

Theory in Recreation and Leisure Research: Reflections from the Editors

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The evolution and importance of theory in leisure research have been recognized as essential to broaden understandings of leisure. The purpose of this reflective piece is to describe and critique the contributions that theory has made by examining the research documented in American leisure and recreation research journals during the 1990s and projecting those contributions toward the future. From our perspective as individuals associated with Leisure Sciences during the past two years, we provide a review of literature regarding the meanings of theory, note summaries of other studies in our field that have empirically examined theory, compare leisure research from the 1980s to the 1990s, and offer suggestions regarding trends in the future theoretical development of the parks, recreation, leisure, sport, and tourism fields. We also advocate “post approaches” such as postmodernism that may be essential in the next stage of theory evolution.

Keywords concepts, models, methods, structuralism, postmodernism

In a research class taught at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, we emphasize the value and importance of theory as the foundation for research done in our field. Our students usually have great ideas for problem-based research that they want to undertake, but sometimes they struggle with what theory or conceptual foundations to use when addressing their research questions. One frustrated student joked one day, “Isn’t there a website I can go to like INeedATheory.com?” The frustrated question was not new to us but underlined the need to reflect again what theory is, why it is important, and how it can be used in leisure research.

Ellis (1993) called parks, recreation, and therapeutic recreation research a developing social science. Three approaches to studying social behavior (Hollander, 1976) in the contemporary period also seem to have paralleled leisure sciences research in the past 40 years. Leisure research evolved from the early works of people like Brightbill (1960), Nash (1969), and Parker (1971), who explained the meanings of leisure through social philosophy, which

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included conjecture and rationalism. Social empiricism as a second approach focused on describing and documenting behavior, with Neulinger's (1974) work being one example. The third approach moves toward social analysis that attempts to explain causality and the underlying structures of behavior (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Iso-Ahola, 1980). In the 1990s and into the twenty-first century new foci within the social analysis approach has resulted in science built around poststructuralism and postmodernism (e.g. Kelly, 1997; Rojek, 1995) that is opening the door to broader understandings of leisure.

The use of theory in leisure studies in the U.S. and Canada has not evolved in the same way as in Europe. Merton (1949) described the theorist with pure ideas uncontaminated by mundane facts juxtaposed to the social researcher equipped with questionnaire and pencil in pursuit of statistics that sometimes appear meaningless. Sometimes the differences between British leisure studies and North American leisure sciences (Coalter, 1999) have been described as the difference between ideas and statistics. In the twenty-first century, the suggestion that differences in research approaches are due to data verses ideas or serendipitous verses non-serendipitous findings is too dialectic. Kaplan (1964), however, argued that no observation is purely empirical and no theory is purely ideation. Theory and empirical research must interact if the field of leisure research is to have the body of knowledge necessary to move forward.

The purpose of this reflections piece is to describe and critique the contributions that theory has made by examining the research documented in American leisure and recreation research journals during the 1990s and projecting those contributions toward the future. Although the major focus of research journals is, and should be, on building a body of knowledge related to recreation and leisure (Burdge, 1975), we believe that a focused self-examination from time to time may improve research efforts. As we finalize this article, we have had the experience of being directly associated with *Leisure Sciences* for almost two years. Our experience working with the journal does not make us experts in any way, but we believe that this piece, along with the field analysis research undertaken by Jackson described in this issue (2004), may provide a baseline for understanding more about theory and leisure research. We argue that theory is critical for an evolving body of knowledge that may or may not apply directly to practice.

Theory

Defining theory results in some of the same difficulties found in defining leisure. Like leisure, "finding" theory may be more important than "defining" it. Volumes have been written about theory including what it is and what it means. A tidy definition might be nice but may also limit or negate the value of why theory is important. Several common ideas, however, have been associated with theory. For example, Kelly (1987) noted that "... theory is systematic explanation of some repeated phenomena that is based on evidence" (p. 1). Theory attempts to explain why facts are what they are. Henderson (1994) concluded that theory gives insight into what can be or has been observed. Theory is an explanation of the relationship between variables that leads to the right kind of questions to ask about facts and phenomena (Hollander, 1976; Stinchcombe, 1968).

