

One Community or Two Solitudes: Ontology, Epistemology, and Praxiology of Canadian and American Leisure Research

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Ed Jackson invites us to consider “the extent to which [leisure] research—and researchers—[in Canada and the U.S.A.] can be considered as a single, integrated community, or, alternatively, two solitudes existing side-by-side but in intellectual isolation from each other.” For Canadians this is but another instance of a recurrent theme—to what extent does American hegemony influence, or dominate, Canada? Although some Americans may find the question to be little more than a curiosity, it does provide an occasion for useful self-examination and collective reflection. The method applied by Jackson in attempting to answer his question is to compare the dissemination of published research (articles in selected leisure journals and papers presented at selected leisure conferences) by American and Canadian leisure researchers. The dimensions explored include “the amount, timing, and longevity” of research activity and “whether the journal or conference was American or Canadian.” Thus, researchers are categorized as publishing/presenting in (1) only Canadian journals/conferences; (2) only American journals/conferences, and; (3) both Canadian and American journals/conferences. His conclusion is that there are “two solitudes” in that Canadians and Americans tend to publish articles/present papers in their own journals/conferences. While this is especially true for American leisure researchers, the more productive scholars from both countries do not follow the pattern, such that within that group there is a trend towards “one community.”

The root of Jackson’s inquiry concerns the notion of what distinguishes one academic community from another. Jackson wants to know if Canadian and American leisure researchers are separate, distinct intellectual communities working in relative isolation. To address this issue one must have an understanding of what constitutes an intellectual discipline or academic community. Shermis (1962) held that such a community must:

1. have a recognizable tradition and identifiable history of its own;
2. have an organized body of knowledge it has developed, and;
3. address solutions to problems of significance to society. (p. 84)

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Consequently, if Canadian and Americans make up separate leisure research communities they ought to have distinct historical traditions of research, different bodies of knowledge, and their own sets of solutions to problems of leisure in their respective societies. Moreover, any such intellectual, academic, research community will display identifiable structural features that allow it to organize its pattern of inquiry and identify its object of inquiry. Erikson (1992) describes three basic kinds of disciplinary structure—organizational, substantive, and syntactical structure. Organizational structure includes the organization of research production, academic curricula, as well as the structure of knowledge communication. Substantive structure deals with the questions to be asked, the data needed, and the ideas used to interpret the data. Syntactical structure addresses the manner in which data are collected, and the methods and techniques applied. Thus, if the scholarly leisure studies communities in Canada and the U.S.A. are separate and isolated they would each have their own identifiable organization of the field of "Leisure Studies", unique methodological syntax, and differing substantive areas of inquiry. To what extent does Jackson's investigation address these fundamental issues? Can any examination of published articles and papers presented at conferences provide clues to these essential questions?

Given the profundity of these considerations, Jackson ostensibly invites the reader on a metaphysical journey—how is leisure scholarship (in Canada and the U.S.A.) conceived, organized, and how does it work? It is useful, then, to investigate these questions from a paradigmatic perspective (see, for example, Hemingway, 1999), especially if, as Rojek (1985) claims, leisure is a field of study characterized by "multiparadigmatic rivalry." Does the Canadian leisure studies community embrace one paradigm while their American counterparts adhere to another? A leisure studies paradigm can be seen as a general set of assumptions that define the nature of possible leisure research and intervention. In this regard, Guba and Lincoln (1994) hold that a paradigm comprises epistemology, ontology, axiology and methodology. Within the leisure studies research literature itself, Henderson (1991) for example, adopts a similar view, explaining that ontology, the study of being or existence, "is broader than a set of rules for research" (p. 10) but it does provide a rationale for a particular research approach, and epistemology, the study of knowledge and knowing, is the general orientation as to "how research is conducted." To these Henderson (1991) adds methodology which is identified as "specific procedures" and "techniques", and theory which is "a way of looking at the world and the assumptions made about it" (p. 11). Researcher bias is discussed, but general axiological questions about values and ethics are not immediately addressed. I propose (see Mazurek & Dawson (1989) for an earlier related discussion) that the distinction between paradigms can be most fruitfully be made in terms of ontology, epistemology, and praxiology. It is my view that methodology is embedded in the epistemology of a particular paradigm and to separate it out as merely technique is unedifying. Epistemology, after all, deals directly with what we can know and how we come to know it. Technique is more adequately ad-

dressed in praxiology because, as is obvious from its root *praxis*, it is concerned with both theory and practice (technique). Praxiology also deals with the values and ethical considerations (axiology) surrounding the putting of theory into practice. It deals with questions of how leisure researchers practice their academic discipline and how they relate to leisure policy and the practice of recreation and leisure in society.

Praxiological considerations are of particular significance for disciplines such as leisure studies in that much of its content arises out of the recreation profession which has its own body of subject matter. This body of applied knowledge serves to guide the actions of practitioners so that their profession can bring about what it values or what it believes ought to be valued in leisure. These values and ethical considerations then find their way into the allied academic leisure studies community and ultimately are implicit in the actions of leisure researchers themselves. Praxiology is concerned with how leisure practitioners and researchers should act and how they solve practical problems and implement concrete plans of action. However, praxiology should not be equated with mere practice that is concerned with only "imitation and repetition rather than the rationale behind the activity being carried out" (Evans, 1971, p. 83). It has been proposed (Gasparski & Ryan, 1996) that praxiology implies a "Triple E" analysis: (1) *effectiveness* as related to the result of action; (2) *efficiency* as related to the process of action, and; (3) *ethics* as related to the values that guide action. Thus, praxiology encompasses ethics as well as theory and action (practice).

