie mirrors this sentiment:

“I haven’t done it in a while but I used to shoot <DJ> and <DJ2> a line to say, “hey, I thought it was great when you played X and Y and Z.” Or often there will be something that is going on in the world.” (Leslie)

Michael and Leslie clearly establish that this place is distinct from the real world but able to comment on it. They are able to interpret musical selections as referents to events in the outside world. This interaction—this play between them—is something they enjoy. Michael and Leslie recognize that the DJ is also playing when he or she uses the music they play in the club to comment on events in the outside world.

Explorers are looking for new and novel ways for the elements of the environment to be put together or for justifiable ways to expand the boundaries. In the nightclub—especially a retro-themed event—this can provide challenges since there is nothing new being made. The Explorer needs variety and combinatorial freedom—different ways of putting things together to make them interesting.

d. Spectators

Recognizing the category of Spectator wasn’t obvious at first; it emerged from the data. I was clouded in my initial observations and interpretations by an assumption that anyone who came to the nightclub came to participate in the nightclub, to actively play in the nightclub—much like Bartle assumed that anyone who played in a MUD or MMORPG would be an active player. It was in examining the interview with Oscar that the Spectator as a player type really became clear.

Oscar posed an interesting case of a socializer who didn’t want to socialize. He obvious got satisfaction from experiencing other people, but expressed little desire in actually talking to them. He wasn’t alone in this either. Several other informants expressed interest in their fellow participants as people to be watched and enjoyed but

not interacted with. They weren't objectifying their fellow participants so much as appreciating what they were doing and respecting it from a distance. They considered the presence of these relevant others to be important to the experience at hand and their particular enjoyment of it. It seemed a contradiction to call him a socializer who didn't want to socialize. In realigning the archetypes out of each quadrant of the matrix and onto the end of each axis, it now meant that two archetypes each shared each quadrant. Rather than being a non-socializing Socializer, he could be a Spectator of People. Now, Oscar can freely admit that he doesn't want to make friends while he is in the nightclub without it being a contradiction..

"My intent here is not to make friends. It's not that I don't like people, but I really enjoy just looking and being very quiet...I'm not really there for that kind of socializing...For me, if I can go in and not say a word to anybody, that's just fine. I may form a relationship with somebody only visually, through dance. And that's very, very nice. Poetic" (Oscar).

His experience of other people is in looking and observing—what we recognize as spectating. Oscar just does his spectating from *on* the dance floor not the sidelines.

Michael echoes Oscar's sentiments about not wanting to meet people though, for him, their presence is also still important,

"It's a nice community for people who don't need to become close personal friends but can enjoy the company of one another in that environment" (Michael).

Michael too experiences communion without conversation. While not wanting to talk with them, there is still importance in their shared company. They provide a recognizable 'us'.

Oscar sees the people as part of the spectacle to be enjoyed. He is not looking to be part of the spectacle but merely to enjoy what others are doing,

"You never know who you're going to see in there and how they're going to be dressed...When people get dressed up, I really appreciate that. Anybody, no

matter what they're dressed up like. It's fun to see people who have gone to a lot of work to look a certain way, a theatrical way. You see it more at Neo than in the rest of the world, but certainly less at Neo than you used to. It's one reason I go there." (Oscar)

The environment provides a specific reward to Oscar in the form of interesting people to observe and appreciate. At no time did he express any interest in meeting people—in fact, he describes it as ultimately undesirable.

"Dancing at Neo is divided into two categories. In the beginning there's nobody there so it looks lightest, that's the nicest time. Because you're the freest. That usually doesn't last too long. Then when people come in it becomes a little more crowded and also more...psychological, you might say. I'm looking at who's dancing where, I love the way people dance. I'm looking for good dancers and want to dance by them. So that's different, it's not just spontaneous dancing, it's now...what would you call it...psychodrama, in a non-verbal way. That's another thing I like about Neo—I don't have to talk to people, it's all visual." (Oscar)

Oscar's experience also provides a significant contrast to what many described as a negative experience in the environment, the tourist. Oscar is not a tourist, and no informant ever referenced him as one (though several did mention him in passing, the remarks were always neutral or positive). The difference between Oscar and the tourists was that Oscar was involved; he was a participant. Oscar's watching was appreciation from a fellow participant, not spectating from a non-participating observer. His ability to do so, I argue, was because he had constructed and maintained within this environment an elective identity which allowed him to be seen as an insider. Where others engaging in the same activities might be seen as intrusive, Oscar was seen as part of the crowd.

I've observed Oscar when he dances. Very often he dances with people who may not even realize he's dancing with them. Even when they do realize it, I have never seen anyone be offended or bothered by it. I would speculate that it is because when he dances with people it is dancing for dancing's sake. He is not engaged in any kind of stylized dance floor mating ritual or other precursor to introduction or seduction. He is

sharing a dance. Sometimes people notice and dance with him, others notice and go right on with what they are doing, and still others never notice at all.

Oscar shows his 'World' side of spectating when he looks to explore the boundaries and possibilities within this place. He also looks to expand the boundaries—to go over the horizon.

"There's an absolutely irresistible temptation to believe that things were better in the past. The music is really of secondary importance. It's pretty good dance music but the important thing to me is the beat. They could be playing almost anything. I was talking to the disc jockey about playing "Rite of Spring" or maybe Count Basie. It is dance music and good dance music. The beat's not really regular, but there is a beat. That would be interesting to expand it out to other dance music—not just rock'n'roll—to other cultures, to see how people would respond to that. They might like it." (Oscar)

The nightclub provided an opportunity for Oscar to explore music and dance. Despite being a specifically themed night—80s New Wave—Oscar sees it more as a dance night and wants to explore more possibilities by transcending the genre. He wants to explore the possibilities of this space as one for all kinds of dance, not just the music specific to the theme of this night. He advocates for Columbus-like explorations into the unknown rather than coast-hopping expansion of the borders.

Oscar seeks shared experiences with his fellow patrons, just not verbally expressed relationships. He engages in voyeurism as appreciation. A shared dance is equally important as a shared conversation is to other Socializers.

"It seems the more bohemian and the more odd people in there, the more in synchronization with the place I feel. The more they look like they're in a college fraternity, the more I feel like...this is depressing. Kind of a missed opportunity for Neo to be slightly eccentric, surprising, and unpredictable." (Oscar)

Oscar balances place and the people in his experience of the nightclub. They feed into each other. He obviously recognizes the role that his co-consumers play in his enjoyment of the place and that he has definitely grouped them into recognizable

categories (bohemian/odd people versus college fraternity types). Some co-consumers make him feel in sync with the place, others depress him. He attributes this to the establishment and a missed opportunity on their part.

G. Shadow Archetypes

So where did the Killers go? I argue that Killers are actually a shadow archetype of each *player* archetype. Shadow archetypes are archetypes that look like the original archetype but differ from them in motivation or intention. They are often playing a different game. The saboteur is a shadow of a worker. He looks like a worker and tries to act like a worker until the crucial moment when his true intention or motivation is revealed. He is engaged in dark play while posing as the worker.

The shadow Achiever is someone who looks like they're playing—Achievers are those who are playing hard and playing to win—but they aren't. They are, in the language of traditional games, Cheaters. In the language of elective identity games, they are Poseurs. The shadow Socializer is someone who gets benefit, reward, or pleasure out of negative interactions with People. They are Instigators. The shadow Explorer negatively impacts the World. He is the Vandal. The shadow Spectator is one whose watching impinges on play without actually playing or refuses to play at all. We will call him the Spoilsport. All the shadow archetypes are the Killer versions of the original archetypes.

