

## **ABSTRACT THOUGHTS ABOUT THE “TWO SOLITUDES”**

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### **Introduction**

The metaphor (“two solitudes”) of this Congress, often repeated within the field itself (in the form of phrases like ‘theory and practice,’ ‘the United States and Canada,’ or ‘North America and Europe/United Kingdom’), begins with an assumption of dualities, dichotomies, difference, or separation and that the way to connect the two is by “bridging the gap.” In this paper, we revisit the very notion of dichotomy and disconnection between theory and practice as well as the limitations of conceiving leisure as only two aspects. Furthermore, we want to explore alternative ways to carefully think about and characterize what we have called leisure scholarship, research, and practice.

The use of “two solitudes” places us within traditional and limiting dichotomous thinking so often connected with power structures, hierarchies, and processes that privilege one over the other (Fox, 1998, 1994, 1992; Warren, 1990). Such a framework obscures the richness of leisure as diverse, multi-disciplinary, complex, nuanced, paradoxical, and dynamic. Within the scholarship on leisure, for instance, applied research looks carefully at elements of practice and their efficacy and benefits. Historical research constructs narratives about leisure practices over time and in specific places. Philosophical inquiry explores logical frameworks and cosmologies related to ultimate questions and ethical choices (e.g., Hemmingway, 1999, 1996; Sylvester, 1999). Theoretical analyses explore foundational values and assumptions or critique existing frameworks, are essential for understanding performativity (Butler, 1989), and emphasize the invisible outcomes and unintentional consequences stemming from our good intentions and practices (Dieser, Fox & Walker, 2003). And yet, this scholarship leaves untapped and unspoken the experiences of and performances in literature, art, poetry, theatre, novels, songs, and music.

It is not difficult to see how formal, scholarly theory gets a “bad rap” from lay people and practitioners. The rarefied language in many theories, the various levels of abstraction, and the distance from the details of practice or daily life create remoteness between them. But the criticisms are perplexing, since theory is vital for any academic field or discipline. Other disciplines have appropriated, engaged, and produced new theoretical languages, while the discipline and field of leisure has maintained a deep suspicion of theory and intellectual dialogue. Comparisons to other, related disciplines suggest leisure supports theories that remain uncomplicated and “practical or applied” rather than supports ones that are complicated and nuanced.

### **Characterizations of Theory and Practice**

Theory comes from the Latin *theoria* and includes: (a) mental view, contemplation; (b) A scheme or system of ideas held as an explanation or account of a group of facts or phenomena; a statement of what are held to be the general laws, principles, or causes of something known or observed; (c) That department of an art or technical subject which consists in the knowledge or statement of facts upon which it depends, or of its principles or methods, as distinguished from the practice of it. Practice comes from the Latin *practizare* and includes: (a) To perform, do, act, execute, carry on,

exercise; (b) To carry on, to perform, or do, habitually or constantly, to make a practice of; to put into practice, carry out in action (as distinguished from believing or professing), etc.; (c) To work at some business or occupation; (d) To exercise the profession of (Oxford English Dictionary).

### **Intertwining of Theory and Practice**

But what do “practise” and “theory” mean? First, we have often wondered what we mean by the “practice of leisure.” From one perspective, “the practice of leisure” is the doing of leisure, the experience of leisure. Artistic endeavours, novels and narratives, song, physical movement, philosophizing (dare we say theorizing?) are all doing leisure. However, in the halls of academe or at conferences, the “practice of leisure” refers to professional standards and behaviour, delivery systems and programs, and social-psychological dimensions of leisure. Often, implied ends include “best practices,” things that will achieve specified results, and individual self-actualization or satisfaction.

