

AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PUERTO RICAN VALUES AND THE PERCEPTION OF BENEFITS AND PARK USE

Edwin Gómez
Assistant Professor
Recreation and Tourism Studies Program
Old Dominion University
140 HPE Building
Norfolk, VA 23529-0196

Abstract

The purpose of this report is to explore the relationship between values, perceived benefits of recreation, and recreation usage. The report explores this relationship from a sample taken from a Puerto Rican ethnic group in central Massachusetts. Through both descriptive and inferential analyses, it was found that this ethnic group sample hold very tightly to their values, and that there is a significant relationship between these values on perceived benefits. It was found that as Puerto Rican values increase so will their perception of the parks, and consequently, their park usage.

1.0 Introduction

Much of the empirical literature on racioethnicity has focused on acculturation issues related to ethnic identity and immigration (Juniu 2000; Manrai & Manrai 1995; Stodalska 2000, Utsey et al. 2002) and their effect on park use (Tinsley et al. 2002). Floyd et al. (1993) defined acculturation as “cultural distance” from mainstream society. Tropp and colleagues (1994) further define acculturation as comprising four factors that together measure the individual variance in acculturation and acculturative levels: cultural competence, cultural behaviors, cultural preferences, and cultural identification. Having competence in one’s culture (ability and knowledge) does not necessarily mean that one will use that ability (cultural behavior). Additionally, one’s cultural preference (desire for/value given to the maintenance of a culture) and one’s cultural identification (recognition of membership and internalized group identity) are two very different matters.

As could be surmised, acculturation is a very complex phenomenon, and measuring acculturation is a challenge. Traditionally, acculturation has been measured along linguistic lines or language variables (reasons for this are beyond the scope of this composition) for various ethnic groups. However, in a study on first and second generation Puerto Ricans, Cortés et al. argued that “there

[was] an overemphasis in acculturation scales on language usage,” and that the level of involvement in Puerto Rican or American culture as well as other elements of culture should also be examined (1994, p. 711). The point is well taken. The process of acculturation goes beyond language and incorporates values, norms, and beliefs.

As such, this study incorporated values and linguistic variables to ascertain the acculturation dimension. However, after a factor analysis of the 11 items used to measure acculturation, it was determined that there were indeed two subfactors: a factor of acculturation based on language (seven items), and a factor of acculturation based on values (four items). Because relatively little attention has been given to the role of values in the racioethnicity and recreation literature, the relationship between values, the perceived benefits of recreation, and park use are explored in this study. The purpose of this report is to explore the relationship between these three factors.

2.0 Sample Size and Representativeness

Data were gathered by a mailed survey (N=382). Snowball sampling techniques were utilized on the Puerto Rican population of Southbridge, Massachusetts. To assess representativeness, the sample was compared to the 2000 Census data. The chi square for age is 9.45 ($\Pi^2_{\text{critical}} (\forall = .05, df = 9) = 16.92$), and the chi square for gender is 10.75 ($\Pi^2_{\text{critical}} (\forall = .05, df = 1) = 3.84$). The chi square test for homogeneity indicates that the sample is representative with respect to age, but not with respect to gender. The most under-represented age group is the 20-24 age category (10% in sample vs. 13% in population), and the most over-represented age groups are the 25-29 age category (14% in sample vs. 12% in population) and the 45-49 age category (9% in sample vs. 7% in population).

3.0 Measurement

The values scale was measured by asking the following questions: (a) How important is it to celebrate holidays in the Puerto Rican way?; (b) How important is it to raise your children with Puerto Rican values?; (c) How important is it to maintain the usage of the Spanish Language?; and (d) How important is it to maintain Puerto Rican values as a part of your life? These items

Table 1.—Scoring of Park Use for Each Park

Season Score	Annual Maximum	Total Range	Scale Score	Annual Use for Park
0	4	0-4	1	Never — Very Few
3	12	5-12	2	A Few Times
9	36	13-36	3	Somewhat Frequent
17	68	37-68	4	Frequent
25+	140	69-140	5	Very Frequent

were borrowed from Cortes, et al. (1994). The values items were scored in the following manner: Very Important (5), Important (4), Somewhat Important (3), A Little Important (2), and Unimportant (1). Items developed for the “values” items reflect raising children with Puerto Rican values, celebrating Puerto Rican holidays, maintaining Spanish language use, and maintaining Puerto Rican values as part of their daily lives.

