

Chapter 7: Race, Ethnicity, Recreation, and Leisure: An Assessment of Research Gaps

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Abstract

The purpose of this report is to identify research gaps related to the race/ethnicity and leisure literature. This was done by first highlighting the trends involved in the ethnicity and leisure literature, and then presenting five gaps found in the literature for future researchers to consider.

Keywords: Ethnicity, race, recreation, leisure, research gaps.

Introduction

General interest in the area of racial/ethnic minority populations and recreation/leisure began prior to the 1960s, but expanded in the 1960s as a function of the civil rights movement (Floyd 1998). Specific interest in racial/ethnic minority populations and outdoor recreation areas was spurred by findings from the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) (Mueller and Gurin 1962). Over the past 40 years, the quantity of studies in race/ethnicity and recreation/leisure has increased. Floyd's (2007) review of five major leisure studies journals in the field noted that only 5 articles appeared in the 1970s, whereas 23 appeared in the 1980s, and 66 in the 1990s. Since 2000, 55 articles have appeared on the topic. Special issues devoted to the topic of race/ethnicity and recreation were allocated in the following journals: *Journal of Leisure Research* (1993, 1998), *World Leisure* (2001), *Leisure Sciences* (2002), *Leisure Studies* (2004), and *Leisure/Loisir* (2007).

Given the increase in the number of studies on the topic of race/ethnicity and recreation, and continued interest due to changing demographics of user groups, the purpose of this report is to conduct a gap analysis. To conduct a gap analysis, it is critical to look at past/current trends and future directions. As such, the present analysis is twofold.

The first area of analysis considers what has been researched in the area of race/ethnicity, and recreation over the past four decades. However, this analysis is less of a literature review, and more of a notation of trends. For more extensive literature reviews and critiques see Allison (2000), Floyd et al. (1994), Gómez (2002),

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Gramann (1996), Philipp (1999), Shinew et al. (2006), and Woodard (1988). The second area of analysis involves the assessment of gaps in the field of ethnicity/race and recreation and leisure. It is important to begin with a brief analysis of where we have been, prior to addressing where we need to go.

An Assessment of the Current State of Ethnicity/Race and Leisure Studies

The 1962 ORRRC study initiated a line of research that would last over a decade. The investigations following the ORRRC study focused on African American/White differences in outdoor recreation. Outdoor recreation investigations of the 1970s were typically centered on issues related to racial inequality in the outdoors, and in African American/White differences in participation in various recreational activities (Manning 1999). These foci consequently led to a search for explanations for the pattern of findings observed.

One explanation for the recreation underparticipation of racial/ethnic minorities was the marginality-ethnicity paradigm espoused by Washburne's (1978) seminal article. Washburne hypothesized that the underparticipation of minorities was due to socioeconomic (marginality) and subcultural identity (ethnicity) reasons. This heralded an era of exploration in the 1980s concerning which of these two theories was more viable. Support for the ethnicity theory came from Klobus-Edwards (1981) and Stamps and Stamps (1985). Support for the marginality theory came from Woodard (1988) and West (1989). Mixed results regarding support for marginality and ethnicity came from Hutchison (1988). These studies looked at differences between racially-integrated vs. homogenous neighborhoods, Southern vs. Northern African Americans, peer-group compositions, and called for more subjective/qualitative measures, as well as a move to alternative explanations beyond the ethnicity-marginality paradigm. At the close of the 1980s, West's (1989) introduction of discrimination or interracial relations as an explanation for underparticipation led to a new set of studies in the 1990s that examined the role of discrimination in outdoor recreation (Chavez 1993, Feagin 1991, Floyd et al. 1993).

The 1990s could be characterized as the decade where ethnicity/race and leisure research really soared and began to reflect on past research and point to new directions. The literature on race/ethnicity and recreation expanded its scope to include more ethnically diverse samples from populations such as Latinos/Hispanics (Carr and Williams 1993; Floyd and Gramman 1993, 1995), Asians (Allison and Geiger 1993, Tsai 2000, Yu and Berryman 1996), and Native Americans (Condon 1995, McDonald and McAvoy 1997, Sky 1995). These and

similar studies focused on meanings of leisure by various ethnic groups, intra- and intergroup differences, and the roles that acculturation, assimilation, and immigration play in public recreation opportunities. Philipp (1999) explored African American socialization, discrimination, parental beliefs, and leisure in order to delve into the belief system of African Americans and how it impacts their leisure choices and their feelings about being “welcomed” in various leisure settings.