A tendency sometimes exists to use philosophy and theory interchangeably. Philosophy relates to a belief system about how the world *should* work. Babbie (2003) explained, "Social scientific theory has to do with what is, not what should be" (p. 26). He further stated that theory aims "to determine the logical and persistent patterns of regularity in social life" (p. 48). Theories should be as explicative as possible in ascertaining patterns and explanations. Stinchcombe (1968) noted that "for a social theorist, ignorance is more excusable than vagueness" (p. 6).

Theory exists in different scopes. Grand theories aim at explaining all-embracing and grandiose ideas. Most theories used in leisure sciences are middle range theories, meaning that they are limited and modest in their scope. Uncovering grand theories and universal truths of social behavior may be an impossible task, but middle range theory can provide building blocks for analyzing recreation and leisure behavior. Leisure researchers may be able to address only limited explanations of data, but middle range theories can discern patterns that help understand leisure and human behavior better. In addition, postmodernists debunk the possibilities of finding a universal truth or grand theory regarding any topic and recognize that all theory is contextual and dynamic.

The notions of inductive and deductive theory are often unconsciously dichotomized. Induction and deduction are closely related although the research methods selected may determine whether more emphasis is placed on one approach or the other. Deduction is the traditional approach to the scientific method whereby an individual starts with some general theory and applies it to a specific situation. With induction, a researcher starts with observed data and develops a generalization to explain relationships. Wallace (1971) noted, "In science (as in everyday life), things must be believed to be seen, as well as seen to be believed; and questions must already be answered a little, if they are to be asked at all" (p. 128). Stebbins (1997) noted that exploration in leisure research is not serendipitous but is purposive, systematic, and prearranged. Exploration is always inductive but can occur using both qualitative and quantitative data. Exploratory studies are often avoided and devalued because they are perceived as preliminary. Exploratory studies can, however, provide inductive theory for further deductive research.

Grounded theory is commonly associated with inductive theory. Grounded theory, according to Strauss and Corbin (1967), refers to deriving theory from data. Grounded theory is really a method used where data collection, analysis, and theory are closely connected. The theory emerging from the grounded approach is either described as substantive theory or formal theory. For example, in a study where little is known about a topic, the theory might be substantive in that the results relate directly to the specific data and offer a foundation for further development and testing. On the other hand, formal grounded theory occurs when the results grounded in the data may support other existing formal theories that have been previously identified.

Concepts are related to theory but are generally considered less sophisticated than theory (Stinchcombe, 1968). Kaplan (1964) discussed the "paradox of conceptualization" (p. 53), which suggests proper concepts are needed to formulate a good theory, but a good theory is needed to arrive at proper concepts. Conceptual frameworks are used to describe the main factors or variables in a study and the assumptions made about their relationships. In some studies, formal theory may not be tested, but a body of knowledge is developed through the elucidation of conceptual meanings and relationships. Constructs are closely linked to concepts through their observable meanings. Constructs, however, are theoretical creations based on measurements that cannot be observed directly or indirectly. For example, IQ is an example of construct. It is constructed mathematically from answers given but we cannot directly observe IQ (Babbie, 2003). Although differences exist among concepts, conceptual frameworks, and constructs, they all relate to examining presumed relationships within a study. Understanding relationships contributes to building a body of knowledge.

Models may be closely related to theories. A model might be likened to a scientific metaphor (Kaplan, 1964, p. 265) or a structure of symbols. Any scientific theory couched in symbolic, postulational, or formal styles could be a model. The relations among the symbols show corresponding relations among the elements of the topic studied. Theory, however, states a certain structure but does not exhibit the structure itself, as a model does. The value

of models is in helping researchers handle complex information without oversimplifying theories.

Good theories are dynamic. "To engage in theorizing is not just learning by an experience but learning from it" (Kaplan, 1964, p. 285). New theories may not refute old ones but remake them. This process of research itself should create the body of leisure knowledge that professionals in our field need to build theory and to use the theory to promote quality of life and best practices.

Theory and Leisure Sciences

The study of leisure in North America sometimes is criticized as atheoretical. Professionals in recreation and leisure often focus more on providing services than building a body of base knowledge. Theory and practice are sometimes dichotomized. Yet, many leisure researchers have suggested how theory is essential for professional growth and quality services (e.g., Bedini & Wu, 1994; Devine & Wilhite, 1999; Ellis, 1993; Henderson, 1994; Iso-Ahola, 1986; Riddick, DeShriver, & Weissinger, 1984).