Although a number of studies have developed scales to assess the cognitive nature of leisure and recreation (Iso-Ahola, 1980; Neulinger, 1981; Witt & Ellis, 1989), items used to measure perceived benefits in this study came from key concepts in the recreation literature. The items for perceived benefits are based on Iso-Ahola’s Benefits of Leisure Scale. The wording, however, was altered from “benefit of leisure” to “benefit of going to Southbridge parks.” Items reflect the key concepts of relaxation, escape, socialization, family time, and physical fitness. Park usage was obtained by asking questions regarding park usage at five public parks in Southbridge, MA by season (see Table 1 for coding), and responses were coded from 1 to 5.

This study explores two questions: (1) how does this group of Puerto Ricans perceive the benefits of using public parks, and (2) is there a relationship between Puerto Rican values, and perceptions of park benefits, or actual usage? Conceptually, the relationship between values (VALS), perceived recreation benefits (BEN), and actual usage (USE) can be conceived in the following manner:

VALS → BEN → USE

3.0 Descriptive Results

The Puerto Ricans in this study place a very strong emphasis on maintaining Puerto Rican values. This is evident by assessing the means of the four items used to measure values (range from 1 to 5): celebrate holidays (M=4.43), raise their children with Puerto Rican values (M=4.55), maintain Spanish (M=4.62), and maintain Puerto Rican values (M=4.65). All the means are between the “Important” to “Very Important” range. This indicates that this ethnic group highly appreciates its value system. Additionally, the perceptions of benefits derived from park usage were also very high (range from 1 to 5), where on average Puerto Ricans were in agreement that they derive benefits from public parks via socialization (M=3.95), exercise (M=4.09), spending time with family and friends (M=4.34), and a place that provides open space (M=4.10).

Lastly, park usage (range of 1-5, M=2.13) was deemed as relatively infrequent usage overall. However, as noted in a previous study (Gomez 2002), there is much generational variance in usage, as well as differential usage by specific park. For example, Henry Street Park and Westville Dam Recreation Area were used more frequently because of geographic proximity (close to concentration of Puerto Ricans), and unique qualities (family picnic areas), respectively.

4.0 Inferential Statistics

Puerto Rican respondents were initially divided into low, middle, and high Puerto Rican values groups. However, only six were in the low group, and they were combined with the middle group making two groups, a lower values group (19%) and higher values group (81%). Results from t-tests indicate no significant differences between

the two groups with respect to park use ($= .960$), however a significant difference was found between the higher/lower values groups and their perception of the benefits derived from parks ($= .008$). Those with higher Puerto Rican values perceived more benefits on average than those with lower Puerto Rican values.

To explore the relationship between Puerto Rican values, perceived benefits, and recreation use, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed on the items comprising these factors. The VALS (4 items), BEN (4 items), and USE (3 items) constructs had factor loadings of .87, .81, and .63, respectively. These constructs held well and were submitted to a path analysis ($< .05$):

VALS $\rightarrow$ (.19) $\rightarrow$ BEN $\rightarrow$ (.29) $\rightarrow$ USE

As indicated above by the standardized path coefficients in parentheses, this number indicates the direct impact VALS has on BEN. An assessment of the direct impact indicates that 19% of the relationship between VALS and BEN is accounted for by the direct relationship between these two factors. Additionally, 29% of the relationship between BEN and USE is accounted for by the direct relationship between these two factors. The impact of VALS on USE can be obtained by multiplying .19 by .29 to obtain a .05 correlation coefficient, a relatively minor relationship. Because the path coefficients are standardized, they are equal to correlations. As such, we can see that in both cases, the relationships are positive. This indicates that as Puerto Rican values increase so will their perception of the parks, and consequently, their usage. This indicates, contrary to popular belief, that one can maintain traditional values and increase park visitations.

