

Development and Testing of a Cultural Identity Construct for Recreation and Tourism Studies¹

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Abstract: A cultural identity construct for use in recreation research was developed. Findings from a survey of 233 university students in San Francisco, suggest that ethnic identity can be quantified and is an important factor influencing differences in vacation travel participation, motivations and barriers. The method used can be applied in diverse multi-cultural settings.

Recognition of the need to assess the motivations, barriers and recreation use patterns of our country's increasingly diverse cultural and ethnic population is growing. Carr and Williams (1992) and Floyd and others (1993) have suggested that differences in minority recreation participation are due to: (1) marginality differences or socio-economic status and access; (2) ethnic identity; and (3) behavioral reception (discrimination). Much of the research on ethnic influences in recreation participation has been designed to show differences between ethnic groups. Dwyer and Gobster (1992) found that African Americans had lower participation rates in dispersed outdoor recreation activities, such as camping and hiking, than did whites. While intra-group comparisons are important, their usefulness in predicting recreation behaviors is limited due to the tremendous variation in social and economic variables that can occur within an ethnic or cultural group. In addition, a survey respondent often is classified as Hispanic or Asian, regardless of how strongly she/he identifies with that ethnic group. Research that combines divergent segments of an ethnic group can present misleading results, reinforce ethnic stereotypes and ignore the evolving inter-cultural boundaries and relationships (Allison 1992).

This paper describes how a cultural identity construct was developed for recreation and tourism studies.

Ethnic Identity

A promising area of investigation into the underlying reasons for differences in recreation patterns within ethnic groups is the construct of ethnic identity. Phinney (1990) defined the term ethnic identity to mean "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership."

Almost all studies using ethnic identity have incorporated self identification as a key component. However, self-labeling alone is not sufficient, as it does not provide an idea of the importance associated with ethnic membership. We propose a model suggesting that ethnic identity is composed of four components: self identification of one's ethnic group; sense of belonging to the ethnic group; attitude toward the group; and a persons level of ethnic involvement. Ethnic identity then influences intention to participate and actual recreation behavior.

Sense of belonging to the identified ethnic group is critical to provide an idea of the level of membership in the group. Operationalization of sense of belonging is proposed through use of the key phrase "attachment to my group," as suggested by Parham and Helms (1985). In addition to attachment, an individual can have both positive and negative attitudes towards their own group. Driedger (1976) and Phinney (1989) incorporated the concept of pride in one's group as a measure of attitude towards it. Respondents in this study were asked to agree/disagree with a statement about pride in belonging to their group.

Ethnic involvement refers to the degree of participation in the social life and cultural practices of one's ethnic group. Studies have measured involvement by determining friendship (Garcia 1982), religious affiliation (Phinney 1990), and political ideology (Parham and Helms 1981). In the present study, ethnic involvement is introduced by asking respondents if their friends are mostly from their own ethnic group. The proposed model and ethnic identity construct were tested in an exploratory study of vacation travel.

Method

Data for the study came from a written questionnaire given to a non-random sample of students in classes at San Francisco State University in May 1992. All students were asked to return the completed questionnaire before they left class, and response rate was over 95 percent. A total of 233 completed surveys were returned.

Vacations were defined as work-free periods of 4 or more consecutive days where most of the time was spent in leisure activities. Survey questions asked students to describe how frequently they expected to take a summer vacation and the expected duration of it. It also asked them to choose their expected vacation from eight vacation types. The identification of motivations associated with this leisure activity used items taken from studies by Driver (1976) and Jacobs (1985), while barriers were similar to those from Tierney (1988) and Norman (1991).

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Each of the four components of ethnic identity was measured. Individuals were grouped, based on self-labelling, into one of seven ethnic groups; Native American, African American, Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, and European Americans or white. Each of the three remaining ethnic identity components, sense of belonging, attitude toward group and ethnic involvement were summed to produce an ethnic identity scale. A high total score on the one to seven point scale suggested a high degree of ethnic involvement. The Reliability program in Statistical Package for Social Science, Personal Computer (SPSS PC) was used to assess the performance of the ethnic identity scale.

Determination of differences in frequency of taking a vacation and the type of vacation was accomplished using one-way analysis of variance and chi-square programs in SPSS PC. Because of low numbers of respondents in some ethnic groups, only Asian, African and European American groups were included in detailed statistical analysis.

Results

Because of the exploratory nature of this model test, findings are based on a limited sample of ethnically diverse San Francisco State University students, which may not be representative of other segments of the public or other areas. Respondents were 46.6 percent Asians, 24.9 percent European, 14.3 percent African Americans, 9.8 percent Hispanic, 4.5 percent Middle-Eastern and less than 1 percent Native American.