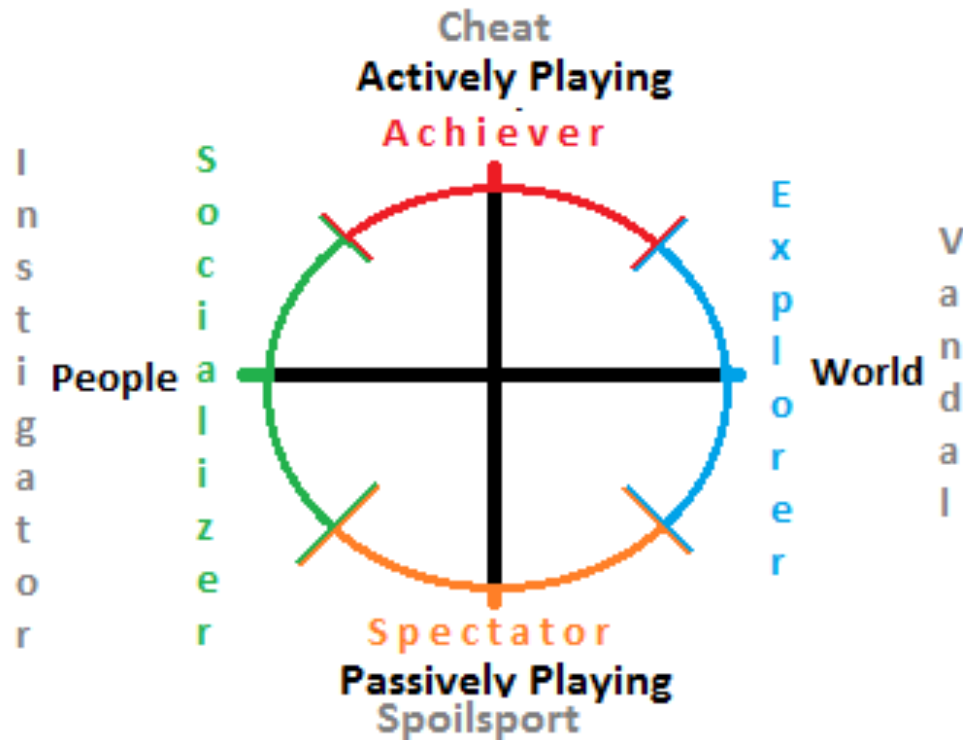


Figure 8: My Player Archetypes with the Shadow Archetypes

We can see how these archetypes also play out in the nightclub context.

According to Bartle (1995), Killers are players who use elements of the game to cause distress to other players. The greater the distress they can cause, the more satisfaction for the Killer. I have rejected this category of players, Killers, in favor of recognizing the variety of Killer behaviors as, in fact, an indication of separate shadow archetypes to the player archetypes. Bartle had one type of Killer, I have four—Cheats, Vandals, Instigators, and Spoilsports.

In the nightclub environment the shadow archetypes are not just someone who ruins another person's good time; they are the people who actively set out to do so. They are sometimes playing a different game than the player archetypes and, very often, a game that is at odds with the one everyone else is playing. More than anything this means that the shadow archetypes are identified by intention. Since we cannot

know what is going on in their minds, this intention has to be inferred from actions and observation and attributed to them by others.

None of my informants were shadow archetypes (by design) though many of my informants (and myself) had experiences with them. As a *participant* observer, I was more easily recognizable as part of the scene than as an outsider—I have said from the beginning that I was involved with this scene prior to the start of my research. This meant that I experienced many of these behaviors directly while also observing them as they happened to others. Because the behavior of the shadow archetypes was often antagonistic to the regular patrons (a group they perceived me to be a part of), they remained unapproachable in any reliable way. Even if I could get an interview with one, I could not trust what they said to me.

The role of the shadow archetypes in this environment is particularly interesting. While providing a unifying force for insiders in the form of a common enemy, they also served as a standard against which certain behaviors could be compared. The shadow archetypes therefore did serve a purpose. Actions for which others were condemned could be justified for insiders. Similarly, great pains were put forward to show how the insiders were “not like them”. As a result, many informants took great pains to differentiate their actions from outsiders in general, but particularly from the brand of outsider that would be considered a shadow archetype.

a. The Politics of Dancing

One of the most common complaints about outsiders was their behavior on the dance floor. The dance floor was actually a highly contested space—significantly

beyond a simple competition for room to dance. There were two forces at work on the dance floor—cooperation amongst insiders and conflict with outsiders. Insiders had expectations of fellow insiders and expressed a sense of mutual understanding. While Achievers seemed to have particular rules for the dance floor, everyone seemed to recognize particular boundaries of behavior.

“The dance floor is a living being. It can be a really crowded dance floor and we all have our quirks but we dance like a mechanism because we know what people are doing” (Cindy).

It was this familiarity with what other regulars were doing that allowed them to function like a mechanism.

“People who go every weekend, they know. This person needs so much dancing space, we shall give them dancing space or if they bump into you they say ‘excuse me’.” (Beryl).

On the other hand, outsiders were seen as dysfunctional, as not following the rules. Part of that familiarity was a ‘sense of space’. Insiders claimed to know how much space other insiders needed and would give it to them. Outsiders ignored the space of others or consciously violated it.

“they (outsiders) wouldn't give people their sense of space. They bump into people on the dance floor, they push people, they stand behind them and make fun of the way they dance” (Debby).

“They didn’t respect space, personal space...Tourists don’t say excuse me. They bump into you, they elbow you, kick you, push you—to the point where you have to get security to kick them out” (Beryl).

Subjects described the situation in very territorial terms. It was *their* dance floor and *their* space.

“It’s not only that they make fun of you but they get confrontational with you because you’re a freak. You have to guard your territory. ‘You’re in my space, can you step back a little.’ You can tell who they are by what they’re wearing” (Emily).

Regulars routinely described ‘my space’ or, more significantly, said ‘my dance floor’—claiming an ownership of the space independent of actual proprietorship. They may not own the club, but the dance floor belonged to them. The dance floor was a part of their extended self. More so than the club itself in some cases, informants could be said to be manifesting place attachment to the dance floor itself.

As part of this ownership of the dance floor, contact was problematic. There were clear ideas about what did and did not constitute acceptable contact in this environment. Shadow archetypes were distinguished, not by the contact they made, but by the perceived intentionality of their dance floor contact. They intentionally bumped into people on the floor. Regulars recognized that some contact was an inevitable part of the dancing experience but that the response to it was what was important. The perception was that Instigators used the pretense of a crowded dance floor to initiate unwanted contact with the intention of causing difficulties for others.

b. Vicious Games

Repeatedly in my observations—and experiences as a participant-observer—I was able to see people clearly attempting to interfere with the enjoyment of others—including many of my informants. I observed these behaviors repeated again and again. The typical encounter would involve a small group of outsiders standing near the edge of the dance floor and motioning towards someone on the dance floor while laughing amongst themselves (they are rarely subtly at this, sometimes they even point right at them). At some point, usually at the transition between songs when the most people moved on and off the dance floor, one or more members of the group would go out onto

the floor and dance near the target. While watching their friends' responses they would proceed to use a number of techniques to provoke their victim. They played different games.

i. The Invisible Target.

Some would dance into the person as if they weren't there. This would usually entail turning their back to the target but dancing in such a way that they were always stepping backwards into the victim. On several occasions, when this was done by couples, you could watch one member literally steering the other into their target by maneuvering them with hands on chest and arms. Since a dance floor can be a crowded space, the Instigator tries to dismiss it as incidental contact. However, this routinely happens on less-than-full dance floors when there is plenty of room to avoid the person. Similarly, after any initial contact one would assume that the presence of the person behind you would be known and could be avoided—patrons on dance floors regularly negotiate and renegotiate space amongst themselves as a floor fills up. Yet, when playing this game, the Instigator never adjusts to the person behind them; they just keep instigating. The level of contact here can be mild (just being in the way) to extreme (the incident described by Beryl and Isaac below). I've watched (and experienced as a participant) this where the Instigator goes so far as to be grinding on the person behind them and yet acting as if oblivious to their presence (which would be impossible considering the degree of contact involved). It is at its most obvious when the dance floor is relatively empty and yet the Instigators are dancing right in the target's space. The final giveaway as to the intentionality of this dance floor contact—that it is

not accidental—is the post-dance floor interactions with their fellow outsider friends waiting at the edge of the dance floor. The congratulations, ‘high fives’, and shared laugh at what they just did is obvious to anyone watching.

ii. Imitation is not Always Flattery.

A more vulgar technique was to go onto the dance floor and move behind the target and then engage in some exaggerated imitation of their dancing. The Instigator or Vandal performs for his audience/friends on the side of the dance floor. The attempt here is to parrot and exaggerate the dance of the target without being noticed by the target. To all who can see what’s going on it’s obvious that this is mockery, but the target is the one who can’t see it because it is behind them. It is a tactic of both Instigators and Vandals because it can be used to mock the dancer (by Instigators) or the music in general (by Vandals).

iii. Dance with Me.