Devine and Wilhite (1999) noted that research on processes and techniques derived from theory contributes to understanding reality and validating practice. Similarly, Sylvester (1992) described how grounding practices and research in theory strengthens the possibility of improved leisure functioning, quality of life, access to leisure opportunities, and right to leisure. Practitioners and researchers need to know not only what and how but also why. Without theory, the topics studied may result in a lack of focus and direction, which makes recreation and leisure research seem shallow (Ellis, 1993). Rojek (1997) explained, "[L]eisure theory gives shape to material that would otherwise appear shapeless" (p. 383). Theory cannot be avoided since the most dogged empiricist makes judgments about the validity of data and the nature of reality, even if tacitly and non-reflexively. Perhaps the problem with theory in leisure is that the theory or the logical connections between ideas often are not made clear.

The apparent lack of theory in the area of leisure sciences, studies, and practice has been documented by researchers. This process of self-criticism continues today (D'Amours, 1997; Rojek, 1997). Bedini and Wu (1994) noted that relatively few researchers in therapeutic recreation between 1986 and 1990 based their research on theoretical or conceptual frameworks. Henderson (1994) described the status of theory use in four major U.S. leisure-based journals during the 1980s and analyzed the frequency of theory use and the theoretical frameworks described. She found that 28% of the articles addressed deductive theory or model testing, 5% addressed inductive theory or model development, 28% used constructs or conceptual frameworks, and 40% were descriptive or evaluative.

Theory and the Leisure Practice Gap

The importance and value of theory clearly is not a new discussion. Many professionals in recreation and leisure areas assume that theory is used and tested by researchers so that it can be translated and used by practitioners. Parr (1996) examined the relationship between leisure theory and recreation practice. In this process, she described the diverse meanings of theory that were uncovered:

"... theory may be used to refer to a formal, scientific explanation of facts, an explanatory system developed by an individual to account for personal experience, or even book knowledge learned in a classroom as opposed to experiential knowledge gained through practice" (p. 315).

Parr discovered a relationship between leisure theory and recreation practice but suggested that researchers and practitioners may have different meanings for the concepts that are applied or studied. She found that practitioners associated theory primarily with programming processes and that leisure theory was used most by mid-level managers and front-line staff.

Parr (1996) also described, as suggested by Griffiths and Tann (1992), a difference between personal and public theories in leisure and recreation research. Common sense is the basis of personal theories. Data are the basis for public theory. The divide between theory and practice may be false as the difference between public and private theory seems to lie in the nature, soundness, and derivation of the theory. The view that all practice is an expression of personal theory may be referred to as the “reflective practitioner” model (Griffiths & Tann, 1992). Parr found that leisure service practitioners had theories about their work (i.e., personal theories), but the language of practitioners did not necessarily fit with the researchers’ explanations of behavior (i.e., public theories). Therefore, the challenges of understanding the roles of theory in leisure and recreation practice may be in pulling public and personal theories more closely together.

Emerging Views of Leisure Theories

Kelly (1997) emphasized the importance of persistence and change as facts of the human condition. He also argued that nothing is permanent in society, that knowledge is always limited, and that most leisure findings are contextual. Similarly, Rojek (1997) described how leisure is ever changing and cannot be approached with only the traditional concepts of liberty, individual choice, and self-determination. Further, Stebbins (1997) suggested that leisure research may be experiencing theoretical stagnation. According to Roberts (1997), the core problems or the basic issues of the sociology of leisure have been addressed such as how much leisure people have, how they might use it (i.e., what are the opportunities?), how they do use it, why, and what the consequences are. Perhaps what now is needed are new answers to some of these “old” basic questions, which may be found in studies of consumerism, cultural studies, and the phenomenology of everyday life.

According to Rojek (1997), leisure theory of the post World War II period has addressed three distinct phases: functionalism (1945–1975), the structuralist critique (1975–1990), and the poststructuralist/postmodernist phase of the current era. Functionalism is based on the concept of the atomized individual where leisure is studied from the standpoint of the individual and not the situation where leisure occurs. These theories usually focus on the positive effects of leisure in enhancing social integration and improving society. Structuralism focuses on how humans are conditioned by structural forces that are external to the individual. Structuralists usually examine the structures of inequality. An example of structuralism related to feminism suggests patriarchy, not individual behavior, subordinates women from inclusion in society (and leisure). Poststructuralism and postmodernism are interrelated forms of criticizing modernist thought by uncovering the ambiguities of structuralist concepts, such as class and patriarchy, and the imposition of categories upon human actions and processes (Rojek, 1995). Postmodernism suggests that everyday life is marked by fragmentation, differentiation, diversity, and mobility. Postmodernists do not believe that human behavior can be explained by class or patriarchy (or any one thing) and question the modernist view of leisure as always connoting freedom, choice, and self determination.