Mean scores for the three components of the ethnic identity construct, for the total sample, ranged from 5.73 for attitude towards group (pride), 4.17 for sense of belonging (attachment), to 3.83 for ethnic involvement (friends). Cronbach's alpha for a scale incorporating all three variables was 0.512. One variable—ethnic involvement—did not appear to contribute to the reliability of the scale and was removed. If the ethnic identity scale consisted of only sense of belonging and attitude towards group, the alpha increased to 0.770.

Levels of ethnic identity varied considerably between the three ethnic groups. Black respondents indicated the highest level of ethnic identity with 83.3 percent showing either high or very high levels, 48.8 percent of Asians, and 14.3 percent of European Americans.

Significant differences were not found between African-, Asian-, and European-Americans in their expected frequency of taking a summer vacation during 1992, or in the number of days they planned to vacation. In addition, respondents with high and low levels of ethnic identity differed significantly regarding their expected frequency to take a vacation. Significant differences in the type of summer vacation that different student ethnic groups planned to take were derived. African Americans were more likely to plan to take a vacation to visit friends and relatives (47.1 percent) than were European Americans (33.3 percent). Asian

Americans were more likely to plan to take a resort (16.4 percent) or cruise vacation (7.3 percent) than were European Americans (3.7 and 0.0 percent, respectively). European Americans were more likely to plan to take outdoors (37.0 percent) and touring vacations (14.8 percent), than were African Americans (11.8 and 5.9 percent, respectively). European Americans were also much less likely to plan to take a city trip (3.7 percent) than were African (17.6 percent) or Asian Americans (21.8 percent).

Respondents with a high level of ethnic identity were more likely to plan to take vacations in which they visited friends and relatives (34.1 percent) than were those with a low level of identity (2.4 percent). This finding may represent a desire—especially by African Americans—to be with others of similar ethnic composition and values. Significant differences were also found in respondent motivations for taking a summer vacation. Blacks were significantly less likely to vacation in order to view scenery and seek solitude and quiet, compared to Asian and white groups. Whites were less concerned about going to a safe area or impressing others with their travels, than were Asian and black respondents. Although not significant, blacks were more likely to go on a vacation to maintain ties with their culture and family roots (4.62 on a 7 point scale) compared to whites (3.52) and Asians (4.16).

Significant differences in vacation participation barriers between ethnic groups were also present. African Americans were more likely limited by a lack of transportation options (3.11), information on where to go (3.06), and interest in vacations (2.05) compared to Asian (2.77, 2.75 and 1.62) and European Americans (1.89, 1.78 and 1.14). Whites were significantly less likely to cite others taking advantage of them while traveling (1.89), and being discriminated against when traveling (1.42) than were African (2.82 and 2.52) and Asian Americans (2.50 and 2.37).

Ethnic identity scores illustrated significant between-group variation in vacation motives and barriers. Findings showed that respondents with a high level of ethnic identity had a significantly higher rating (5.27) to the vacation motive of “maintaining ties with their culture and family roots,” than did those with lower ethnic identity (1.66). Respondents with a high level of ethnic identity were more likely to identify “I am discriminated against when traveling” as barriers to travel (2.62), versus those with low ethnic identity (1.01). Although the difference was not significant, it tends to support findings by Floyd and others (1993) that discrimination is a part of recreation decision-making of ethnic populations.

Another measure of intragroup variation is provided by comparing respondent's level of ethnic identity with vacation motives and barriers. Results for Asian Americans showed that the importance of the vacation motive of maintaining ties with their culture and family roots increased significantly as the respondents level of ethnic identity increased.

Summary

This exploratory study provides some preliminary findings and suggests areas for additional research. The model of ethnic identity proposed appears to characterize an important factor influencing differences in recreation use and the underlying motives and barriers to participation. It seems applicable to a variety of ethnic populations, not just those with unique languages or those with large numbers of recent immigrants. However, further work is needed with a larger, more representative sample to complete verification of the model.

Overall, level of ethnic identity varied significantly between African and Asian Americans who had significantly higher levels of identity, attachment, and sense of belonging, than European Americans.

Although there are few differences in planned frequency of vacation travel between African, Asian, and European American student groups, significant differences were found regarding the type of vacation sought, why different groups vacation, and the barriers that limit vacation pursuits.

However, to generalize differences between ethnic groups can lead to stereotyping: considerable variation exists within ethnic groups. The level of ethnic identity is one of many variables that influences vacation motives and barriers.

And finally, the findings imply that as the population in the United States becomes more ethnically diverse, and groups continue to identify strongly with their ethnic group, the potential is considerable for a tremendous change in the types of vacation products and services that will be demanded.

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