



Race, ethnicity, and visitation to national parks in the United States: Tests of the marginality, discrimination, and subculture hypotheses with national-level survey data[☆]



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ABSTRACT

It is well documented that members of racial and ethnic minority groups tend to visit national parks at lower rates than whites, and a large body of literature has explored a number of hypotheses for this finding. These explanations are usually grouped into three categories: (1) marginality, which focuses on economic-related reasons for non-participation; (2) ethnicity, which purportedly focuses on cultural factors; (3) discrimination, which centers on the role of hostile behaviors on the part of whites and/or institutional discrimination. Despite the size of this literature, it suffers from a number of shortcomings. To begin with, the data used to test the hypotheses are usually not nationally representative. In addition, the possible explanations have not been comprehensively evaluated. For instance, a full range of demographic items has generally not been used in tests of marginality, actual measures of culture have rarely been employed in examining ethnicity, and the discrimination hypothesis has received very little testing. In this paper, we add to the literature by testing all three perspectives with national-level data from the National Park Service Second Comprehensive Survey on the American Public. Findings indicate larger differences between African Americans and whites than between Hispanics and whites, with some racial differences growing over time. We find evidence for all three explanations considered, with the subcultural hypothesis receiving the most support.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

1. More management attention is needed to address underrepresentation of racial/ethnic groups in national parks and related areas, as this may violate the fundamental democratic character of these sites.
2. In addition, as underrepresented groups continue to grow in proportion to the historically dominant white European majority, underrepresentation is an increasingly urgent matter.
3. This issue may be further exacerbated by an apparent growing differential in visitation by younger African Americans.
4. Given global patterns of immigration, this matter is increasingly international in scope.
5. Support for the marginality hypothesis suggests that special efforts may be needed to help ensure equal access to parks and outdoor recreation, including provision of public transportation, location of parks closer to minority populations, and development and marketing of outdoor recreation programs to minority racial/ethnic groups.
6. Support for the subculture hypothesis suggests that park and outdoor recreation opportunities should be designed in concert with the values of minority racial/ethnic groups, including types of facilities and programming, establishment of parks honoring diverse cultures, and reinterpretation of existing parks in ways that are more culturally inclusive.

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7. Support for the discrimination hypothesis suggests that park and outdoor recreation managers re-examine their agencies and programs for evidence of interpersonal and institutional discrimination, including hiring practices and pricing policies.

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1. Introduction

Interest in the effects of race and ethnicity on outdoor recreation has been evident for over 50 years. Two of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) studies, for example, reported significant differences in outdoor recreation participation between blacks and whites (Hauser, 1962; Mueller & Gurin, 1962). Attention to this issue expanded in the 1960s and early 1970s as a result of the civil rights movement (Floyd, 1998), and racial unrest was attributed, at least in part, to the poor quality and inequitable distribution of recreation opportunities (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1970; Washburne, 1978; Kraus & Lewis, 1986; Bialeschki & Walbert, 1998). Concern for equity and social and environmental justice have sustained research on racial and ethnic inequality in outdoor recreation (Allison, 2000; Taylor, 2000; Floyd & Johnson, 2002; Stodolska, Shinew, Floyd, & Walker, 2014), and interest is likely to grow in intensity and importance as minority populations expand relative to the traditional white, European American majority (Floyd, 1998). For instance, a “State of Knowledge Report” was produced for the National Park Service (NPS) in 2002 regarding the impact of race/ethnicity, gender, and social class on outdoor recreation experiences (Rodriguez & Roberts, 2002), a recent report by the U.S. Forest Service featured an extensive collection of research papers regarding the effect of race, ethnicity, and nationality on outdoor recreation (Chavez, Winter, & Absher, 2008), and an important new text on this topic was recently published (Stodolska et al., 2014).

