
**Papers From Second
Concurrent Session,
Thursday Afternoon**

**Land Use Ethics and
Communication With
Multicultural Groups**

Social Structural Characteristics of Hispanic Recreationists on the Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests¹

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Abstract: Much of the early work done within the realm of ethnic group participation in outdoor recreation has focused on understanding what was seen as underparticipation utilizing two possible explanations: marginality and ethnicity. Rather than characterizing these explanations as competing, it may be more fruitful to characterize them as being two parts of the larger social structural framework of which individuals are a part. This paper focuses on understanding the demographic characteristics of the Hispanic individuals (primarily of Mexican and Central American descent) recreating on the National Forests of Southern California utilizing on-site, self-administered surveys.

Outdoor recreation on the National Forests near large urban centers is changing and diversifying, as users of many ethnic and racial backgrounds increasingly choose urban-proximate forests as recreation sites. These changes are particularly evident on the National Forests of southern California where large numbers of individuals of Hispanic origins are utilizing dispersed, relatively undeveloped sites for day-use recreation activities including picnicking, barbecuing, and swimming.

This study has been designed with the primary goal of answering the question, "What is it about the relationship between people (meaning recreational users of the forests of southern California of Hispanic origins) and sites (meaning the dispersed, relatively undeveloped sites) that leads to the recreation use patterns occurring on the Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests (primarily picnicking, barbecuing, and socializing)?" At the most basic level this question can be broken down into seeking to understand who the recreationists are and how they use a given recreation site. Understanding who the recreationists are is the focus of this paper, while understanding recreationists' use of sites is further discussed elsewhere (Carr 1992).

Much of the early work done within the realm of ethnic group participation in outdoor recreation has focused on understanding what was seen as underparticipation utilizing two possible explanations: marginality and ethnicity. The marginality explanation refers to factors such as low socioeconomic status (SES), lack of access to desired facilities, and discrimination for explaining ethnic recreation patterns. The ethnicity explanation holds that differences in minority recreation participation are the results of subcultural differences in the values and expectations related to outdoor recreation experiences. These explanations were frequently characterized as competing with each other, as if support for one invalidates the other. Another way to conceptualize ethnic groups' outdoor participation avoiding this explanatory

dichotomy is to examine ethnicity and marginality within the larger framework of social structure and personality.

Early leisure research explored the utility of using social structural variables (primarily SES) in attempts to predict and explain leisure preferences and behaviors, but met with only moderate success. Subsequently, the usefulness of a social structural approach has been questioned by many recreation researchers (Hutchison 1988). When ethnicity has been investigated as a possible predictor of recreation choices, an individual's ancestral group membership has been operationalized as a unidimensional, categorical measure of an individual's ethnicity. A person is classified as black, Hispanic, Asian, etc., with little regard for how strongly one identifies with such a designation. Beyond the fact that ethnicity is a much more complex phenomenon than this, treating ethnicity in this way ignores the social structural framework of which people are a part. Ethnic group membership represents only one dimension of an individual's social background and identity.

To better understand ethnic variation in outdoor recreation, it is necessary to explore the combination of social structural variables that may have an impact on outdoor recreation patterns in addition to ancestral group membership. For the purposes of this study, five key social structural variables thought to impact outdoor recreation experiences were identified. Three variables characterize an individual's ethnicity—ancestral origins, generational status, and acculturation—and two measure an individual's SES—income and education. While income and education are fairly self-explanatory, the other four variables need a bit more description.

Focusing on individuals of Hispanic origin, their ancestry is characterized not by the generic term *Hispanic*, which encompasses as many as 20 different groups, but on their country of origin. From there, the individual's temporal relationship with the United States can be measured in terms of the number of generations removed they are from their ancestral country, or for those born outside the United States, how long they have lived here. Acculturation reflects the sociocultural changes that take place when an individual of a subculture comes into contact with mainstream society.

Characterizing individuals essentially as a package of social structural variables has two main advantages. First, we are able to avoid the dichotomy of competing explanations mentioned earlier. Second, we are able to focus our analysis on two different levels—by making inter-ethnic comparisons, as is the case between those of Anglo and Mexican origins, as well as intra-ethnic comparisons, examining, for example, variations within those of Mexican origins.