The transition from the 1990s to the 21st century involved a growing interest in the expansion of the race/ethnicity and recreation literature. The 21st century marked three key trends: (1) model development, (2) alternative explanations, and (3) more qualitative studies.

One of the first conceptual models was developed by Floyd et al. (1993) to illustrate the factors affecting ethnic group participation in recreation activities and reconceptualize the marginality-ethnicity paradigm within the larger perspective of assimilation theory. Gómez developed (2002) and empirically tested (2006) the Ethnicity and Public Recreation Participation Model. Gómez’ model illustrated how acculturation, subcultural identity, socioeconomic status, perceived discrimination, and benefits of recreation affected recreation participation. Stodolska (2005) developed the Conditioned Attitude Model of Discrimination to look at the relationship that external and internal forces contribute to recreation participation.

Alternative explanations for race/ethnicity and recreation are expanding. For example, the empirical literature has focused on acculturation issues related to ethnic identity, immigration, and transnationalism (Juniu 2000, Stodolska 2000, Stodolska and Alexandris 2004, Utsey et al. 2002). The role of leisure constraints and negotiation strategies has also been applied to recreation behavior by minority groups (Li and Stodolska 2007). The role of place attachment/meaning has been explored with respect to specific ethnic groups such as African Americans (Johnson 1998) and, more recently, Native Americans (McAvoy et al. 2003), as well as the specific role a place can play in enhancing positive interracial interactions (Shinew et al. 2004).

Hutchison (1988) was one of the first to advocate for more qualitative studies in the race/ethnicity and recreation literature—a sentiment echoed by Henderson et al. (1999). Kelly (2000) pointed out that qualitative studies have legitimately established themselves in the recreation literature in general, and Stodolska and Walker (2007) noted this pattern as a staple of current initiatives in race/ethnicity and leisure research.

An Assessment of the Gaps in Race/Ethnicity and Leisure Studies

Gap 1—Need for Replication of Previous Studies

There have been a multitude of studies geared at exploring various aspects of ethnicity/race and leisure. While certainly laudable, the next step is to begin the process of replicating studies to confirm previous conceptualizations and findings. As a discipline, ethnicity/race and leisure needs a more concerted effort regarding the establishment of correlations between hypothesized relationships. For example, what is the relationship (e.g., correlation) between acculturation and recreation use, or between perceived benefits and recreation use, and are these associations similar within and across race/ethnic groups? Replication studies would allow for the assessment of trends over time and a meta-analytic approach to race/ethnicity and leisure. Replication studies could be augmented by “linking” qualitative and quantitative data. Henderson et al. (1999) noted that quantitative data can provide “reliable outcome information that can be generalized,” while qualitative data provide an “insider’s view to better understand the phenomenon under study” (1999: 254).

Gap 2—Location, Location, Location

Related to the need for replication is the need to replicate studies in both the same areas of the country and in different areas of the country. The focus has traditionally been on national parks, regional recreation areas, or areas predominantly west of the Appalachians. As noted in an earlier publication (Gómez 2003), most African American studies have been conducted in the Great Lakes Region or in the U.S. Southeast; most studies on Latinos in the U.S. Southwest; the widest geographic distribution of studies have been done on Asian Americans; and Native American research has been primarily in the U.S. West and Canada. Very little has been done in the larger metropolitan areas, in general (with Chicago and Los Angeles being the exception), and the largest cities on the U.S. East Coast in particular. This is not to say that there is no research on wildland-urban interface; however, the vast majority of our concentrations of ethnic/racial groups are in cities, and the vast majority of park lands used by these groups, for various reasons, are urban park systems. Additionally, the Latino/Hispanic population grew faster from 1990 through 2000 in much of the U.S. South than in other areas of the United States (Kochlar et al. 2005), and these new Latinos have distinctive characteristics (e.g., they tend to be male, unmarried, born abroad, and young), different from their predecessors in traditional settlement areas (e.g., New York and California).

