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RESEARCH REFLECTION



Research on Race, Ethnicity, Immigration, and Leisure: Have We Missed the Boat?

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this essay is to offer a critical look at the past 40 years of research on race, ethnicity, immigration, and leisure and to pose some provocative questions about the future of this subdiscipline. In particular, the article examines the main strands of research on this topic, reviews suggestions for future study offered by some key manuscripts and book chapters, and examines their relevance vis-à-vis current social and political discourse in North America and beyond. Are these research questions still relevant or does the new reality of North American and European societies necessitate refocusing of our scholarship?

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Research on leisure behavior among members of racial and ethnic minorities has significantly developed and matured in the last 50 years. Much of this literature has been inspired by the unprecedented growth in the ethnic and racial minority population in the United States, which more than tripled in size between 1950 and 2016. The current demographic forecasts predict that by 2044 more than half of all Americans will belong to a minority group, and by 2060 nearly one in five Americans will be foreign-born (Colby & Ortman, 2015). However, changes in the public sentiments toward ethnic and religious groups and the resurgence of open racism both in the United States and Europe (Wike, Stokes, & Simmons, 2016) beg the question: Is our research still relevant? Or, should we ask new questions, explore new topics, and adopt new theoretical perspectives? What should these questions be and what roles can the leisure and recreation field play in the new era of race and ethnic relations in the United States? The goal of this essay is to offer a critical look at the past five decades of research on race, ethnicity, immigration, and leisure and to pose some provocative questions about the future of this subdiscipline. In particular, this article will 1) provide a brief overview of the main strands of research on the topic, 2) review suggestions for future study offered by some key manuscripts and book chapters published between 2000 and 2016, and 3) examine their relevance vis-à-vis current social and political trends in North America and beyond.

The existing research on ethnicity, race, and leisure

The beginnings of research on race, ethnicity, immigration, and leisure date back to the classic Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) studies of the 1960s,

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but the in-depth investigations of the factors conditioning leisure behavior among ethnic and racial minorities have not begun until the early 1990s. Since then, a number of special issues of our main disciplinary journals (e.g., *Journal of Leisure Research* in 1998 and 2009, *Leisure Sciences* in 2002, *Leisure/Loisir* in 2007, *Leisure Studies* in 2015, *World Leisure Journal* in 2015) have been devoted to this topic, and the book *Race, Ethnicity, and Leisure* (Stodolska, Shinew, Floyd, & Walker) was published in 2014. The existing studies have explored a plethora of subjects, including leisure needs and motivations among minority populations (e.g., Walker, Deng, & Dieser, 2001), leisure constraints and constraints negotiation (e.g., Shores, Scott, & Floyd, 2007), discrimination in leisure contexts (e.g., Sharaievska, Stodolska, Shinew, & Kim, 2010), and issues of social justice, power, privilege, and whiteness (e.g., Arai & Kivel, 2009; Mowatt, 2009). Moreover, topics such as cultural change and leisure (e.g., Tirone & Goodberry, 2011), and leisure behaviors among minorities in the context of various environments and activities (e.g., nature, urban settings, physical activity, music and art) (e.g., Gobster, 2002; Lashua & Fox, 2006) have also been examined.

A growing number of theoretical approaches and methodological tools have been applied to study leisure behavior among ethnic and racial groups (Floyd & Stodolska, 2014; Lee & Stodolska, 2017; Henderson & Walker, 2014). Although the majority of research has focused on leisure experiences of African Americans and Latinos, numerous studies on Asian Americans and, to a lesser extent, European Americans and American Indians have also been conducted (Lee & Scott, 2013; McAvoy, 2002; Stodolska & Jackson, 1998; Walker & Wang, 2009). Floyd, Walker, Stodolska, and Shinew (2014) argued that although “both the quantity and qualitative content of studies focused on racial and ethnic minority groups have markedly increased” (p. 306) and the “theory and concepts used to explain and understand racial and ethnic patterns in leisure are becoming more diverse and comprehensive” (p. 298), our field will be challenged to respond to the new dynamics of race relations and the changing racial and ethnic composition of our societies.