For the bold Instigator, a still more provocative method is to get right up in their target’s face as if they are trying to dance with them. This is usually coupled with an imitation of the target’s style of dance. The Instigator attempts to exploit the fact that a dance floor is a social space where (at least in other clubs) patrons engage in stylistic courtship rituals. When called on their attempt to mock the target, the defense is usually some variation on, “but I just wanted to dance with you” where the Instigator, now assuming the role of victim, whines their claim to be merely misunderstood and turns any reaction back on the target as their own ‘over-reaction’ or ‘over-sensitivity’.

iv. Girls Just Wanna Have Fun

A specific incident involving Beryl was particularly telling. This encounter actually appears in two interviews—hers and Isaac’s (who intervened in the incident on her behalf). Beryl is a self-described ‘big girl’ who’s not shy about dressing up as ‘a freak’ (her descriptor). The incident she describes involved an individual dancing too close to her and a friend—and repeatedly bumping into them—on an otherwise uncrowded dance floor. Her take on the incident when asked to describe it:

“I give everybody the benefit of the doubt. Sure, a couple of times, no problem, I get it, you were dancing, no problem. I was dancing with a friend of mine and we were dancing really close. We weren’t taking up a lot of space—well, okay, I know I take up more than the average girl space but I’m not taking up the whole dance floor. He could have moved over. Instead it kept going and going and I was just done” (Beryl)

When Beryl acknowledges that, as a big girl, she takes up ‘more than the average girl space’ on the dance floor, she’s almost apologetic—as if the incident could have been her fault. She recognizes that contact on the dance floor is a part of the experience (‘a couple of times, no problem’). But the Instigator loses the benefit of the doubt when she points out his intentionality, “he could have moved over” and “it kept going and going”. She perceived his actions as intentional and attached motive to them.

Another informant, Isaac, was also present that evening and intervened in the incident. He responds by interposing his body and ‘dancing the offender away’.

Describing the same incident:

“The other day there was somebody dancing on the floor and I knew all she wanted to do was be left alone to dance. Somebody who had never been there before and was really, really drunk started to get up behind her and do whatever. Because I’ve known her for years I literally pushed myself in between them and backed him away so she could be left alone. The bouncers even said thank you for doing that. When I go, I try to pay attention to everything that happens. I like

to make sure that the people I am with are able to enjoy themselves too. I knew this woman didn't want to be bothered and this guy just wouldn't leave her alone. So I got in between them, just to make sure she was okay." (Isaac)

c. It Ain't What You Do It's the Way That You Do It

Regulars recognized that they too bumped into people on the dance floor. It wasn't the contact that was the issue, but the reason for it and the response afterwards. They differentiated it by both intention and response. We saw this previously with Chris' lengthy stating of his rules of the dance floor.

"...it's inevitable that when you're dancing you're going to bump into someone who's behind you or to your side or whatever. Depending on the degree of the impact I feel it's always important to acknowledge, 'hey, I'm sorry'. You don't need to go out of your way, but if you step on someone's foot...you know. People have very strange reactions to that sometimes too. They freak out if you bump into them on a dance floor. Well, we're dancing. We're not standing stationary. There's movement going on out here. I'm not slam dancing. I wasn't intentionally running into people." (Chris)

Chris defends his contact by acknowledging that there might be occasions where this would possibly be acceptable (if people were slam dancing) and by specifically pointing out that he wasn't bumping into anyone intentionally. His lack of intention justifies his occasional contact. Michael echoes a similar sentiment:

"Bumping into people? That's part of dancing. Touching people? That's part of dancing. Tripping over people? That's part of dancing. Falling down because you're doing some spinning move? That's part of dancing. If any of those things happen and you don't have a drink in your hand then you're not inconveniencing somebody else. I broke a couple of glasses last week when I bumped into a table but I picked up the large pieces. I tried to clean up and then told the bouncer. Here I wasn't even on the dance floor and I broke one on the perimeter, so I'm certainly capable of causing damage too. I'm not pretending I'm not." (Michael)

In both cases Michael and Chris acknowledge that physical contact is a part of the process of dancing in a nightclub; 'it's inevitable'. But there are ways in which that contact is acceptable and ways in which it is not. And there are responses—apologies,

cleaning up breakage—that are taken as indicators of whether the action was intentional or not.

d. Girls on Film

A final behavior generally attributed to shadow archetypes involved photography. This is where we see the Spoilsport in this environment. Because, for many, this environment was a type of sanctuary from the outside world, photography was frowned upon. Some insiders were willing to be photographed if asked first, others preferred not at all. Some Spoilsports aggressively pursued getting photos (or videos) of participants.

As part of a larger discussion on what we are here describing as shadow archetypes, Leslie had this to say:

“The ones that are most appalling are getting really drunk or really pushy or being obviously objectifying and basically just treating any of the regulars or any of the people who are there all the time or anyone that clearly looks a little freaky as part of the entertainment experience—not just to watch, but to talk to them or get them to say funny things or *to get pictures without their permission* [emphasis added] or try to get a rise out of them. To poke someone, or to play with their tutu, to see what they’re going to say or talk to the little freaky girl and see what she’s going to do or say. That to me is really appalling. Tourists are there to see what it’s all about, they don’t want to be a part of it. They want to make themselves be more normal by watching other people be weird. Sometimes it’s really offensive.” (Leslie)

More than anything it seemed to be the objectification of their activity by those who were not participating in it that most upset informants. When outsiders engaged in photography insiders did not know what would happen to the pictures (a legitimate concern in the age of the internet). They saw the outside world intruding on their set apart world. The Spectator, while integral to any performance, was transformed into the Spoilsport and now interfered with the performance by drawing attention to it. The illusion was broken.

(in a sing-song voice) “I’m having this experience of something I’m not actually experiencing myself.” (normal voice) They’re actually watching us do what we do. It’s kind of weird. I’m watching it too, but I’m also a participant. They’re just watching.” (Helene)

The photographer, as obtrusive spectator, marks the activities within the environment as different (deviant) whereas here they should be seen as normal. For Helene it is strange that someone would be watching someone do what they do here without also being a participant. Their presence points to what she is doing as something different. Even though any festival *is* a performance for both the community and relevant outside audiences, it is implicitly, not explicitly, so. Explicitly it is a celebration. By drawing attention to the performance as performance, the illusion of a separate reality is destroyed and the photographer turns celebration into performance and celebrant into performer. In the process he is turned from a Spectator into a Spoilsport.

H. Summary

What emerges from this is a set of archetypes to describe those people who are participating in any designed experience—whether a videogame, retail establishment, or nightclub—as players. It also identifies a potential second set of people—the shadow archetypes—who, for whatever reason (they have many, both malicious and innocuous), get satisfaction from various forms of disrupting the play of others or are playing games that interfere with the games of the players in this particular playscape.

Each of these archetype should be treated as broad categories. The members of each archetype category will certainly vary. How each category applies to individual games and playscapes will also vary. This means that it is necessary to understand the playscape and its games in order to identify and categorize its players. The Cheater in

an explicit game is called just that, a cheater. Playing a game of *Monopoly* he might steal money from the bank or add a house to his properties when no one is looking. In a social identity game he is not called a Cheater, but a Poseur—someone who cheats at a social identity. In sports fandom (see Discussion below) he would be called a Fair-Weather Fan. Each falls within the archetype category of Cheater, but their manifestation (and identification) within their particular game is different.

V. Conclusions

A. Discussion

What I have shown throughout this research is how the explicit recognition of play in the elective identity process enables us to better understand how consumers approach consumption. Once we are freed from the obligations of necessity—once we are free to play—we can approach our consumption differently. Once we begin to play, we don't all play the same way.

Identities are not static; they are ongoing projects. They are a process. We can work at these projects or we can play at these projects. We can make these projects a game and, in doing so, they take on the characteristics and components of any other game. They have a playscape—boundaries within which they are played. They have rules determining what you can and cannot do. They have pieces, props, and other paraphernalia. They involve the suspension of the 'real world' for the acceptance of an imaginary world that—while it is active—takes precedence over the outside world. Finally, games have other players.