Functionalism, structuralism, and postmodernism all offer ways to understand leisure theory. Roberts (1997), Kelly (1997), and Rojek (1997), however, agreed that leisure is highly contextual, which makes testing grand theories using functionalism or structuralism almost impossible. Functionalism and structuralism have been useful, but in the twenty-first

century they may fail to offer anything new in leisure research beyond clarifying and modifying existing knowledge. Kelly described how the poststructuralist approach sees reality as a constantly changing process and stressed the inability and weaknesses of previous theories in attempts to study everyday life. Leisure research in the twenty-first century can fit within a postmodern context if the relationships among time, places, and activities are no longer identified in absolute terms, and if leisure is viewed as playful, irrational, pleasure seeking, and unexplainable.

Despite the talk of a postmodern condition that dissolves former structures, most people still spend time at work and workplaces, and leisure behavior is often determined by their lifestyle and income. Postmodern approaches can be criticized because they are overconcerned with representation that does not address structural relations. All actors are situated at the margins, which diminishes the possibility of reconstruction of leisure. Postmodernists may privilege ambiguity and sliding meanings that limit leisure to a descriptive role. Postmodernists often do not focus on qualitative improvements, which results in the potential for “perpetual introspection” (Rojek, 1997, p. 387) rather than social change. Nevertheless, poststructuralism and postmodernism are opening doors to broaden leisure theory in ways previously not considered. The influence of postmodernism can be understood better by examining the current state of leisure theory.

Ways to Examine Theory

The empirical analyses in this reflective paper were modeled in the same way as the work done by Henderson in 1994. The purpose of Henderson’s work was to examine how empirical activity interfaced with leisure and to describe the status of leisure theory at the end of the 1980s. In the current study, we identified the research paradigm, the presence of theory, and the primary theory/conceptual frameworks used in juried articles published in the past decade. Our goal was to update an explication of the status of theory in four U.S. leisure research journals and to see what trends might be emerging.

For purposes of this reflection paper, theory was conceptualized as a systematic explanation used for describing data and interpreting behaviors. The function of theory was to describe, explain, and/or predict an aspect of leisure behavior or professional practice.

Each research article (commentaries, programming, responses, and research/short notes were not included) during 1992–2002 (11 years) was examined (N = 808) in four journals. The journals used were the most common American leisure and recreation research journals: *Journal of Leisure Research* (JLR) (N = 232), *Leisure Sciences* (LeisSci) (N = 195), *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* (JPRA) (N = 260), and *Therapeutic Recreation Journal* (TRJ) (N = 123). The same criteria were applied to all journals even though the focus of the latter two (i.e. practice) is different from the first two (i.e., theory). The articles were divided for reading between two of the authors with a focus on exploring the foundations and providing descriptions of the theoretical bases for the articles. The authors read several articles and discussed their conclusions about the theoretical aspects so that face validity and informal interrater reliability were confirmed.

In reviewing each of the articles, the following data were recorded: method used, application of theory, the theory or conceptual framework name, the definition of the theory or concept, the purpose of the article, and the nationality and sex of the authors. Unlike Henderson’s study (1994), we did not attempt to determine whether the research done was positivist or interpretive, as we concluded that the methods and application of theory were more important indicators of the research paradigm. The methods included such approaches as questionnaires, indepth and structured interviews, literature and integrative reviews, experiments, group data collection (e.g., focus groups, nominal group process, Delphi),

secondary data analysis or meta-analysis, case studies, mixed methods, and applications of the theory categories.