Gap 3—The Role of Language in Leisure

The role that language plays in leisure will be an area that will require further exploration. As the United States becomes more pluralistic and ethnic group members become more and more inclined to speak their heritage language, it will be important to look at the relationship between non-English speakers and the role that their heritage language has on how they recreate, where they recreate, and why they recreate with specific groups (in- vs. out-groupings). Also, what effect does language have on recreation participation? Besides being simply a constraint, what is it about language that encourages or discourages participation? For example, if one speaks both Spanish and English, and is a functional bilingual, where would that person choose to recreate, and who would he or she participate with? Language, in terms of loss or maintenance, should be explored. This will give the oft-measured acculturation variable a more indepth analysis (see Carr and Williams 1993, Floyd and Gramman 1993, for early examples of this work—especially on why language use should be studied). Researchers noted that language is as much a cultural marker as it is an indication of acculturation and adaptation. Additionally, heritage language can facilitate intra-ethnic leisure interaction, which is important to maintain and reinforce other aspects of cultural norms.

Gap 4—The Role of Values and Leisure/Recreation

Acculturation is not simply an issue of language, but also of value systems. Some researchers argued for acculturation measures to take into account the role of values, in addition to linguistic issues. As such, a gap in the literature is the lack of understanding of the role of value systems. Related to this, how is leisure itself valued as a concept by various racial/ethnic group members? Researchers have asked about meanings given to the environment and the outdoors, the same extension should be allotted to the exploration of leisure from a non-Western perspective. Over three decades ago, Meeker and others (1973) noted that “myth” of national parks as “Gardens of Eden” does not go well with conceptions of nature in traditional African and American Indian culture. Given that some cultures are collectivistic, while others are individualistic, how does leisure manifest itself in the public psyche of different cultural orientations (see Kim et al. 2001 for a case study on Koreans)? For example, is leisure manifested as a collective identity issue? What’s the role of leisure in maintaining ethnic identity or reinforcing values? Typically, leisure or recreation is viewed as the dependent variable or the “end product.” Arguably, however, recreation and leisure could be the cause of the reinforcement of values and ethnic identity (Virden and Walker 1999), or cultural values could be the cause of recreational resource conflicts (Dustin et al. 2002).

This report noted that there has been a tremendous increase in the size and scope of research on race/ethnicity and recreation. This includes both theoretical approaches (i.e., theories and models), an exploration of various racial/ethnic groups, and methodological approaches (i.e., quantitative and qualitative).

Gap 5—More Exploration on Role of Dominant Ideologies

Assuming the hegemonic leisure mindset is an Anglo male perspective, why have researchers not asked Anglos their perceptions of why they think various ethno-racial groups do not participate in recreation, or visit certain leisure environments or recreation sites? When discussing individual leisure experiences, identity, and difference, researchers need to ask “why” difference matters, and ask how discourse about race operates within leisure. Kivel (2000) advocated for the need to “explicitly examine the construction of dominant discourses around race (e.g., whiteness); gender (masculinity); sexual identity (heterosexism); disability (hegemony of ability); class (economic privilege); [and religion (Christianity)] in order to understand leisure’s role in constructing and maintaining dominant identities of privilege” (p. 81). It is important to “deconstruct” the historical role of “whiteness” and its impact on recreation. Critical theorists and others have addressed the deconstruction of whiteness in public spaces (see Price’s 1998 case study in Washington, DC). The focus on whiteness and its accompanying issues or power and privilege are not only an extension of the interracial contact hypothesis mentioned by West, but also moves away from a categorical perspective of race to a more concerted effort surrounding the issue of racism, and how “leisure contexts operate to reproduce and reinforce racist discourses and discriminatory practices or how they serve as contexts in which people resist racism” (Kivel 2005: 26).

Discussion

This report noted that there has been a tremendous increase in the size and scope of research on race/ethnicity and recreation. This includes both theoretical approaches (i.e., theories and models), an exploration of various racial/ethnic groups, and methodological approaches (i.e., quantitative and qualitative). Although there has been an expansion in the literature on this topic, I noted other areas in need of expansion within the study of race/ethnicity and leisure including (1) replication of previous studies, (2) an expansion of research in regions of the United States where there has been historically limited research, or where demographic changes in regions necessitate new research, (3) a more thorough investigation of the role of language as a cultural marker and determinant of leisure behavior or attitudes, (4) the role that value systems play in race/ethnicity and recreation or attitudes toward recreation, and (5) a more critical examination of White hegemony and racial discourse as it relates to the recreation and leisure context. Although there certainly are more, I have presented the top five gaps or areas of concern for future research in race/ethnicity and recreation.

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