One of the things this research makes apparent is that other players are more important to play and games—especially elective identity games—than we may at first realize. In consumer behavior and consumer culture theory we tend to treat the observer as a given; as something that is fixed. As a result we tend to see elective identity performances as one-sided communication—as presentations made to relevant audiences. What, in fact, my research shows is that elective identity performances are more like multi-sided games with both moves and countermoves. Elective identity becomes a form of negotiation between the performer and an active audience who are

also involved in the performance—or, in keeping with this dissertation, a negotiation between players playing the same or similar games. As an open game—one whose goal is to keep playing and not end the game—elective identity games involve the creation, maintenance, and defense of different elective identities within a playscape. Successful play means the creating, maintaining, and defending playscape-compatible elective identities. It is through the ongoing play within these playscapes that boundaries are tested and performances assessed. It is an iterative process, a conversation, between presenter and observer in which a consumer can choose to play either role. If we study just one side of this equation we cannot get a proper understanding of the role played by each—like hearing only one side of a phone conversation. We can try to piece some of it together, but we can be more confident in what we hear and understand if we have both sides of the conversation.

Players, of course, provide us with an opponent when the game itself (or our own previous personal best) is not enough. Often we cannot play many games without other players—providing us with the satisfaction of demonstrating skill and proving superiority when we play well. Players also provide us with a relevant and significant source of affirmation for what we are doing when they choose to play the same games we are playing and when they recognize and acknowledge when we play them well. They validate our choice of games as worthwhile by choosing it as well. Players create an ‘us’ (fellow players) and a ‘them’ (non-players) against whom we can establish a sense of distinctiveness simply by being players ourselves—we may come to find that we share more in common and feel a stronger camaraderie to our fellow players (even our opponents as fellow players) than to non-players. Huzinga (1956) describes this when

he talks about the camaraderie (that lasts beyond the term of the game) created just by sitting down to play a game together. Fellow players, even if not playing right now, also provide an audience for our performances—and not just any audience, but a well-informed audience that ‘gets it’ and who’s opinion matters *because* they get it.

While using the nightclub as an obvious example of play and elective identity, what we have been constructing is a way to better understand any environment that facilitates consumer elective identity play. Elective Identities can be equally, if not more, important in who consumers see themselves to be than ascribed identities. Once we recognize play as a significant activity in the lives of consumers and the elective identities they consider important, we can position ourselves to fill important roles in those identity processes—we can become the new institutions that embody that identity. They can build identities around their play activities that are reinforced by the same factors—esteem, efficacy, distinctiveness, and continuity—that reinforce ascribed identities.

Play, particularly social elective identity play, is rarely purely ludic (free play without rules). It develops rules, conventions, and expectations over time. Consumers engaged in elective identity play do so as well. While not always formally codified, they develop socially constructed sets of rules that they none-the-less expect other patrons to abide by. They develop specific expectations of others playing the same game—or perceived as playing the same game—and react in different ways to those who violate the norms and expectations that they see as having been established. Despite being informal, the rules can be remarkable consistent. Without an active participant observer approach to the research I do not believe this would be readily available to a

researcher. The business owner doesn't always get to set the rules either. If a strong community develops a business could even find themselves at odds with their own patrons (see the appendix for an example of patron created art regarding rules in the night club) if the patrons see the rules differently than management. They are certainly going to be caught in the middle between players using their designed experiences to play their elective identity games and the shadow archetypes playing a different set of games.

a. Moving Beyond the Nightclub

But can this extend outside of the nightclub or have I only seen a context-specific effect. Let's look at some of the ways that we can see each of these archetypes and their shadows in some different contexts other than in the nightclub. Let's look at fans at a sporting event. We are not talking about the actual players on the field or court, but the performance of 'fan' in the stands. The game is 'Sports Fan'.

The Socializers are probably the first ones we'll see because they're visible in the parking lot. The tailgater at the football game is the most obvious example. He's here at the game to hang out with his buddies and the other fans. They share a bond as fans of the team. They talk to other people in the parking lot before the game and may not ever go in to the stadium, choosing to listen to the game out here where they can be social and relax. Halftime provides an opportunity to talk to other people *about* the ball game without the interference *of* the ball game.

The Achievers are also obvious. They are the big fans. They arrive dressed in their team paraphernalia from head to toe. They most likely know their team's statistics,

where they are in the standings, and will tell you what they need to do to do better. They, like Explorers, are ‘armchair quarterbacks’—willing and able to tell you how the coach could have done things better in the last play, game, season, or draft. They attend games frequently and try to get the best seats they can—they’re season ticket holders when they can afford it (and they’ll find ways to afford it)—but they’ll sit anywhere if they have to. They are here to cheer on the home team to victory and they’ll be the loudest people in the stands. They, along with some Socializers, are likely to be leading crowd cheers—which is why they are part of the ‘home field advantage’. They say things like, “We won!” or “I can’t believe we lost that one!” even though they don’t actually play in the ball game they still say, “we”. For Achievers, halftime is a chance to recharge for the second half.

The Explorers are here to see a good game. They’re equally interested in the star players on the opposition team as they are in the stars of the home team. They’re more likely to know statistics for both team’s players and will be excited by the achievements of either team—at a baseball game you’ll see them in the stands with their scorecards keeping track of the game (*See Holt 1995 for examples of this in baseball*). They are likely to be fans of the sport more than of a particular team—not that they won’t necessarily also have a favorite team. They’re also here for the spectacle and the event. Halftime can be just as much a part of the overall experience as the game itself. They savor unique moments—records being set, ‘first time ever’ events, etc.—regardless of which team it involves.

The Spectator is just there to watch a game. They enjoy the game, may be a fan of one of the teams or a star player, and appreciate the spectacle. They watch the game

but may ultimately be here for other reasons—entertaining for business or accompanying a spouse, for example. They’ll participate in a cheer or ‘the wave’, but are unlikely to start one.

The shadow archetypes are also present at the sporting event. The Instigator is there to provoke the other fans. He doesn’t just cheer for the home team or taunt the opposition, he taunts the opposition’s fans—possibly even starting fights with them. He is the soccer hooligan.

Since the ‘fan game’ could be described as one of cultural capital, the Cheat fakes that capital. He is the Fair-Weather Fan. He cheers for the home team when they are winning but is nowhere to be seen when they are losing. The Cheat also cheers, “We Won!” but he laments, “I can’t believe *they* lost that one!”.

If the Explorer is about the game world itself—the variety of experiences it has to offer—the Vandal denigrates the game. He inhibits or hinders the enjoyment of the players (of the Fan game, not the actual game) by his interactions with the playscape. At the sporting event this can be literal vandalism—always an option for the Vandal—or he can achieve his goals by devaluing the game itself. There are several ways the Vandal can do this. “This sport was better before...” is a way of devaluing any game (you can finish that statement many ways depending on the sport; “the designated hitter”, “they started wearing all that padding and helmets”, “the 3-point shot”). It’s an attack upon the game in its current state that makes it harder to be a fan (and therefore play the fan game) without actually acting upon the fans themselves (which would make someone an Instigator instead).

The Spoilsport can take many forms. They can just refuse to play along. When 'the wave' rolls through the stadium, Spoilsports are the ones who refuse to leave their seat for that brief moment. Spoilsports can also be the ones who choose to play games in a playscape designated for other games. With both the price and demand for seats at most sporting events being relatively high these might be less common, but certainly not unheard of. Arguably, engaging in any activity that is not the primary activity of the playscape could fall into this category.

Sporting events are one place to see this, but I am describing archetypes that we can apply to any designed experience where play is possible. Let's look at the other side of the spectrum from sporting events and do the same breakout (in briefer form) for attending the opera (again, I am not talking about the performers but the audience). The elective identity game is "Attending the Opera" or "Opera Fan".

Achievers would be those who demonstrate their expertise on the subject. They can signal their cultural capital by their knowledge of music and composers. They can joke that Joe Green (Giuseppe Verdi) is their favorite opera composer and their fellow Achievers (and Explorers) will get it.

The Explorers are there to hear (and compare) different interpretations, unusual pieces of music, and the visual spectacle as well. They can go to the opera equally for the performance, a notable performer, and the staging.

Socializers are there because they may recognize important social networking opportunities and because of the particular crowd the event attracts.

Spectators are there to watch because they recognize opera as something 'high culture' or important in some way and want to be able to say they've been to the opera.

An opera needs an audience and the Spectator helps provide it. They can also be there to watch the crowd rather than watch the opera.

The Cheater in this context is called the Poseur (rather than the Fair-Weather Fan or Cheat) here. He fakes a level of expertise he doesn't necessarily have. He is likely to reveal himself if he talks too much to the actual Achievers or Explorers or, during a performance, by clapping at inappropriate times (during a prolonged pause rather than at the end of a piece).