The theory application categories included theory or model testing, theoretical or conceptual framework application, descriptive or evaluative studies, and theory or model development (usually substantive theory). A brief description of each topic follows:

- **Theory and Model Testing/Confirmation.** We examined whether or not a priori theory or a model was explicated and how the results addressed the theory and added to a body of knowledge. The theory might have been described in words or as a model that might be constituted by diagrams or formula. If a model or theory was articulated but not confirmed in the research, we categorized the application as a conceptual framework.
- **Theoretical or Conceptual Framework Application.** The application of a theoretical or conceptual framework meant that a theory, construct, or concept was used as the main dimension or building block that framed a study. These frameworks described a background and the main dimensions, factors, or variables to be studied. All articles used concepts but were not considered a framework unless the concepts were woven into the foundation and rationale of the study. These frameworks are necessary for research that has not confirmed or uncovered theory that might relate to the phenomena being studied. Further, in some studies that focused on the application of research to practice, conceptual frameworks often provided a broader base than did theory testing.
- **Descriptive/Evaluation.** Studies that did not formally identify theory, models, or conceptual frameworks to build a rationale for the study or for the application of results were classified as descriptive or evaluative. Studies that addressed primarily the application of methods or the development of instruments were also considered descriptive. All these studies used concepts but did not develop the relationship between the concepts and the data collection and analyses. In some cases, the studies were not atheoretical, but the connections were not explicated. Many of these studies provided information that might be used to improve practice, but not necessarily to add to a broader body of knowledge. Some of these studies applied to a specific situation that made little use of the extension of formal theories. Nevertheless, these studies are valuable in communicating a foundation for possible theory development or testing in the future.
- **Theory/Model Development.** Inductive research typically focuses on the theory that emerges or is discovered and/or uncovered as a result of a study. This development may be in the form of emerging or substantive theory that is evident because of the data. Sometimes this theory is grounded, and other times it may come as a formal theory that had not been associated with the topic of the research.

Before providing an overview of our view of theory in these U.S. leisure and recreation research journals, we would like to offer several limitations of the research that has been published during the 1990s. First, as you will note in the invited piece in this issue by Jackson (2004), only a few people are doing a good deal of the published work that occurs in our field. Therefore, the use of theory may be limited or enhanced by the topics that these individuals study. Second, the research that is published reflects the biases of the journal editors and the associate editors. These gatekeepers enable some types of research with particular theoretical or conceptual frameworks to get published, while other studies might be rejected. In addition, as Jackson concluded, many of the researchers were also on editorial boards, thus possibly perpetuating certain theoretical biases. Third, the research reflected is primarily done by North Americans, which reflects the empirical aspects of the work done and the theories that may or may not be reflected. Finally, we acknowledge a good deal of possible overlap among the four categories of theory/model testing, theory/model development, conceptual frameworks, and descriptive/evaluative research. The data as they are presented,

however, give a sense of where and how theory is used in our field. Pausing for a moment of self-reflection and critique may provide the impetus for moving on in new directions.

Theory from 1992–2002

The analyses done for this reflective piece offer one way to review the research conducted in four U.S. journals during the 1990s. The value of these data may lie mostly in the discussions they provoke and the directions we set for leisure research in the future.

Background of Studies

A bit of background about the studies may be of interest as part of the context for how theory appeared. This background includes the methods used, the nationality of the researchers, and the sex of the researchers.

Table 1 portrays the methods used in the 808 studies published from 1992 to 2002. In all four journals, quantitative questionnaires were the predominant form of data collection. In *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, experimental designs including single subject designs were more evident than in any of the other journals. The use of literature reviews and integrative reviews was a common source of data in all the journals, which makes sense given the growing research base that now exists in our field that needs to be described, integrated, and interpreted further. Literature reviews also set the framework for future theory development. The use of triangulation, mixed methods, and linked data were also found in all of the journals. This use of multiple methods, although more work for the researcher due to additional efforts and the need to make sure all methods are rigorous, provided a broad base for examining concepts and theories in some research projects.

The nationality of the researchers was analyzed to get a sense of the ethnocentricity of the researchers and to do another examination complementary to some of the work reported by Jackson in this issue (2004). In the global world in which we live, we might hope to have an increase in theory published from English speakers around the world. Although

TABLE 1 Methods Used in Research Published in Four Leisure Research Journals, 1992–2002

Methods	LeisSci		JLR		JPRA		TRJ		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Questionnaires	105	54	127	55	120	47	41	33	393	49
Interviews ^a	20	10	25	11	25	10	16	13	86	11
Lit reviews	35	18	34	15	52	20	18	15	139	17
Mixed ^b	10	5	23	10	13	5	11	9	57	7
Experiment	10	5	6	3	10	4	32	26	58	7
Case studies	2	1	1	0	21	8	1	1	25	3
Second/meta	8	4	11	5	6	2	0	0	25	3
Group ^c	1	1	0	0	9	3	1	1	11	1
Other ^d	4	2	5	2	2	1	3	2	14	2
	n = 195		n = 232		n = 258		n = 123		N = 808	

^aIncludes indepth, structured, and telephone.

