The millennium is fast approaching, and with its' approach, much discussion is taking place about what life will be like in the 21st Century. Included in these discussions is the topic of leisure; specifically, the form and structure of leisure services and the role of the profession in providing those services (Godbey, 1997). By definition, a profession is based on an unique body of theoretical knowledge that serves as a guidepost for practice. In order for this "theoretical" guidepost to function, three things are required: an understanding of the nature of practice, an understanding of the nature and content of theory, and finally, an understanding of how the two are related. The purpose of this paper is to outline a framework for understanding the relationship between leisure theory and leisure service practice using Griffiths and Tann's (1992) conception of personal theories. It is argued further that a critical perspective is necessary when examining this relationship and that an opportunity exists to not only respond to change, but to effect change by envisioning a more democratic role for the leisure services profession.

Theory and Practice
Professional practice, including leisure services, implies action: practitioners are "practicing" their craft by providing programs, products, and services to those who desire them. Professional practice also implies a defined set of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are required to provide those services. Professional practice is defined by what constitutes the "job" and how it is to be done. Theory is a systematic explanation of relations among constructs, based on empirical evidence, and is testable through further research (Kerlinger, 1986). The relationship between theory and practice is often described as the process of applying general, scientific theories to every-day situations. Furthermore, "professional" practice implies a body of theory unique to that profession.

However, this conception of the relationship between theory and practice often results in a perceived gap between the two. Researchers are often perceived as out of touch with the practical concerns of professionals and practitioners are described as unwilling or unable to interpret and apply scientific research findings. According to Griffiths and Tann (1992), these gaps are often the result of a false dichotomy between theory and practice. It is their contention that a broader definition of theory is needed in order to understand the relationship between theory and practice. They defined theory as a combination of public (or scientific) theories and personal theories. Personal theories refer to a practitioner's implicit, systematic explanation for the situations she or he encounters that guide her or his actions. The source of these personal theories is a combination of scientific/public knowledge and the practitioner's own experience with the environment. Professional practice then, implies a personal theory, or system of guidance, that is influenced by public/scientific theory (presumably learned through formal education) and practical experience.

The Critical Leisure Theory-Practice Model
Griffiths and Tann's (1992) proposed relationship between theory and practice, developed in the context of teacher education, provides a relevant framework for examining the relationship between leisure theory and leisure service practice. A perceived gap between theory and practice has been well documented in the leisure literature (e.g., Burdge, 1985; Goodale, 1991, Parr, 1996) and according to Parr (1996), may be due, in part, to different conceptions of leisure theory for practitioners and researchers. The Critical Leisure Theory-Practice Model (CLTPM) presented here expands on Griffiths and Tann's concept of personal theories and incorporates elements specific to leisure.
As stated earlier, a practitioner's personal leisure theory is most likely a combination of public/scientific theory and personal experience. Personal experience refers to an individual's leisure experiences both as a participant and as a professional. Personal leisure experiences are included because an individual's personal leisure experiences most likely shape his or her understanding of the meaning and value of leisure, (see Iso-Ahola's Leisure Socialization Model, 1980, p. 132), and this understanding would conversely influence his or her personal leisure and his or her professional actions related to leisure service delivery. For example, a practitioner may understand the social and psychological benefits of playing on a softball team from the perspective of a player who has received these benefits, from the perspective of a coach or an administrator of a softball league, and from knowledge of human behavior gained through academic coursework.

However, as Kelly (1996) points out, individual choices are rarely made in a vacuum. Individuals exist in, are influenced by, and exert influence over, a broader social context. Therefore, in order to understand a practitioner's personal theory of leisure, it is useful to examine social influences that directly impact the individual and to examine the broader social context of cultural expressions of leisure, incorporating psychological, social psychological, and sociological perspectives. Cultural expressions of leisure may include direct messages about the meaning and value of leisure and more general messages about age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability, etc. that indirectly affect our understanding of leisure. Leisure theory, from the "personal" perspective is more than a construction of related, generalizable, research findings. By examining practitioner's personal theories, researchers can begin to understand what parts of public leisure theory are useful to practitioners. It is therefore assumed that what is useful for successfully engaging in leisure services practice will be incorporated into the practitioner's personal theory.

So far the model explains the "what" of leisure theory and practice and isn't really all that new. Scientific research has been, and will likely continue to be, conducted along these lines. However, based on the notion of public theories, more scientific research won't necessarily lead to a more useful theory because it ignores the "user's" perspective and experience. Scientific theories strive to be value free, but personal theories are necessarily value-laden. In the words of Sylvester (1995), "It seems that modern reason, which insists on segregating facts and values, is disembodied, having no mind to tell researchers what should be done with what they know. ... Restricted by an epistemology that has been inhospitable, if not hostile, toward values, rational inquiry that limits itself to empirical science is too narrow for the morally relevant needs and interests of human beings" (p. 130). Thus, what is needed in leisure research is "a theory of reason" that is both rational and relevant, and that is empirical, interpretative, and critical at the same time (Sylvester, 1995, p. 129).