The Vandal mocks the institution itself and can manifest as either the disruptive audience member with candy wrappers that make too much noise when opened during a performance or the audience member who forgets to turn off his phone. He is also the guy in the tuxedo t-shirt (mocking the social conventions of dress for the event without mocking any individual in particular).

The Instigator here is The Boor. He can be a seat poacher, a loud talker (or even just a talker), or an ignorer of any social conventions or etiquette of the milieu.

The Spoilsport is asleep in his seat, the performance being insufficient to rouse his interest enough to keep him awake.

b. It's About How We Play

After all is said and done, what are we left with? Servicescapes—particularly those aiming for (or dependent upon) a designed experience—need to realize that not all consumers are consuming their products in the same way—even when they are consuming the same product, in the same place, at the same time. I believe we have only scratched the surface of how consumers use the playscapes, props, and (access

to) fellow players businesses provide to play an assortment of games which can involve elective identities. When they play these games they play them in different ways. This is seen in what I have identified as the four player archetypes (Achievers, Explorers, Socializers, and Spectators) adapted from Bartle. When we correct for some of the biases in Bartle's original formulation, the archetypes provide us with a way to understand and categorize consumers according to what they are seeking in that environment—esteem, self-efficacy, distinction, and/or continuity. The player archetypes are those consumers who are consuming our product in ways that are, more or less, intended by the offering—they are playing the game being offered or at least are playing the same game together.

There are also the shadow archetypes, the dark players (Cheaters, Vandals, Instigators, and Spoilsports). They too are playing games within our servicescapes and designed experiences but they are not necessarily playing the same games as the other players. They too are getting satisfactions that are just like the player archetypes in many cases but they arrive at them in different ways. They often get their satisfaction from disrupting the play of others.

With this knowledge in hand we can better structure our designed experiences to match the needs of our consumers—and we can be aware of some of the pitfalls of doing so as well. We can plan offerings that give our customers what they actually want, not what we think they want. That means it is incumbent on us to learn what types of players we are dealing with and who we want to attract.

c. Who's Here and Who Isn't?

Not every archetype need be present in every playscape. Some may be possible but not present (a selective social club is set up to try to keep out the shadow archetypes by design), some may just be difficult or impossible to define within the context (the difficulty for Bartle's original formulation because online MUDs and MMORPGs do not lend themselves to Spectators). Some may be more desirable than others in certain playscapes—can a nightclub ever have too many Socializers?. (Yes, it can, if they are socializing on the dance floor while Achievers, Explorers, and even other Socializers are trying to dance). What my work provides is a way to begin to recognize different types of participants in our designed experiences and understand the different satisfactions they derive from those experiences.

Bartle laid the groundwork upon which we can begin to build an understanding of how consumers play in these environments, but his work is insufficient. It is my contention that we must go beyond his start to a better understanding of how these player archetypes explain consumer behaviors by understanding the different satisfactions they get within these environments. I believe what I lay out better explains how consumers play within designed experiences.

The central focus of this dissertation concerns elective identity—the satisfactions and motivations to play within these playscapes to create, maintain, and defend these identities. Understanding players and how they play elective identity games is integral to understanding their reasons for playing. I argue that different players gain benefit from different identity reinforcing elements based on how they play. Each quadrant within our matrix provides for a different identity process element—distinctiveness, continuity, self-

esteem, efficacy—that is shared by the two adjacent player types. What we then get is figure 9.

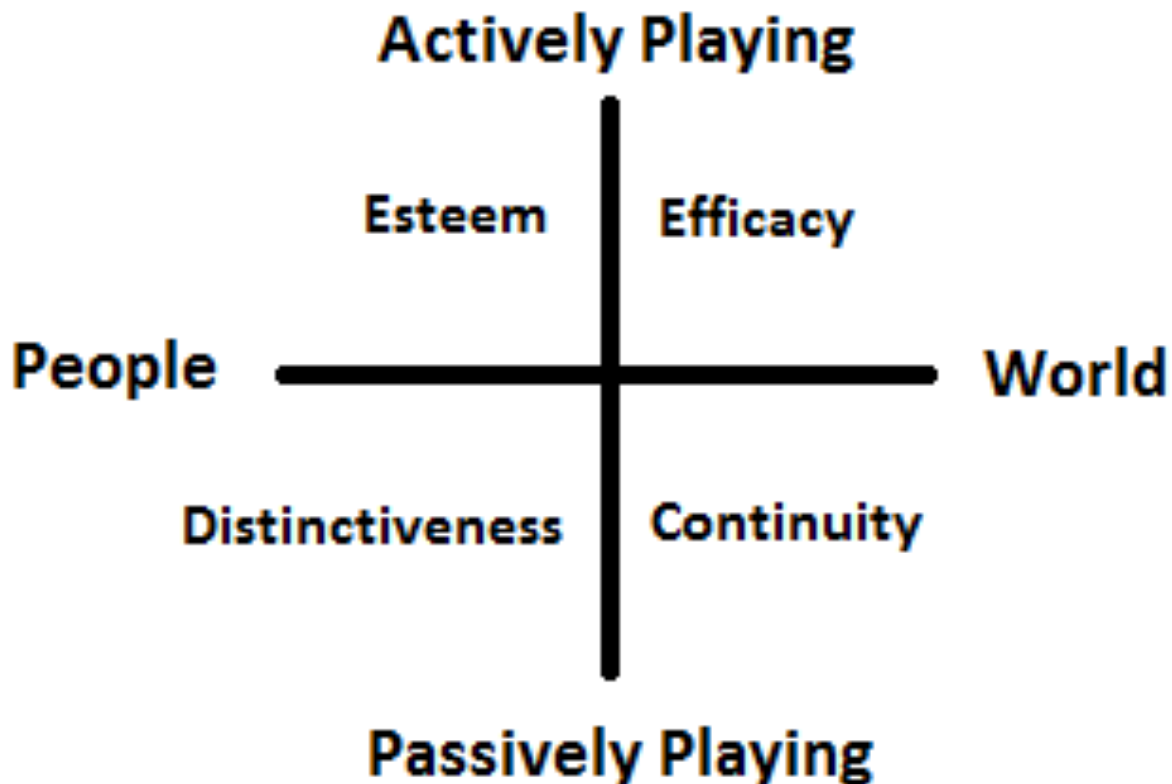


Figure 9: Merging Bartle with the Identity Process Model

When Achievers (Cheaters) or Socializers (Instigators) actively play with People, they get Esteem—the regard with which others hold us and, in the case of self-esteem, with which we regard ourselves. For the Achiever this is the laurels and accolades of the victor; for the Socializer it is popularity or notoriety. In open-ended games, they get to keep playing because they have added more players.

When Achievers (Cheaters) and Explorers (Vandals) actively play with elements of the World, they achieve Efficacy. It is through their actions that they are able to

display dominance over the environment, its elements, or its challenges. Achievers get awards, Explorers complete collections. In open-ended games, they get to keep playing because they have expanded the game.

Socializers (Instigators) and Spectators (Spoilsports), by passively playing with others (or refusing to play in the case of Spoilsports), establish Distinctiveness. Through their interactions they set themselves apart from (and sometimes above) 'others' and the social representations (Breakwell, 1993) associated with themselves and others. Both gain from the social comparisons. In open-ended games they get to keep playing because there are more active players to interact with them or for them to watch.

Explorers (Vandals) and Spectators (Spoilsports), by passively playing with the World, get Continuity. By observing the World—rather than actively trying to influence it—they can experience the ways in which continuity is present. They can gain benefit, reward, or satisfaction from the ongoing continuity they observe. Continuity validates existing structures or reminds them of better times. In open-ended games they get to keep playing because they discover possible avenues of exploration and get to watch more spectacles or events.

B. Contributions to Theory in the Field

I think this research can offer some significant theoretical contributions to the field of marketing. First, I think it takes a more in-depth look at the role of play in the consumer experience. Consumers play with the offerings of producers in ways that are not frivolous but are, in fact, significant to their lives and their identities. The role of this elective identity play in consumers' lives is relatively unexplored in the field of

marketing—management researchers have taken some notice, though only in the context of organizational identities and play (Ibarra and Petriglieri, 2010). Marketing has treated identity processes as work, I propose we treat them as play.