^bIncludes mixed qualitative and/or quantitative.

^cFocus groups, Delphi, nominal group.

^dContent analysis, observations.

TABLE 2 Nationality of Authors in Four Leisure Research Journals, 1992–2002

Nationality	LeisSci		JLR		JPRA		TRJ		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
USA	142	73	165	71	223	86	109	89	639	79
Canada	18	9	18	8	20	8	9	7	65	8
Other	18	9	23	10	6	2	1	1	48	6
Combination ^a	17	9	26	11	9	3	4	3	56	7
	n = 195		n = 232		n = 258		n = 123		N = 808	

^aIncludes all articles with two authors from different countries.

we have no baseline, it appeared that a growing number of published articles were coming from outside the U.S. or were co-authored with someone outside the U.S., with 8% of the articles from Canada and 6% from other countries including primarily Australia. At least one paper was authored by a researcher from Spain, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Bangladesh, South Africa, the UK, Brazil, and South Korea (See Table 2). It was also of interest to see that 7% of the total papers were authored cross-culturally. As might be expected, the journals concerned primarily with research as it pertained to practice (i.e., *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* and *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*) had fewer papers authored by individuals from other countries.

Another context for the origins of research can be analyzed by the sex of the researchers. Table 3 provides a summary of those data described in six categories: Single male, two or more males, single female, two or more females, both male and female, and unknown. As might be expected, females were the primary researchers in *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, while males were more common in the other three journals, led by *Leisure Sciences*. A baseline for comparison is the work done by Aitchison (2001), who found that 22% of the articles in *Journal of Leisure Research* from 1982 to 1997 were authored by women as compared to 78% by men. Our analysis showed that in *Journal of Leisure Research* between 1992 and 2002, 37% of the articles were authored by one or more women and 62% were authored by one or more men. In universities, 60% of the tenure track positions in recreation and leisure studies were held by males compared to 40% held by female faculty (Bialeschki & Irven, 2001). Therefore, we would probably expect the number of articles published to

TABLE 3 Sex of Authors in Research Published in Four Leisure Research Journals, 1992–2002

Sex	LeisSci		JLR		JPRA		TRJ		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Single Male	38	19	34	15	39	15	12	10	123	15
Two + Male	71	36	62	27	76	29	18	15	227	28
Single Fem	10	5	36	16	24	9	9	7	79	10
Two + Fem	17	9	21	9	23	9	25	20	86	11
Both MF	51	26	55	24	88	34	57	46	251	31
Unknown	8	4	24	10	8	3	2	2	42	5
	n = 195		n = 232		n = 258		n = 123		N = 808	

represent that ratio. When the mixed sex articles were added in *Journal of Leisure Research* ($n = 55$), 49% of the articles had at least one female author while 66% of the articles had at least one male author. As the table shows, the percentages of joint authored publications were highest across all the publications. The number of articles published by one or more males (42%) was twice the overall number published by one or more females (21%).

Theory Examination

The primary purpose of these data analyses was to examine the categories of theory that appeared in the four research publications during the period of 1992–2002. As noted in the literature review, theory is necessary to build a body of knowledge. Further, as researchers move into the twenty-first century with the foundation of social empiricism that exists, we hope that social analysis will predominate in this research literature whether applied to functionalism, structuralism, or postmodernism.

As noted in Table 4, articles that addressed theory or model testing and theory or model development were most prevalent in the two primary leisure behavior research journals, *Leisure Sciences* and *Journal of Leisure Research*. These journals also had more articles with theoretical or conceptual frameworks used. Descriptive and evaluation studies were most common in the practitioner oriented research journals, *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* and *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*. These findings are probably not surprising, but they give some idea of the categories of information that have been published.