Are Canadian leisure researchers distinct from American leisure researchers? Do they make up "two solitudes?" To answer this, one must compare their respective ontology (research topics), epistemology (research methods) and praxiology (theories, practices/techniques, and ethics). Jackson himself recognizes that a comparison of research communities must go beyond the single dimension of publication. He has argued elsewhere that at least three sets of factors affect leisure scholarship; (1) social trends, (2) developments in the social sciences, and (3) "changes in concepts, paradigms, and methodology in leisure studies itself" (Jackson & Burton, 1999, p. xxii). In that same volume, edited by Jackson and Burton, Samdahl calls for a critical examination in leisure studies of the topics chosen for study; how questions are formed; the methods selected to collect data; the values that influence the practice of research, and; what the resultant research can produce.

Samdahl (1999) suggests that comparisons of North American and British leisure studies reveal that North American researchers typically frame their questions from the perspective of social psychology while British researchers are likely to draw upon conflict theory and cultural studies. As well, Samdahl suggests that North American leisure researchers are more likely to embrace a positivistic orientation and rely upon quantitative methodology as opposed to the British preference for interpretive, qualitative research. Coalter, also in Jackson and Burton (1999), further states that North American and British leisure researchers engage in such divergent

enterprises that he distinguishes between North American *leisure sciences* and British *leisure studies*. North American leisure sciences is said to be characterized by the following set of broad predominant assumptions: cognitive theory, leisure-centeredness, liberal individualism, freedom and choice, social psychology, and satisfactions and benefits. Conversely, British leisure studies is based upon the following: normative theory, decentered-leisure, collective welfarism, social and cultural reproduction, sociology, and ideology (Coalter, 1999). Neither Coalter nor Samdahl differentiate between Canadian and American leisure researchers, but the "common wisdom" (see Dustin & Goodale, 1999, for example) holds that, given its membership in the British Commonwealth and its close proximity to the U.S.A., Canadian scholarship has been influenced by both Britain and America. Thus, Canadian leisure studies would be expected to fall somewhere between the American and British orientations outlined by Samdahl and Coalter. In addition, the influence of France, Canada's other "founding nation," on Canadian francophone leisure scholarship in particular and Canadian leisure studies in general further draws leisure studies in Canada away from the U.S.A. towards European predispositions (Pronovost, 1983).

The examination as to if there are real differences between leisure studies (leisure sciences?) in Canada and the U.S.A. is greatly informed by the discussion of methods and traditions of leisure research in Europe (see Mommaas, van der Poel, Bramham, & Henry, 1996). The work of Mommaas et.al. (1996) holds that while European leisure scholars can be seen to belong to a loosely structured community, national policies and practices surrounding academic research and scholarly activity, as well as their relationship with professional practice, have lead to differences in approaches to leisure research. Particular historical periods and institutional settings in the various nation states color leisure research as both an intellectual endeavor and policy project within the countries of Europe. There are, within each country, different "professional networks" (Bramham & Henry, 1996) that both affect and are affected by the development of national leisure research priorities and perspectives. It is postulated that there exist "domestic dominant paradigms" that have emerged in European nation states (Bramham & Henry, 1996). One might ask whether difference paradigms of leisure research may have evolved in Canada and the U.S.A. in ways somewhat similar to their evolution in Europe. This question once again brings us back to an examination of ontological, epistemological and praxiological issues. This implies, to follow Jackson's lead, comparing the published articles/delivered papers of Canadian and American leisure researchers with respect to their topics, methodology, theory, practice and ethics. If the published works of Canadians and Americans address different leisure topics, using different research methods, employing different theoretical perspectives, inferring different implications for leisure practice, and are guided by different values, morals and ethics, then they would indeed constitute Jackson's "two solitudes." To what extent has Jackson's study confronted these issues?

Ontology, epistemology and praxiology imply that the "source of content" (Erekson, 1992) within domains of knowledge over time become iden-

tified as being representative of a field while new areas emerge that gradually come to be seen as appropriate for study. Thus the communication of the content of research within a discipline is vitally important to the accumulation of domain specific knowledge and the very identity of the discipline itself. The communication of research findings takes place in particular through the presentation of papers at academic conferences and the publication of articles in research journals. Such dissemination/communication is inherent to the “doing” of research (praxiology) and can not be fully understood if removed from its ontological and epistemological basis. Nevertheless, Jackson, in his examination of leisure research reported in journals and conferences, has seized upon a necessary praxiological component—the communication of content. Of course Samdahl (1999) is correct in arguing that not all leisure content can “derive solely from existing published research” (p. 122), but her very comment stresses just how important journals and conferences are as sources of content in the normal practice of any research community. Dustin and Goodale (1999) point out that communication of leisure research can occur in “narrowly focused journals” (p. 478) some presumably of a national, regional or local character rather than “cross-national” or “transnational” (see Beckers & Mommaas, 1996), and largely “self-referential” (see Rojek, 1985) instead of immersed in an integrated international community of scholars. Consequently, Jackson’s exploration of journals and conference proceedings is not without sound praxiological foundation. On the other hand, the need for a broader review of the ontological, epistemological and praxiological content—including topic, methodology, theory, practice and ethics—remains to be undertaken.

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