When we play we don't all play the same way. It is in transforming Bartle's original player archetypes—Achiever, Explorer, Socializer, Killer—into my player archetypes—Achiever, Explorer, Socializer, Spectator—that I think we can begin to better understand consumers and how they consume when they play. When consumers have room to play, most will play. Understanding that modern Western consumer culture increasing provides these opportunities to play is integral to seeing *how* consumers then play with their consumption. If they are going to play games (and they are), then we need to make sure that we are making our products most conducive to play. We make our product conducive to play by understanding the types of games our consumers most want to play. Consumers most want to play the games that give them the rewards they seek most.

Where play is marginally explored in marketing, Dark Play is new to the field. For any business, but especially the more experientially-based business, Dark Play offers a way to understand those troublesome consumers that may disrupt what it is we and our customers are trying to do—the shadow archetypes. They have a set of motivations that resemble our customers' motivations but ultimately are playing differently than our other customers. Whether you see these shadow archetypes as a problem (disruption) or an opportunity (another revenue stream), recognizing that they exist is the first step to dealing with them.

Similarly, while marketing recognizes the attachments we can develop to objects, place attachment has remained relatively unexplored. Place attachment has developed a rich literature in environmental psychology and yet has failed to make significant inroads into marketing. I've explored it from its links to the places we use for elective identity, but there is room for a more thorough examination of the many relationships between place, business, and consumers (and their identities).

C. Managerial Implications

There are several ways we can take the findings in this research and apply them in real-world contexts.

a. Know the Rules Your Players are Playing by

Consumers can develop very specific expectations of what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior in the games they play; they will codify rules. The business in which these processes play out may or may not be a part of that process. Managers need to decide what they will allow, what they will encourage, and what they will stop from happening within their playscape. Belk (2000) shows how Las Vegas, through the process of infantilization, encourages all kinds of behaviors not otherwise acceptable outside its playscape. Goulding et al (2008) and Thornton (1996) show how this plays out in rave culture in England through the manipulation of light, sound, and space.

b. Different Consumers Will Value Different Rewards

Achievers Socializers, Explorers, and Spectators respond to different types of rewards than their fellow archetypes. The type of rewards our designed experiences provide can influence the types of players we attract and keep. Not every type of designed experience is going to appeal equally to different archetypes. Where this research was conducted in a nightclub environment—where one might expect to see more Socializers than any other type—different businesses may have different types of appeals for different archetypes. The nightclub examined in this research had plenty of Explorer and Achiever behavior and attracted a significant amount of Spectators—enough so that every Socializer, Achiever, and Explorer could describe experiences with them. But this research has to be able to move beyond the context of the nightclub and be more broadly applicable. Let's look at two businesses, a games store and a kitchen/cooking store, and apply the archetypes across all four types of rewards.

Socializers and Achievers (upper left quadrant) are going to respond most to rewards that involve personal comparison and social interaction; those that provide esteem. Competitions where players can compare how they are doing to others (and to group averages) will give the more competitive of both types the recognition they seek. Give them a social environment where they can discuss achievements and interact with people and they will be happy. But, be careful, too much 'shop talk' bores the Socializers and too much 'chit chat' annoys the Achievers. Best to give them both places to retreat to in order to talk to their fellows without the annoyance of the other—with room for crossover should either side desire. These are the players that want

opportunities to meet interesting people and they will take the actions necessary to do so (they introduce themselves to others, they don't wait to be introduced).

Designed experiences that offer high levels of social interaction are likely to appeal to these archetypes. The nightclub is an obvious example; the coffee shop is certainly another. Any service or product that is enhanced by or requires other participants can benefit from this.

My neighborhood has a rather successful gaming store. They sell all manner of board and card games. Many of the games are best played with 4 or more players. For those with limited social connections or friends who are too busy with family and work, it becomes difficult to get a group together to play them. The store facilitates this play process by holding nightly game nights for different types of games—Monday may be board games, Tuesday a particular collectible card game, Wednesday is miniatures. Every night of the week is a different game or group of games. The store not only facilitates the playing of the games but they are also encouraging sales of their products. A large multiplayer game may not be worth buying if I know my usual friends are rarely available at the same time to get together to play. But if I know I can bring it to game night and find a group of 'friends by the set' (Oldenburg, 1999), I am more willing to make that investment. They provide the social network for me and, if winning is important as it is for the Achievers, supplies me with a ready set of adversaries.

In a kitchen/cooking store there are ways to enhance the customer experience in ways that reward the Socializer and Achiever. Tastings, classes, book signings can all bring people with shared interests together. Enjoying a good meal is nice, but some would rather do so in the company of others. The kitchen/cooking store can provide that

central, common place for bringing people together while promoting their own products. For the Achiever it may not be enough to cook a meal, it is important to cook a *good* meal. As our 'food consciousness' expands, for some, "It's no longer acceptable to dump a handful of vegetables and brown rice into a wok, stir them into mush, then invite your friends over and expect them to be grateful. They now know better." (Bourdain, 2007, p1). The kitchen—like any other part of our lives—can be a place where we play cultural capital games and the Achievers will still look for ways to 'win'.

Achievers and Explorers (upper right quadrant) look for efficacy. Give them ways to succeed at things that, preferably, don't have to involve interacting with too many people. They're more likely to look for 'high scores' and 'personal bests'. They only want to socialize if it provides a better way to achieve their goals or opens up new avenues of exploration (or to talk about what they have already accomplished or explored), otherwise they mostly don't want to be bothered. They want to know how much they've done and how much is left to do. They respond to new challenges to be overcome or new experiences to be had.

The aforementioned game store provides these opportunities as well. By providing an environment where customers can come and try new games they give the Explorer the opportunity to explore possibilities. They allow him to try new games but to also experiment with new strategies for familiar games. The game night also allows the Achiever the opportunity to excel at a range of games and prove overall expertise extendable beyond one game and applicable to others—they become a worthy adversary regardless of game. They get a chance to not just beat their friends, but strangers against whom they otherwise would not get a chance to compete.

For the kitchen/cooking store there is the opportunity to provide skills at which either group can succeed. It is a chance to expose the Explorers to opportunities or experiences they may not have known existed. The store can give Achievers skills with which to achieve and Explorers information and opportunities to explore.

Explorers and Spectators (lower right quadrant) seek continuity. Demonstrate to them how what they are doing is part of something larger or reinforces some other important element of their life. *Show* them things, don't make them make things happen. People in this quadrant want to *experience* exciting things, they don't want to *create* exciting things. They watch parades, they don't march in them. Rewards likely to appeal to both involve some kind of relationship to the things they already consider important—especially things like values.

These are the consumers who like to watch, not do. In the game store this means that they want to see a well-played game, even if they don't play in it. The Explorer will use that watching experience as a way to possibly improve his own play; the Spectator may just enjoy watching it happen—never intending to do the same himself.

For the kitchen/cooking store this means providing a variety of experiences to watch—not necessarily do. They want demonstrations, not workshops. These consumers are the audience for cooking shows like Andrew Zimmern's *Bizarre Foods*. The Explorers watch him for ideas—places to go and foods to eat when they get there; The Spectators watch to watch. They want to see the guy on television eat bugs, brains, and barnacles—but would never dream of doing so themselves. Give them both recipe books, exotic ingredients, and any spectacle you can provide.

Socializers and Spectators (lower left quadrant) seek distinctiveness. Their rewards are in identifying *this* relationship as being different from other relationships—but they don't necessarily want to create these relationships, they want to observe or be a part of them. They want to meet or watch interesting people but they don't want to have to *be* interesting people.

For these customers the game shop and its activities are a place where people can come and be social and games provide the context for doing so. They don't 'play to win', they play to be sociable (they 'play to play'). Sometimes they may not even play, sometimes they just watch—the event being enough to guarantee social interactions without the need to play.

For the cooking store these customers seek out others with shared interests. They want to meet others with the same interests, not compete with them, but they don't want to necessarily do the work to meet them. The store can help this by making it easier for them to meet. These are the people who are passively playing but are most concerned with the people side of the game. They want to meet and/or watch people but want to be on the receiving end. You help them with things like providing a host or breaking down barriers to interaction.

c. Identify What Type of Player Your Best Customers Are

These player archetypes are going to apply to different businesses and different industries in different ways. The proper mix in one industry may not be the proper mix in another. The mix we have may not be the mix we want.

If the Pareto's Principle, the 80/20 rule, is to be believed then we need understand what type of player(s) our biggest customers are—not necessarily what most of our customers may be. Do they fall equally into all four archetypes or just one or two of them? If they are just one type then we need to be focusing on designing our environment to best meet the needs of that archetype. If they are evenly distributed, then we need to also design accordingly.