**Critical Theory in Leisure Studies**

Along these lines, several authors have recently called into question the "conserving" role that capitalism and inquiry dominated by instrumental rationality plays in understanding and defining leisure and thus the role of leisure services (Hemingway, in press; Mullet, 1988; Stormann, 1993; Sylvester, 1995). For example, Stormann (1993) argued that the leisure services "profession," throughout its history, has reproduced the dichotomy between work and leisure; restoring and maintaining workers' mental and physical health so that they might continue to be productive workers. Stormann argued further that the more "professionalized" the field becomes, the more the participants' role will be reduced to mere consumption of predetermined programs, products, and services (a situation of disempowerment for individual participants). According to Stormann, "true leisure" occurs when individuals engage in a democratic process in order to benefit themselves and their community.
The notion that recreation is instrumental in alleviating social ills has been documented throughout the history of the American recreation movement (e.g., Russell, 1996) and continues today in the form of the Benefits Movement (described by Allen, Jarvi, and Clark, 1998, as "... the ongoing process by leisure service providers to identify desirable individual, social, economic, and environmental benefits derived from recreational experiences," p. 36). However, Sylvester (1995) pointed out that considering leisure only in terms of its instrumental value limits its relevance to human life. According to Sylvester, "The relevance of leisure is not exhausted as an instrument for fixing the problems of living or stoking the economy. Leisure is equally, if not more, relevant as an opportunity to live life as fully and meaningfully as the limits and potential of human beings allow" (p. 130). Following the logic of the instrumental view, once social ills are eliminated then leisure would no longer be necessary. The instrumental view also provides the profession with a vested interest in maintaining a social system where social ills are unlikely to be eradicated, and/or claiming new or different social issues as within its purview in order to maintain professional status.

Hemingway (1990, in press), Sylvester (1995) and others have questioned the over reliance on positivism in leisure research and have suggested that the instrumental rationality of positivism limits what we can know about leisure. An underlying assumption of positivism is that it must be divorced from values because values are difficult, if not impossible to measure objectively. Hemingway (in press) has suggested that a critical theory of leisure would allow for an understanding of the emancipatory potential of leisure. Critical analysis calls for a) an understanding of the socio-political context in which leisure practices are embedded (with the assumption that dominant leisure practices are influenced by the values of those who hold political power), b) a questioning of whether or not practices act to the advantage of some groups and the disadvantage of others, and c) alternatives for changing the face of the sociopolitical context. He further suggested that a critical analysis of leisure could identify the contradictions of reproductive leisure practices, particularly those that commodify leisure. Recreation professionals need to address how their practices (programming, administration, allocation of resources, location, etc.) contribute to or detract from the emancipatory potential of leisure (Hemingway, in press).

Efforts to understand the relationship between theory and practice in leisure services have been focused in two areas: a) determining the nature and scope of leisure services practice, i.e., the roles and responsibilities of practitioners and the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to fulfill those roles and responsibilities, and; b) determining what theories or disciplines can inform practitioners about the most effective and efficient ways of fulfilling those roles and responsibilities (e.g., psychology, organizational behavior, counseling, economics, etc.). But this approach simply identifies what is regarding the nature of leisure and leisure practice and not the socio-political context that gave rise to what is, nor what leisure and leisure practice could be.

It is within the best interests of the leisure services profession to identify areas of social concern where it believes it can have a positive impact such as stress relief, economic development, improved physical health, etc. and then attempt to convince the public that institutionalized leisure services are the most efficient and effective means for ameliorating these concerns. However, these efforts may be characterized as little more than "reformist reforms" (Stormann, 1993). Reformist reforms are attempts to change the outcomes of a particular system without changing the system itself, or even questioning whether the system operates at the advantage of some and the disadvantage of others.
The Critical Leisure Theory-Practice Model (CLTPM) provides a framework for understanding the relationship between leisure theory and leisure services practice that offers the potential for structural reform by acknowledging the value of personal theory. Theories generated through the scientific method, by themselves, can be likened to the proverbial square peg trying to fit the round hole of the everyday, practical environment. By definition, scientific theories are purported to be value-free, and yet practice is always value-laden.

By understanding practitioners' personal theories (what they believe about leisure and leisure services practice), researchers and practitioners can begin to understand, question, and pose alternatives to these beliefs, and actions resulting from these beliefs.

As the profession redefines itself for the next century, the questions of "what we do," "why we do it" and "how we do it" will be increasingly important. If leisure is ever to meet its emancipatory potential, as described by Hemingway (in press), then the leisure services profession must begin to question whether its practices reproduce or transform the status quo. Particularly, the view that leisure is a means to an end, supporting a capitalist system in which leisure is associated with consumerism and commodification. It is incumbent upon leisure researchers and practitioners to play an active role in defining the profession, and in creating a future where leisure will serve as a voice for all those who desire it.

References


Contact Information: Mary Greenwood Parr, Kent State University, School of Exercise, Leisure and Sport, Leisure Studies, P.O. Box 5190, Kent, OH 44242-0001. E-mail: mparr@kent.edu Phone: (330) 672-2015

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ABSTRACTS

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