

Mapping changing contexts and integrated departmental models for Kinesiology

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Vertinsky, P. (2009). Mind the Gap (or Mending It): Qualitative Research and Interdisciplinarity in Kinesiology. *Quest*, 61(1), 39-51.

It is clear that Vertinsky's paper is not a contribution to the theoretical underpinnings driving or grounding a PCS project but nonetheless plays a key role in understanding the position of the project within rapidly changing contexts of Kinesiology and public health in academia. As such Vertinsky's work can be framed as not only a core piece of scholarship in understanding our history and role professionally, but also as a potential blueprint for a more collaborative approach to PCS.

Vertinsky suggests that since the 1980's there has been a general shift in Kinesiology programs broadly in North America away from a model dominated by physical education teacher education towards more scientifically centered formats in the middle of which usually stands exercise physiology or similar positivist approaches. Vertinsky states "as the field moved toward and into the 21st century, there was an increasingly strong move to science-based kinesiology, sport performance analysis, an applied health science focus, a return to a medical base, and a broadening of professional domains" (p. 40). As such, projects such as PCS have increasingly had to compete for legitimacy within a model that favors evidence based clinical science. We are consistently facing a situation where "much of what gets defined as knowledge in a society can be recognized as those beliefs and modes of practice that are successful in helping official groups in that society do what they want to do" (p. 40) and continually – and often times intentionally – our objectives do not serve official or dominant knowledge groups in the current conjuncture. Indeed we are often being judged in ways that rarely conform to our modes of research. Fortunately, our positioning within a revenue generating field and departments has allowed us to fend off the financial ruin and collapse seen in humanities departments not as lucky to be shielded in this manner.

Vertinsky goes on in the paper to suggest that although many have talked of an irreparable gap or schism between the sciences and humanities this view has

become dated and debated. Work within women's studies, sociology and other fields have started to embrace science, especially of a theoretical physical nature in exploring lived experience from Timothy Morton's (2011) work on affect to John Urry's (2005) work on chaos theory and social formation. However this is the point where Vertinsky becomes overly optimistic. She believes that there has been a "challenge [to] traditional models of scientific thinking [] encourag[ing] the role of imagination, of metaphor and analogy, of category transforming speculations and off-beat intuitions" (p. 43), yet we have seen little evidence of this within our walls. If this schism has been crossed in other fields and disciplines it has yet to happen within kinesiology in a manner that is nuanced and effective. We agree that PCS should lead, guide, and inform the work being done throughout the department. As more universities move towards interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary models of research, those of us with education and interest in the study of culture have the potential to provide stewardship of Kinesiology's future. But a vision of work that crosses disciplines in practice (which is inevitably asking us to cross ontological and epistemological paradigms as a move within Kinesiology) may be naively utopic and therefore a "fundamentally unreal space[]" (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). Indeed even in her optimistic model, Vertinsky subtly recognizes contradictions the PCS project faces and limited potential we may find in crossing 'solitudes'. Vertinsky urges us to consider the importance of this work in an interdisciplinary manner even if it is in the interest to "garner research funds from public and private agencies" (p. 41) and with continual recognition that "there is also a limit to the level of intimacy with language, theoretical approaches, and methodological intricacies that we might sensibly expect of our kinesiology colleagues on either side of the two solitudes" (p. 46). This raises the question of whether we are striving to do interdisciplinary work for fiscal solvency, or whether the drive for interdisciplinary work is in the continual pursuit of academic excellence. Ultimately the paper points us towards a discussion of an inherently contradictory and disjointed position for PCS but with recognition of the possibly generative nature of this antagonistic relationship. Housed within a department that is increasingly moving towards a model dominated by research groups and sub disciplines formed around and hell bent on ontological,

epistemological, methodological and ethical approaches that we find problematic on many registers, but finding financial protection (however fleeting it is substantially it is of relative permanence in relation to other humanities fields) within their revenue generation.

Therefore this paper is important as it urges us towards the need for a nuanced approach to our work, whether we are looking to achieve respectful criticism in our orientation to our fellow kinesiologists or provide illumination that creates not only a backdrop for the department's work, but contextualizes those studies in a constellation of inquiries about the nature of physical activity. In other words we must offer assessments of the problematic nature of the scientific work being carried out in the labs that we pass everyday and must highlight the political nature of what is often seen as a-political by those enthralled in it, but we must do this in a respectful and constructive manner. Although we believe the underpinning sentiment differs from ours in some key manners when Vertinsky states "our best scientifically minded researchers in kinesiology would not argue with the principle that science, and the humanities and social sciences, need to both mind and mend the gap that has become more marked in kinesiology" (p. 44) we can agree on this need for maintaining relationships within kinesiology. Maybe not theoretically or methodologically but indeed strategically we must 'mend the gap' because our ability to speak across disciplines, translate complex ideas, and problematize study design will make us invaluable to future research in all aspects of Kinesiology, and if even only cynically it will help perpetuate our own position within corporate academia.

**Reference:**

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John Urry. 2005. "The Complexities of the Global." *Theory, Culture and Society* 22 (5): 235-254.