A final key to understanding the structural characteristics of the recreationists is to explore the patterns of characteristics

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across recreation sites. We hypothesize that patterns of structural characteristics will vary along with the social field of a given site. For the purposes of this paper a social field can be thought of as a summation of the social definitions of a site conveyed to current and potential users. It is the concept of a social field that Lee (1973) had in mind when he wrote, "Individuals seek outdoor areas where they may share a scheme of order (or social definitions) with others similar enough to themselves to be able to take for granted many of the everyday normative constraints. It is only in such situations that individuals feel at home or that they belong."

One of the most basic aspects of the social field is the ethnic composition of a site. We would expect to see certain patterns in structural characteristics of visitors to areas based on who are the dominant users of an area. We might expect that in areas where Anglo visitors are the majority, we would find later generation, more acculturated, higher SES individuals of Hispanic origin. In areas where Hispanics are the dominant group we might expect to find relatively unacculturated, lower SES individuals born outside the United States.

Study Design

Data from self-administered surveys were collected from four sites; two each on the Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests, on weekends and holidays during summer 1991. The study sites were chosen to span the continuum from areas used almost exclusively by Hispanics (the West and East Fork sites), to areas of diverse ethnic composition (Lytle Creek), to areas where Anglos are the majority (Forest Falls). Sites were sampled from 5 to 8 days yielding a total sample size of 732 respondents.

Results

Individuals of Hispanic descent (primarily of Mexican ancestry) are the majority at all sites except Forest Falls, ranging from 67 percent to 84 percent of the respondents. Individuals of Central American descent are present in measurable numbers (approximately 20 percent) only at the West and East Fork sites and are not present at all at Forest Falls.

Individuals born outside the United States were the majority of Hispanic individuals at all sites, ranging from 63 percent to 82 percent. Individuals of Central American descent are almost exclusively of immigrant status. There were no second generation Central Americans surveyed. Those of Mexican descent follow a pattern that might be expected given the relationship between social fields and structural characteristics we propose, particularly those of the second generation, where the percentages of these individuals increase from the West and East Fork sites to Forest Falls.

Individuals of Mexican descent are more acculturated than those of Central American descent. As with generational status, those of Central American descent are a fairly homogeneous group, with language skills somewhere between speaking only

Spanish to speaking Spanish better than English, while those of Mexican descent are much closer to being bilingual. The acculturation scores for individuals of Mexican descent follow a pattern similar to that of generational status as well. Scores increase from the West and East Fork sites to Forest Falls.

Those of Anglo descent had the highest income levels at \$33,500, followed by those of Mexican (\$19,400) and Central American (\$15,000) descent. Within ancestral groups, income levels are fairly homogeneous for those of Anglo and Central American descent. Again, income levels for those of Mexican descent follow a pattern that might be expected given the model we proposed. Income levels were lowest at the West Fork site and highest at Forest Falls.

Individuals of Anglo descent have the highest education level at 13.1 years. Those of Mexican and Central American descent have approximately equal education levels at 9.5 (Mexican) and 9.1 (Central American) years. Within ancestral groups, education levels are fairly homogeneous across all sites.

Conclusions

The results pertaining to the patterns of structural variables found across sites discussed above fit within the expectations of the study. Of particular interest is the distribution of those of Central American heritage across sites. While it is impossible to imply the causation, the fact that those of Central American descent are present in extremely small numbers at Lytle Creek and not at all at Forest Falls fits well with the expectations of the study. If it is accurate to expect that individuals seek to recreate in places that match their structural characteristics, it appears that there may not be a substantial component of the Central American population that has the longer generational tenures and higher acculturation scores and SES that seem to go with Lytle Creek and Forest Falls. However, the possibility that more acculturated individuals of Central American origins choose entirely different recreation activities and sites than those studied here cannot be excluded.

The results of the study show great promise from theoretical and managerial perspectives. From a theoretical perspective, a social structural framework apparently is a viable way of approaching research in the area of ethnic groups' outdoor recreation participation and experiences. From a managerial perspective, this framework provides a more detailed understanding of the recreationists at each site, providing deeper insight into the visitors of these areas.

References

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