We also need to recognize that what we do to attract our preferred archetype may also attract its shadow archetype. The Cheater can pilfer the esteem meant for the achiever and may still feel efficacy despite cheating to win. Environments with lots of Socializers are fertile hunting grounds for Instigators and the esteem and distinctiveness they seek. Managing these relationships are important lest they drive away our customers to seek satisfaction elsewhere.

This means we need to understand who our best customers are and how we can identify the different types. Surveys can provide broad information about what they want—best this may only tell us what the largest number of them want, not necessarily that prime 20%. Focus groups, if we can afford them, may allow us to dig deeper. The ability to pick and choose our participants may allow us greater control in this process. Observation by those with direct contact can be priceless if our observers know what to look for and who to look at. At its core, this means understanding our customers, their purchase behaviors, and what they want.

d. The Necessity of Subcultural Capital

In environments with high subcultural capital requirements it can be difficult for beginning Achievers to achieve, beginning Socializers to socialize, and beginning Explorers to explorer. Even the Spectators may be lost as they don't know where to begin to understand it all. It becomes contingent on the business to help aspiring players get off the ground. The initial learning curve in any area is steep until the learner can learn what they need to learn. Explain the game, wherever possible, to new players. Make learning easier (but not too easy lest you lose that sense of accomplishment in learning it). Provide guides and hosts.

One notable example of this was a blog linked to the weekly event which one DJ co-hosted. On that site she and her invited contributors posted songs, videos, and commentary on what they considered to be significant artists from the genre. Anyone with an interest in the music now had easy access to music considered important to the scene as contributed by members of the scene. For new members it was an easily accessible source of information. For long-time members it provided 'fresh blood' to ensure the scene's longevity. It also gave them more fellow members with which to socialize if that was important to them. It gave members of the community a stake in the success of the night and a sense of contributing to that success. It connected them to each other as they had a forum to talk with each other about their opinions about these artists (allowing them to demonstrate expertise in the field).

e. How Do You Prevent Explorers and Achievers From Roaming Too

Far?

Socializers can be the easiest group to satisfy—just keep an adequate supply of people coming through the door. But Achievers and Explorers require more—they need things to achieve and explore. They need things to accomplish or they go elsewhere to look for them. Any business—but especially the designed experience—needs to find ways to bring them back for more. Take something as straightforward as a restaurant. The Socializer can come back again and again to socialize with customers or staff they know. They might even be counted on to bring their own fellow socializers with them. They are looking to the restaurant to provide a socialization context for them. Food, service, and the environment need to not get in the way of the social experience. The Achiever is looking for a personal experience. He wants an exceptional meal and a great dining experience. Where the Socializer is happy with a meal that is unobtrusive and allows their party to enjoy each other's company, the Achiever is more likely to be looking for an experience that is exceptional. The Explorer wants something they can't get elsewhere.

At its most basic, the Socializer may be happy with a meal they could have cooked at home but didn't have to and now doesn't have to clean up afterwards. The Socializer benefits from a social environment, where everyone can get together and no one has to clean up afterwards. No one is in the kitchen cooking (no one from their party at least). The Achiever doesn't want something they could cook at home—or they'd do that and do it better. They want a meal to be some kind of experience for them to enjoy. The Explorer is also looking for something better than they could do

themselves—or, at the spectator side of the spectrum, they're looking to watch someone do it. They are more likely looking for how this place does it different, not necessarily better. The Spectator may go to the restaurant simply to be around other people or a particular restaurant because they've heard it is the 'place to be'. They are less there to actually involve themselves with the goings on than to see what all the buzz is about.

f. What About the Shadow Archetypes?

If both Achievers and Poseurs are likely to gain some reward from esteem and efficacy your efforts to increase one may increase numbers of the other. Efforts to attract Socializers may also attract Instigators. Can you (and should you) concern yourself with whether you are attracting one or the other? For all the archetypes what role does their shadow play in your business? After all, Poseurs can spend money just like Achievers. Do the shadows hurt your business—driving away your more valuable and loyal customers—or are they equally (more?) valuable to you?

It is outside the research conducted here but it is my impulse to say that the shadows are more harm than good. That being said, you may need some of them. Bartle, in his original formulation of player archetypes, argued that *some* Killers were a good thing—they provided a challenge for Achievers and Explorers to overcome and a subject of conversation for Socializers. But this was only if kept in check. In the nightclub research in this research the shadow archetypes served as a reminder of the mainstream against which many members positioned their identity. The shadows were an audience for which they could perform. *Some* shadows were a good thing. Too many

shadow archetypes meant too many conflicts and too many challenges, leading to frustration and, eventually, flight in search of a better playscape.

D. Limitations

This research is going to be limited by the specificity of the research context—the nightclub. What is needed is additional research to show how this can move beyond this one context and be more generalizable.

E. Future Research

I believe this research opens up a number of fruitful avenues of exploration. The first step is to gather evidence of this as it applies across various different contexts. Bartle's original formulation of the player archetypes was derived from his experiences with online gamers. His four basic archetypes—Achievers, Socializers, Explorers, and Killers—described, as he saw it, his experiences of gamers in MUDs and MMORPGs. In applying his foundation to the nightclub I found that a different formulation worked better to explain player behavior. In any context where people can play elective identity games, I believe we will be able to see evidence of these different archetypes—my examples from sports fans, opera, kitchen and cooking stores, and real-world gamers have already pointed to some of the ways these can manifest. I believe this research would benefit from applying a similar examination of consumers and how they play within multiple designed experiences, servicescapes, or retail settings. I think even a cursory examination of previous research (DeBerry-Spence, 2008; Henry and Caldwell, 2007; Kozinets et al, 2004; Penaloza, 1998) suggests that we can see the these

archetypes underlying what the respective authors are describing. Taking just one as an example, in describing the role of the audience at consumer spectacles like Niketown, Penaloza says,

“From the spectators of the early Olympics in Athens and the coliseum of Rome, to the monarchs' kingdoms, religious congregations, citizenry and most recently, consumers, popular audience support and participation is required. Most critically, this participation plays a key role in legitimizing the social institution (Foucault 1980). Various levels of audience participation include *being there*, experiencing the event with others, *beholding* the spectacular sights and objects, and actively taking part in the rituals. The audience may be live and/or convened through the media.” (Penaloza, 1998, p347)

Being there and beholding are for the Explorers and Socializers in their more passive mode of playing and for the Spectators. Actively taking part in the rituals is for the Achievers as well as the Socializers and Explorers in their actively playing mode.

I think the elective identity research pursued here would also mesh well with the terror management theory area of social psychology. Terror Management Theory posits that humans are uniquely aware of our own mortality and that when that mortality is made salient we engage in activities which enhance our self-esteem (Greenberg et al, 1986). I would argue that, since elective identity play is so important to who consumers see themselves as being and also gains benefits from enhanced self-esteem, we would see similar responses when elective identities are threatened. I believe this might go a long way to explaining some of the responses of players in my research to the behaviors of the shadow archetypes.

This leads to the research questions, “Does salience of death enhance elective identity processes?” or “Does a challenge or threat to elective identities reinforce self-esteem processes in consumers?” I think there are some relevant and significant links

between the elective identity, stigma, and terror management literatures. Deschene et al (2000) explores a similar theme in relation to sports fan affiliation.

There should also be some way to identify various archetypes without the labor- and time-intensive labor and in-depth knowledge of an embedded researcher. I believe that it is possible to develop some survey instruments to identify the various player types (and their shadows). We should be able to identify which satisfactions—Efficacy, Esteem, Distinction, and Continuity—particular patrons are most likely to pursue. A patron who primarily pursues Efficacy satisfactions with a secondary emphasis on Esteem is most likely an Achiever whereas a patron with primary Efficacy and secondary Continuity is more likely an Explorer. A properly designed research tool should help us identify these differences.

Similarly, I think that examining the correlation between players' expectations of a designed experience and management's perceptions of their customers' expectations would also be fruitful. What effect does the manager's player archetype have on the players and the success of the business?

Appendix A: Customer-created Content —Facebook

The following graphic was posted to the Neo Facebook page by a customer.