Selected theoretical frameworks and examples from different journals included: marginality and ethnicity (Carr & Williams, 1993; Gómez, 2002), theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Driver, 1992; Hrubes, Ajzen & Daigle, 2001), critical theory (Hemingway, 1999; Novatorov & Crompton, 2001), flow (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993; Ellis, Voelkl, & Morris, 1994; Walker, Hull IV, & Roggenbuck, 1998), resiliency Hurtes & Allen, 2001; Green, Kleiber, & Tarrant, 2000), attribution (Searle & Mahon, 1993; Dieser & Ruddell, 2001), self-efficacy (Ellis, Maughan-Pritchett, & Ruddell, 1993; Farias-Tomaszewski, Jenkins, & Keller, 2001; Probst & Koesler, 1998), social learning theory (Schleien, Hornfeldt, & McAvoy, 1994; Finnell, Card, & Menditto, 1997), social support (McCormick, 1999; Coleman, Iso-Ahola, 1993), equity (Wicks, Backman, Allen, & Van Blaricom, 1993; Weissinger & Murphy, 1993; Anderson & Bedini, 2002; Shinew & Arnold, 1998), constraints (Jackson, 1994; Raymore, Godbey, & Crawford, 1994; Little, 2002; Hawkins, Peng, Hsieh, & Eklund, 1999), normative theory (Hall & Roggenbuck, 2002; Heywood, 1996; Manning, Lime, Freimund, & Pitt, 1996; Lewis, Lime, & Anderson, 1996; Vaske & Donnelly, 2002), conflict theory (Dustin, Schneider, McAvoy, & Frakt, 2002;

TABLE 4 Categories Related to Theory in Research Published in Four Leisure Research Journals, 1992–2002

Category	LeisSci		JLR		JPRA		TRJ		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Theory/model testing	40	20	49	21	18	7	13	10	120	15
Theory/model development	24	12	38	16	16	6	15	12	93	11
Theory/conceptual framework	98	50	99	43	87	33	45	37	329	41
Descriptive/evaluative	33	17	46	20	137	53	50	41	266	33
	n = 195		n = 232		n = 258		n = 123		N = 808	

Ramthun, 1995), place attachment (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000; Kaltenborn, 1997), activity theory (Hawkins & Freeman, 1993; Voelkl, Galecki, & Fries, 1996), and serious leisure (Baldwin & Norris, 1999; Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002).

One point of comparison that can be made is the relationship of these data to the data collected during the 1980s (Henderson, 1994). Because one of the authors was the same and the definitions used to describe the categories of theory were similar, we can make some general observations about the similarities and differences among these two data sets. In the analysis for this reflective paper, the categories of theory testing and model testing were combined as well as theory development and model development. Comparison of the four categories show that less theory/model testing (15% in this analysis compared to 28% in the 1980s study) and fewer descriptive/evaluative studies (33% in current analysis compared to 40% in 1980s) were done. Conversely, more theory and model development (11% compared to 5% in 1980s) and more theoretical/conceptual bases (41% in current compared to 28% in the 1980s) were done during the 1990s. All of the individual journals had fewer descriptive/evaluative studies in the 1990s than in the 1980s and were clearly more focused on the use of theory as a basis for research.

Theory in the Future

This reflection is meant to be a descriptive analysis of literature and journal data to examine the status of theory in leisure research. Both the literature and the data analyzed during 1992–2002 showed that more theory, whether in terms of development or use in a framework was occurring in the four major U.S. recreation- and leisure-focused journals. Leisure researchers seemed to be using social analysis as well as social empiricism in their work. Choices were made about theory by authors in these journals that directed their research process toward some outcomes and away from others.

Almost half of the articles used questionnaires although the breadth of other qualitative and quantitative data seemed important as this field has broadened its approach to how data are collected and used. The research published in the U.S. was primarily done by North American researchers, although researchers from 16 other countries were represented in the literature from 1992 to 2002. Although a limited baseline for comparison existed, the gender balance of researchers seemed to be increasing in all journals.