2. Previous research

Outdoor recreation is a large and diverse category of leisure activity, encompassing a wide range of pursuits. Our focus is on the use of parks and related areas. Research on racial and ethnic differences in such outdoor recreation tends to fall into one of two basic categories: studies that explore differences in use patterns between or among racial and ethnic groups, and studies that attempt to explain such differences. Research has been conducted in a variety of contexts and has employed varying research methods; study findings have been nearly universal in their conclusion that whites participate more often than minority populations (particularly blacks and Hispanics) in these types of activities (Hauser, 1962; Mueller & Gurin, 1962; Cheek & Burch, 1976; Washburne, 1978; Kelly, 1980; Washburne & Wall, 1980; Klobus-Edwards, 1981; McMillen, 1983; Stamps & Stamps, 1985; Van Horne, Swak, & Randall, 1986; West, 1989; Hartmann & Overdevest, 1990; Dwyer, 1992, 1993; Gobster & Delgado, 1993; Scott, 1993; Brown, 1994; Christensen & Dwyer, 1995; Cordell et al., 1996; Dwyer & Gobster, 1997; Johnson, Bowker, English, & Worthen, 1997; Finn & Loomis, 1998; Floyd, 1999). The ORRRC studies noted above were the first to document this pattern, and it has been found to persist over time. A national survey conducted in 1977, for example, found that blacks participated less than whites to a statistically significant degree in outdoor recreation activities such as camping, boating, hiking, backpacking, hunting, skiing, and sightseeing at historical

sites or natural areas (Washburne & Wall, 1980). Similarly, an on-site survey conducted a decade later at a nationwide sample of federal and state parks and outdoor recreation areas found that blacks comprised only 2% of all visitors while representing 11.7% of the U.S. population (Hartmann & Overdevest, 1990). Finally, a survey of a representative sample of Americans in 2000 found that 36% of whites had visited a national park in the previous two years compared to only 13% of blacks and 27% of Hispanics (Solop, Hagen, & Ostergren, 2003).

A second basic area of research has focused on explaining these differences in participation among groups. Research in this area has been both theoretical and empirical. Three basic hypotheses have been advanced; the first two were developed in a seminal paper by Washburne (1978), which suggested the hypotheses of marginality and ethnicity. The marginality hypothesis posits that minority groups, particularly blacks, suffer from economic and related disadvantages as a result of historic discrimination, and that these disadvantages act to inhibit participation in such outdoor recreation by means of cost, transportation, information, location, and other barriers (Cheek & Burch, 1976; Wagner & Donahue, 1986; Washburne, 1978; Washburne & Wall, 1980; Woodard, 1988; Dwyer & Hutchinson, 1990; Dwyer, 1992, 1993; Floyd, Gramann, & Saenz, 1993; Scott, 1993; Floyd, Shinew, McGuire, & Noe, 1994; Hospodarsky & Lee, 1995; Shinew, Floyd, McGuire, & Noe, 1995, 1996; Bowker & Leeworthy, 1998; Johnson, Bowker, English, & Worthen, 1998; Johnson & Floyd, 2006). An example of a study supporting this hypothesis examined beach visitation in Los Angeles, California (Wolch & Zhang, 2004). Visits were found to be related to economic class and thus helped explain why whites visited beaches twice as often as blacks, Asian-Pacific Islanders, and Latinos.

The ethnicity or subcultural values hypothesis, on the other hand, suggests that differences in behavior are a function of subcultural values: groups such as blacks and ethnic minorities hold cultural values that are different from those of the dominant white, European American culture, and these values affect propensity to participate in parks-related outdoor recreation (Craig, 1972; Jackson, 1973; Peterson, 1977; Washburne, 1978; Washburne & Wall, 1980; Klobus-Edwards, 1981; Hutchison & Fidel, 1984; Stamps & Stamps, 1985; Wagner & Donahue, 1986; Hutchison, 1987; Dwyer & Hutchinson, 1990; Irwin, Gartner, & Phelps, 1990; Dwyer, 1992; Carr & Williams, 1993a, b; Dwyer, 1993; Gobster & Delgado, 1993; Hutchison, 1993; Scott, 1993; Floyd et al., 1994; Johnson et al., 1997, 1998; Floyd & Shinew, 1999; Dwyer & Barro, 2001; Tinsley, Tinsley, & Croskeys, 2002; Tsai, 2005; Barnett & Klitzing, 2006; Chavez, 2008; Walker, 2008; Walker & Wang, 2008). An example of a study supporting this hypothesis examined preferences for types of parks among several ethnic groups and found a number of differences (Ho et al., 2005). For example, black and Hispanic respondents expressed the strongest preferences for developed facilities compared to Korean American, Chinese American, white, and Japanese American respondents.

A third basic theory has been developed more recently and focuses on racism and interracial relations. (Blahna & Black, 1993; Chavez, 1993; Floyd et al., 1993; West, 1989, 1993; Philipp, 1998; Stodolska & Jackson, 1998; Hibbler & Shinew, 2002; Martin, 2004;

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