There are a number of ways in which the customer is playing with several pop culture themes. First, the entire graphic plays off of the “slippery when wet” floor signs with their big “Caution” at the top and attention-grabbing black-on-yellow text. It establishes itself as a warning to the unwary. There are the references to the movie “300”. The figure kicking the other off the floor is a direct reference to a scene in the movie where the protagonist kicks a treacherous opponent into a well. It is also present in the “This is ~~Sparta~~ Neo” text beneath it. Both here and in the film the “This is...” line is set up as a strong declaration of a place where things are different. ‘You may do things differently where you are from, but this is...’ And yet, with all the references to violence in this warning, the fine print, after making its request, still ends in “please”.

Appendix B: Customer-created Content—Trading Cards



Some kids collect baseball cards; some adults collect trading cards. Customer Nate, a professional graphic artist, draws collectible trading cards of the staff and customers at Neo. He was inspired by his childhood love of the “Garbage Pail Kids” line of cards from his childhood and began sketching staff at his favorite nightclub. This branched out into notable patrons and friends. The cards were used for promotional materials for the bar at first—they included the weekly schedule of events on the back of each card. Later cards were done to recognize fellow patrons and, occasionally, by request. The artist requires that the subject only be in good standing with the bar. Some patrons collect the cards and pursue them aggressively (they are distributed for free by the artist but you must be present when he brings them to hand out). Cards will often play off of pop cultural themes like video games or movies.

Appendix C: Customer-created Content —Graphic Novel

The following is an excerpt from a customer created autobiographical graphic novel that Philippe is in the process of writing and drawing.



Philippe chronicles his experiences in both the club and in meeting a person who he considers to be significant in his life (though they are not dating). They share a bond around their mutual love of similar music, dancing, and this club. His graphic novel revolves around these mutual interests and the club features prominently in his writing.

Appendix D: IRB Approval, Exemption Granted

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (MC 672)
203 Administrative Office Building
1737 West Polk Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612-7227

Exemption Granted

May 31, 2011

John Hildebrand
Managerial Studies
6451 N. Bosworth #2
Chicago, IL 60626
Phone: (773) 655-3516

RE: Research Protocol # 2011-0374
“The Construction, Maintenance, and Defense of Elective Identity Through Play”

Dear Mr. Hildebrand:

Your Claim of Exemption was reviewed on May 31, 2011 and it was determined that your research protocol meets the criteria for exemption as defined in the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects [(45 CFR 46.101(b)). You may now begin your research.

Please note the following regarding your research:

Exemption Period:	May 31, 2011 – May 30, 2014
Sponsor(s):	None
Performance Site(s):	UIC
Recruitment Site(s):	Various Businesses
Subject Population:	Adult (18+ years) subjects only
Number of Subjects:	20

The specific exemption category under 45 CFR 46.101(b) is:

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Current Investigator Training Periods:

- 1) Joseph Cherian: September 18, 2009 – **September 18, 2011**
- 2) John Hidebrand: May 16, 2011 – May 16, 2013

Please be reminded that all UIC Investigators must complete two-hours of Investigator Continuing Education every two years: http://tiger.uic.edu/depts/ovcr/research/protocolreview/irb/education/2-2-2/ce_requirements.shtml

You are reminded that investigators whose research involving human subjects is determined to be exempt from the federal regulations for the protection of human subjects still have

responsibilities for the ethical conduct of the research under state law and UIC policy. Please be aware of the following UIC policies and responsibilities for investigators:

1. Amendments You are responsible for reporting any amendments to your research protocol that may affect the determination of the exemption and may result in your research no longer being eligible for the exemption that has been granted.
2. Record Keeping You are responsible for maintaining a copy all research related records in a secure location in the event future verification is necessary, at a minimum these documents include: the research protocol, the claim of exemption application, all questionnaires, survey instruments, interview questions and/or data collection instruments associated with this research protocol, recruiting or advertising materials, any consent forms or information sheets given to subjects, or any other pertinent documents.
3. Final Research Report When you have completed work on your research protocol, you should submit a final research report to the Office for Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS).
4. Information for Human Subjects UIC Policy requires investigators to provide information about the research protocol to subjects and to obtain their permission prior to their participating in the research. The information about the research protocol should be presented to subjects in writing or orally from a written script. When appropriate, the following information must be provided to all research subjects participating in exempt studies:
 - a. The researchers affiliation; UIC, JBVMAC or other institutions,
 - b. The purpose of the research,
 - c. The extent of the subject's involvement and an explanation of the procedures to be followed,
 - d. Whether the information being collected will be used for any purposes other than the proposed research,
 - e. A description of the procedures to protect the privacy of subjects and the confidentiality of the research information and data,
 - f. Description of any reasonable foreseeable risks,
 - g. Description of anticipated benefit,
 - h. A statement that participation is voluntary and subjects can refuse to participate or can stop at any time,
 - i. A statement that the researcher is available to answer any questions that the subject may have and which includes the name and phone number of the investigator(s).
 - j. A statement that the UIC IRB/OPRS or JBVMAC Patient Advocate Office is available if there are questions about subject's rights, which includes the appropriate phone numbers.

Please be sure to:

→ Use your research protocol number (listed above) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact me at (312) 355-2908 or the OPRS office at (312) 996-1711. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

Sincerely,

Charles W. Hoehne, B.S., C.I.P.
Assistant Director, IRB # 2
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

cc: Mark Shanley, Managerial Studies, M/C 243
Joseph Cherian, Managerial Studies, M/C 243

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Academic Experience

2010 - Present	Visiting Assistant Professor, Concordia University Chicago
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Courses Taught

Introduction to Marketing*	Principles of Retailing
Consumer Market Behavior*	Organizational Behavior
Strategic Marketing Planning and Strategy*	Marketing II
Global Marketing	Family Entrepreneurship
Multicultural Marketing	Managerial Economics
Exploring Chicago's Cultural Diversity Through Food	The Political Economy of Consumer Culture

**Taught at both the undergraduate and graduate level*

Research Activities

Proceedings

Whalen, Joel, et al (2012). " My Favorite Assignment: Selections from the ABC 2011 Annual Convention, Montreal, CA." *Business Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 75. No. 3. September 2012.

Work In Progress

“The Politics of Dancing”. Targeting *Journal of Consumer Research*.

“And You Do It Too”. Targeting *Journal of Marketing Education*.

Presentations

October, 2011: “My Favorite Assignment: Imaginary Expedition”, presented at the 76th *Annual Association for Business Communication Conference*, (Oct 20) Montreal, Canada.

October, 2011: “And You Do It Too”. Making marketing theory relevant and applicable to the lives of students through direct demonstration of their theory-supporting behaviors. *ACCA Scholarship of Pedagogy Conference*, (Oct 15) Chicago, IL.

October, 2011: “Imaginary Expeditions”. Enhancing student learning through experiential, immersive activities. *ACCA Scholarship of Pedagogy Conference*, (Oct 15) Chicago, IL.

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June, 2008: “The Politics of Dancing”. Research focusing on consumption, community, and identity. A working paper presented at the *Consumer Culture Theory Conference*, Boston, MA.

June, 2007: “The Role of the Other in Online Environments”. Preliminary research on how others affect the online experience of consumers in a service environment. A working paper presented at the 7th *Hawaii International Conference on Business*, Honolulu, HI.

June, 2007: “The Politics of Dancing”. Preliminary research focusing on consumption, community, and identity. A working paper presented at the 7th *Hawaii International Conference on Business*, Honolulu, HI.

Research Interests

I enjoy bringing together divergent threads of scholarship to better understand consumer behavior, especially the influences of culture and of space and place.

Teaching Interests

Primary areas of interest include *Consumer Behavior*, *Principles of Marketing*, and *Multicultural Marketing*. Secondary areas are *Marketing Strategy* and *Business Communication*.

Industry Experience

2000 - 2001	Content Developer Cognitive Arts, Chicago
1997 - 2000	Staff Developer & Event Planner SAS Program, DePaul University, Chicago

1996 - 1997 **Training Assistant**
Midwest AIDS Training and Education Center, Chicago

Service Activities—Concordia University

Department-level

- New Hire Committee
- Peer Review Committee

University-level

- STOP Committee (Striving to Overcome Prejudice), co-chair
- Innovations in Undergraduate Scheduling Working Group
- Synodic Placement

Student-Oriented

- Faculty advisor for *Business Club*
- Student academic advisor for 25+ students

Professional Activities

Manuscripts reviewed for:

- Association for Consumer Research Conference (2008, 2010)
- Direct Marketing Education Foundation Case Writers' Workshop (2010, 2011, 2012)

Professional Memberships

- American Marketing Association
- Association for Consumer Research
- Association for Business Communication
- National Association of Black School Educators