# Comment on the Impact of Leisure Research

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Taken together, the two articles (Jordan & Roland [J&R]; Samdahl & Kelly [S&K]) present a sobering picture as to the contribution made by leisure researchers. Given the limited amount of space, I will not reiterate the points made by the authors. Rather, I will look at the issue from a somewhat broader perspective that addresses how leisure research might be made more attractive to a broader audience.

Any discussion of the impact of a body of literature should begin with a discussion of the most prevalent journals in the field. As per S&K, my focus will be on *Leisure Sciences* (*LS*) and the *Journal of Leisure Research* (*JLR*). A review of the missions of each journal suggests that the study of leisure is interdisciplinary in nature and intended for an audience that includes both academics and practitioners. Interestingly this perspective has not changed very much over the past two decades. In a review of leisure and recreation research as a scholarly topic between 1972 and 1982, Rabel Burdge (1983) commented that the study of leisure "requires a multidisciplinary orientation. Practical application of findings is seen as the desired end product of leisure research" (p. 104). Thus, it comes as no surprise that formal inquiry into the leisure phenomenon has been studied from a number of different social science perspectives including anthropology, geography, sociology, economics, and psychology. Consistent with the mission statements, therefore, the study of leisure represents an applied discipline in two ways. First, it represents a context in which theories and methods from other core disciplines might be applied. Second, information produced from the research can also be applied to "real world" settings, although J&R's article suggests that practitioners have very little use for or interest in this research (see also Parr, 1996).

I would like to begin my comments by discussing the audience for these journals. One way the academic/practitioner distinction might be clarified is by applying a conceptual framework developed by Brinberg and McGrath (1985) who outlined three broad domains of validity in research: conceptual, methodological, and substantive. Each domain is further differentiated into relations, elements, and embedding systems. For example, conceptual elements are properties of actors behaving a given context (e.g., beliefs, attitudes, involvement) and relations are the connections between properties (e.g., attitudes predict intentions in Ajzen and Fishbein's [1975] Theory of Reasoned Action). The methodological domain provides researchers with the tools to assess relations among variables. The substantive domain is represented by actors behaving in some "real world" context or setting (e.g., campers, camp directors). Relations, in this case, are the pattern of events that occur within the context (e.g., the interaction of the camp director with campers).

In the traditional experimental paradigm (i.e., academic orientation), a researcher first selects elements and relations from the conceptual domain, then goes to the methodological domain to design the study and test relations, and then selects a substantive domain in which to conduct the research. The specific substantive domain is often selected on the basis of convenience. Tinsley (1997) alluded to this point in a recent *LS* commentary:

As a psychologist, I am much less interested in the nature of the activity (e.g., volleyball or picnicking) than I am in the effects of participation in the activity on the individual, the conditions necessary for those effects to occur, and the lasting consequences or benefits of those effects (p. 293). In contrast, a strict empirical approach (i.e., practitioner orientation) begins with a researcher selecting elements and relations from the substantive domain, drawing upon the methodological domain to develop a set of observations, and then using the conceptual domain as a basis for interpreting the observations. The two research paths are distinct in that one is initiated from the conceptual domain and the other from the substantive domain. Also, the last step in each path is reversed.

Two alternative "theoretical" paths which are typical of most leisure research are also available. Researchers with an academic orientation can develop a set of hypotheses based on how elements in the conceptual domain should be related in a specific substantive domain. Similarly, practitioner-oriented researchers can begin with the substantive domain and then develop a set of hypotheses from the conceptual domain to explain the phenomenon. Although each of these theoretical paths use a different starting point, the final step for both involves selecting elements from the methodological domain to test hypotheses. Thus, both approaches should be seen as "relevant" because each emphasizes the substantive domain. Likewise, both should be conceptually intriguing because of their reliance on stated hypotheses. The only difference between the two is the methodology used to test the hypotheses. The inability of practitioners to find relevance in the research may be because researchers are doing a poor job identifying managerially relevant elements from the substantive domain to study and/or not articulating the results in a way that can be easily understood.[1] On the other hand, practitioners may be too focused on what they consider important and are not persistent enough in interpreting how research results might generalize to their particular situations. Perhaps the best remedy for this problem is in the preparation of undergraduate majors. Developing an appreciation for theory and research in future practitioners might improve their consumption of it in later years.

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[1]I would like to note my agreement with Stewart's (1998) point that not all leisure research needs to be motivated by managerial utility.

The second issue I would like to address is how leisure studies research might be made more relevant to outside disciplines. The interdisciplinary nature of leisure studies is a two-edged sword. While it provides a richness to the literature, it also subordinates the leisure phenomenon to the role of a context or setting in which elements from other disciplines' conceptual and methodological domains may be applied. Stewart (1998) addressed this topic quite eloquently in a recent special issue of *JLR* focusing on leisure as a multiphase experience. As noted by Shaw (1997), the majority of leisure scholarship produced in North America has been conducted at the micro-level in which the focus is on specific concepts (i.e., constraints, involvement, satisfaction). In order for leisure research to have a greater impact, these studies need to be used as the building blocks for middle-range and macro-level theory development. In contrast to macrolevel theories which are comprehensive full-blown models describing a phenomenon, middle-range theories offer specific explanations and predictions for some relatively limited areas of inquiry. Middle-range theories develop over time from research centering on a specific conceptual domain which, when aggregated, contribute to an integrated theoretical position. An excellent example of a middle-range theory is Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) elaboration likelihood model of attitude persuasion. Although theory development benefits from all three levels of abstraction, leisure research is likely to have its greatest impact on other literatures only when efforts are taken to build middle-range and macrolevel theories that are unique to the leisure experience.

In addition to theory construction, the impact of leisure research is likely to be enhanced only if leisure scholars make themselves more visible to those in other disciplines. This can be done in a variety of ways. First, presenting leisure research at conferences that are not focused on the substantive domain of leisure behavior will increase name recognition. A second way to increase visibility is through collaboration with faculty members from other disciplines. Third, leisure researchers should be encouraged to submit their work to non-leisure journals (see Havitz, and Howard 1995; Stokowski 1992). However, an obstacle to such efforts lies in the reward system that exists at many universities. Promotion and tenure decisions are often tied directly to productivity in specific journals and fail to recognize outside journals regardless of their quality. Such closed systems detract from outside interaction and recognition for leisure scholars.

Greater rigor is also needed to enhance the standing of leisure research in other disciplines. This includes developing a strong conceptual basis upon which to conduct research, testing clearly stated directional hypotheses, replicating and extending results through the use of multiple studies within a single research paper, and integrating the results into a coherent discussion addressing issues related to the study's generalizability and its unique implications for future research and practice. Special attention should also be given to establishing the construct validity of the measures used in constructing variables. Without this, it is impossible to test hypotheses and, consequently, interpret results. Similarly, the discriminant validity of the measures should also be considered.

In closing, it is my hope that the two articles (J&R; S&K) are not viewed as the final word on leisure research. Rather, they should be seen as an opportunity for improving the way in which leisure research is conducted and disseminated in the future. The leisure phenomenon is a unique and exciting construct that is worthy of academic attention. However, our voice will be heard only if the quality of the work is capable of making an independent contribution to the wider literature.

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