5.0 Discussion

It is odd that those who have a greater affinity towards Puerto Rican values have a higher appreciation of the benefits than those that do not share Puerto Rican values as strongly. This could indicate that those that are less acculturated have greater appreciation for parks, than those that are more acculturated, at least in this ethnic group. If so, we may need to re-think benefits, or re-think the argument about minority under-participation. The benefits questions came from a predominantly mainstreamed perspective. Perhaps more research is needed to explore benefits specific to ethnic groups. From an academic perspective this study is exploratory,

and more should be done with values. For example, are values a subset of acculturation, or do values precede acculturation? This study supports the notion that there should be a separation between values and acculturation when measuring them in future studies.

Managers need to be much attuned to the cultural milieu of their constituents, as appreciation for their values will increase both benefits and increased participation. Communicating effectively from a cultural standpoint needs more than lip service or “sensitivity” training. These results indicate that Puerto Ricans hold their values in high regard — as do most of us — and failure to acknowledge these values when dealing with this ethnic group will create detrimental confrontations. The manager of a recreation site needs to incorporate traditions and values of the ethnic users into the training of future professionals, and the day to day interaction in the park with Puerto Rican constituents. Some suggestions include inviting a community leader to speak with staff as part of a training session, signage in multiple languages, the ability to have at least one person fluent in the ethnic group’s language, and more importantly, not seeing these so-called “new” users as under-represented, and therefore not worthy of attention.

Although as a group, they tend to participate in moderate amounts of recreation, this study did not explore the pattern of recreation. As a member of the community under study, the researcher knows that however infrequent, Puerto Ricans tend to recreate in larger numbers, and do so in more concentrated areas (such as Henry Street Park), and in more built up areas (i.e., picnicking amenities at Westville Dam Recreation Area) — a pattern supported by Chavez (1992) in her findings on other Latino groups.

6.0 Citations

- Chavez, D.J. (1992). Hispanic recreationists in the wildland-urban interface. *Trends*, 29(4), 23-25.
- Cortés, D.E., Rogler, L.H., & Malgady, R.G. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 22(5), 707-721.
- Iso-Ahola, S E. (1980). *The social psychology of leisure and recreation*. Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown.
- Floyd, M.F., Gramann, J.H., & Saenz, R. (1993). Ethnic factors and the use of public outdoor recreation areas:

- The case of Mexican Americans. *Leisure Sciences*, 15, 83-98.
- Gómez, E. (2002). Puerto Ricans and recreation participation: Methodological, cultural and perceptual considerations. *World Leisure*, 44(2), 46-62.
- Manrai, L.A., & Manrai, A.K. (1995). Effects of culture-context, gender, and acculturation on perceptions of work versus social/leisure time usage. *Journal of Business Research*, 32, 115-128.
- Neulinger, J. (1981). *The psychology of leisure* (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher.
- Stodolska, M. (2000). Changes in leisure participation patterns after immigration. *Leisure Sciences*, 22, 39-63.
- Tinsley, H.E.A., Tinsley, D.J., & Croskeys, C.E. (2002). Park usage, social milieu, and psychosocial benefits of park use reported by older urban park users from four ethnic groups [Special issue]. *Leisure Sciences*, 24(2), 199-218.
- Tropp, L.R., Erkut, S., Alarcon, O., Garcia Coll, C., & Vazquez, H. (1994). Toward a theoretical model of psychological acculturation. *Working Paper Series* (268). (Available from Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, 106 Central Street, Wellesley, MA 02181-8259).
- Utsey, S.O., Chae, M.H., Brown, C.F., & Kelly, D. (2002). Effect of ethnic group membership on ethnic identity, race-related stress, and quality of life. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 8(4), 366-377.
- Witt, P.A., & Ellis, G.D. (1989). *The leisure diagnostic battery: Users Manual*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.