At a basic level, practise is about doing something in the world, while theory is about thinking about things in the world. Theory helps us understand what we know and what we do not know. In more detail, theory is a systematic way (a system or framework) for thinking about some specific element, process, exchange, interaction, object in the world. Theorizing, then, can include the development of such a system or framework or, in some cases, the applications of it. Yet, this is not as separate as it might seem. Many theories emerge from thinking about or are developed through consultation (e.g., action research or applied sciences) with the world. Action researchers, through reflexively acting in the world, develop a specific theory (e.g., Marxist feminism). They are “doing” theory. Some highly theoretical works, such as Foucault’s concepts of power and discourse or Welch’s (1990) feminist ethic of risk, have, in fact, directly altered practise (see Burrows, 2004, Butchart, 1998, Welch, 1999, 2004).

Theory and practice are connected much like “dance partners.” We could not find any instances where theory or practise stood alone. Through providing recreation leadership on a playground, the practitioner uses (even if not consciously or articulately) theories about child development, leadership, gender identities, recreation benefits, physics, and normative frameworks. In addition, she develops informal theories to explain the efficacies of her leadership and choices. We can not conceptualize a recreation leader, or any one else, practising without any theory or theorizing. Whether we act on the basis of knowing formal theory or on the basis of our informal, often left unexplained and unquestioned, theories, behaviour, thought, and verbal communication rarely, if ever, occur without a system of meaning or purpose. We could hardly advocate for a leisure profession or discipline that acted without knowledge or consideration of ethics, science, mathematics, history, psychology, sociology, or economics, among many. So, all practice is somewhat theoretical, while all theory must be somewhat practical or connected to the world. Since all theory contains, at least, some references to the world (by referencing non-human, human, animate, inanimate, visible, invisible, fictional, or real things), it is logically impossible to remove theory from the world. To imagine or articulate theory locates it within the world for you and others to act on or not. To divide theory from practise is to silence theory by relegating it to the unthinkable realm.

Comments and questions emerging from a theory-practice divide lead to problematic causal and linear connections. Questions about theory often revolve around

behavioural changes, choices, or solutions, the assumptions behind the questions imply immediate, causal and linear relationships between all theories and practice. The move to find technical, linear and efficient answers for our questions and practices has been critiqued by Heron (1991). Theories, however, come in all sizes and shapes. While theories directly related to behaviour or action may imply specific procedures, other theories provide criticism of assumptions, challenges to beliefs and thinking patterns, or provide alternative conceptual frameworks or assumptions from which to begin thinking.

There is another reason to question the division of practise from theory. Explanations and accounts are types of meaning, interpretation, and understanding. Facts that cannot be explained in any way whatsoever have no meaning. If theory provides the frameworks of meaning, then facts cannot, under this definition, meaningfully exist before theory. We only know a fact, because we can explain it or account for it through theory. As such, non-behaviourally focused theories may or may not lead immediately to an observable behavioural change or a direct link to a specific use. For example, theoretical thinking has described the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous epistemologies or analyzed the abstract forces related to discourse (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Meyer, 2003). These and other theories may, however, deepen our understanding of the leisure phenomenon, open alternative ways of thinking or being, and eventually lead to some utilitarian, observable, and measurable behaviour.

### **Conclusion: Praxis and Beyond**

Dichotomous metaphors suggest that we may achieve clarity through resolving the dichotomy or choosing one side. “Clarity’ is always a distinction made through positions of power to sanction what is legitimate...Moreover, clarity is almost always a function of the status quo or the familiar, and the unfamiliar is often described as unclear” (Popkewitz, 1999b). This essential tension is not sufficient reason to abandon the dynamic relationship or to attempt a resolution; it is the very evidence that this tension is necessary. Wider lenses of theory and praxis borrow from post-modernism, post-structural feminist theory, post-colonial and chaos theory (among others), implying dynamic and emergent leisure contexts that may provide favourable conditions while fostering comfort with ambiguity. Perhaps we should think in terms of degrees and types of relationships. Maybe we can engage theory into practise in numerous ways at varying points along the process. We suggest that it is more responsible to ask theory and practice to hear what each other say and that each, practice and theory, can be done for utilitarian purposes (i.e., achieving specific ends or results) or leisure’s sake. Without the intertwining of theory and practice, we may not be able to make choices responsibly or dance with each other and uncertainty.

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