These conclusions in the form of literature and data analyses may give some ideas relative to where leisure research in the U.S. stands in the early part of the twenty-first century. Some ideas to consider may be:

- The greater the diversity of people writing in the field, the greater our understandings of leisure theory will be. Thus, to see that gender and nationality diversity, as well as the expansion of the methods used, is heartening. Since the system of parks and recreation and therapeutic recreation is somewhat unique to the U.S., practitioner-oriented journals such as *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* and *Therapeutic Recreation Journal* are not likely to have great nationality diversity in their manuscripts. *Leisure Sciences* and *Journal of Leisure Research*, however, can provide a base for broad contributions from other parts of the world and will likely continue to enlighten our understanding of leisure behavior as the articles published move beyond social empiricism.
- The increase in the number of articles that used literature reviews, integrative reviews, and meta-analysis is important to acknowledge as these articles contribute to integrating the body of knowledge. These articles also provide theoretical foundations for further research.
- The breadth and depth of the methods used as well as a movement toward more linking of methods and the use of mixed methods are noteworthy. Although some problems exist

with linking data (see Henderson & Bedini, 1995), these mixed methods can provide a stronger basis for uncovering a deeper understanding of the phenomena studied. Pulling data sets together to address theory also present a greater opportunity for social analyses.

- The use of grounded theory approaches combined with emerging qualitative data offered ways to understand the context of leisure research regardless of the subject. As noted in the literature review, this grounded theory method enables researchers to find formal theory or substantive theory uncovered in data. The acceptance of these methods and their growth, albeit slow, opens the door for greater leisure theory development as long as the grounded theory is analyzed and described.
- The “gap” between researchers and practitioners may or may not be reflected in the articles we analyzed. Although descriptive studies are often helpful in describing “what is” and may be of use in practice, the longer term implications for developing theory ought to be considered regardless of the journal’s audience. Most practitioners probably do not go to research journals for practice techniques, but these journals can provide the documentation for interpreting applied research. Journals like *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* and *Therapeutic Recreation Journal* seem to be moving toward more theoretical foundations for their articles and that movement with a focus on theory application can push the entire profession forward. If nothing else, moving away from the dichotomy of either/or as in theory/practice, will be positive for the field.

In conclusion, the leisure research in the U.S. seems to be evolving slowly toward incorporating functionalist and structuralist approaches with postmodernism. Leisure theories are complex and unlikely to become more simplified in the future. Therefore, the number of articles focused on theory and model development may reflect the movement toward poststructuralism and postmodernism in our field, whether articulated or not. Researchers are seeking new ways to explain data and are both implicitly and explicitly acknowledging that context has major implications for leisure theory. The notion that leisure is highly contextual and that theory in the past has contributed marginally to understanding leisure behavior, is leading to new answers to some of the “old” questions (Roberts, 1997). If nothing else, an admission that no theory is total and complete may open the door for greater exploration of the many building blocks of theory. The articulation that no grand theory will ever be uncovered, but that many approaches might be used in examining and critiquing leisure and how it is facilitated may lead researchers into deeper social analyses.

According to Kelly (1997), the themes of poststructuralism may reform social science by putting forward the notion that all knowledge is relative to changing social, cultural, and historical contexts and that nothing is permanent in the social milieu. Leisure researchers will need to assess change as well as regularities. He further noted that “totalizing statements and vocabularies mask the relativism of all knowledge” (p. 402). Therefore, explanatory frameworks are constructed from limited standpoints, are relative and socially constructed, and always in a state of theory development. Kelly concluded, “Theory, then, is not a theorem proven for all time, but a reflexive process of explanation.” (p. 404).

Research is about developing ideas rather than completing an understanding. In using theory, future leisure researchers must take advantage of the work of the past and build upon what makes sense. Theory does not move in a straight line but is tangential and reflexive. Postmodernist and poststructuralist research can be a self-critical foray into that practice of trying to understand social realities such as leisure that are complex and nonlinear. Leisure cannot be separated from the rest of life, which could suggest that perhaps there is not or should not be leisure theory. We believe, however, that leisure is a special aspect of human behavior and needs to be examined theoretically from a variety of dimensions.

No one ever thought that ONE true theory of leisure behavior or practice existed, but postmodernism and poststructuralism may help to more critically examine what leisure

researchers know and what practitioners do. The growing emphasis of the past decade on theory and model testing/confirmation and theory/model development seem to indicate that at least some leisure researchers are moving beyond merely deconstructing leisure toward the next evolutionary step where the body of knowledge provides many potential answers for each question asked. The result will be a vibrant arena of social research that informs many aspects of human and leisure behavior and contributes a solid foundation for practice.

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