Suggestions for future research proposed in key review manuscripts

The 40th anniversary issue of *Leisure Sciences* offers a convenient departure point to reevaluate the suggestions for future research on race, ethnicity, and leisure proposed by key review manuscripts and book chapters published between 2000 and 2016. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to discuss to what extent these recommendations are still relevant considering the changing nature of North American and European societies. In this article, I selected what I believed to be the key review articles published in *Journal of Leisure Research* by Allison (2000) and by Floyd, Bocarro, and Thompson (2008), in *Leisure Sciences* by Shinew et al. (2006), in *Leisure/Loisir* by Stodolska and Walker (2007), and the concluding chapter in the book on *Race, Ethnicity and Leisure* by Floyd, Walker, Stodolska, and Shinew (2014). It needs to be taken into account that some of these texts are now more than a decade old, so the perspectives that they present should be considered within the context of the time period when they were written.

Allison (2000) advocated for the use of social justice paradigm (Young, 1990) in exploring issues of race and ethnicity. She argued that in comparison to research on gendered leisure, “race and ethnicity leisure-based research has focused less on justice-related issues and more heavily on the influence of race/ethnicity on participation patterns” (p. 4). Allison claimed that research on barriers to access and discrimination experienced by ethnic/racial minorities is limited and that future research should explore topics such as environmental justice,

institutional racism, program/agency nonresponsiveness, and violence. Allison believed that in order for social change to occur, leisure research needs to help understand the institutional conditions, properties, processes, conflicts and constraints that foster exclusion.

Shinew et al. (2006) cited Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2002) provocative theory that the United States is moving toward a three-tier racial structure and questioned how this new structure would impact leisure opportunities and constraints among minority groups. Bonilla-Silva claimed that in this new hierarchy, inequality would be based on the phenotype and skin tone rather than on a rigid "black-white" color line. Whites along with white Latinos, select multiracial groups, and a few Asian groups will maintain their highest-tier position. A middle stratum will consist of light skinned Latinos, Asian Americans, people from the Middle East, and most people of mixed racial origin. The lowest tier will be occupied by African Americans, including Black immigrants, Native Americans residing on reservations, dark skinned Latinos, and Southeast Asians. Shinew et al. also cited Hiemstra (2005), who had predicted that racial divisions will lose significance in the future and would be replaced by the legality of residence as a marker of social status. They posed a question "to the extent that such new structures are emerging, how will they impact leisure opportunities and constraints?" (pp. 404–405). In terms of future research, Shinew et al. argued that studies should examine factors that facilitate and constrain leisure experiences of ethnic/racial groups, intergroup interactions in public leisure spaces, and explore how minorities negotiate limited leisure resources. They also advocated for more research on the contributions of leisure to a sense of place and community in diverse neighborhoods.

Stodolska and Walker's (2007) review outlined what they believed were the major shortcomings of the existing leisure research on ethnicity and race, including its focus on a small number of well-established groups without explicitly acknowledging their immigration status, generational tenure or legality of residence, and ties to their communities of origin. They argued that broader societal issues need to be acknowledged by leisure researchers and called for cross-national comparison studies that would examine the integration of minorities in societies with different political systems. They echoed Shinew et al.'s (2006) belief that the changing makeup of minority groups in the U.S. and Canada may lead to the emergence of a new social hierarchy. Stodolska and Walker expressed concern that future national or global crisis may lead to new sources of conflict, discrimination, and exclusion by the mainstream population. They argued that such conflicts may "play out in leisure settings, concern recreation space and resources, or affect people's ability to participate in free time activities" (p. 16). They also called for more attention to the processes of globalization of leisure cultures and more research on the transnational nature of ethnic populations.

Floyd, Bocarro, and Thompson (2008) provided a systematic review of research on race and ethnicity published in five major leisure journals and argued that future studies should examine underdeveloped themes and emerging issues such as children and youth, immigration, environmental justice, and physical activity among ethnic and racial populations. They also encouraged scholars to provide systematic assessments of literature and "integrative research reviews and analysis of theories, populations, and findings" (p. 18).

In their concluding chapter to the book on *Race, Ethnicity and Leisure*, Floyd et al. (2014) argued that future research should focus on macro processes at the societal- and global-levels and, in particular, pay more attention to the globalization issues, the mobility of minority populations, and the possible realignment of racial hierarchies. They also argued that more focus needs to be placed on issues of resistance and trajectories of success and advancement among ethnic and racial groups and that researchers should move beyond examining factors that affect leisure participation and explore outcomes of leisure engagements. More research

on topics such as happiness, life satisfaction, and subjective wellbeing among members of racial/ethnic groups is needed. They echoed Floyd, Bocarro, and Thompson's (2008) call for examinations of leisure among minority children and teenagers and argued that more research should examine their use of expressive arts. Floyd et al. (2014) believed that more research should focus on the unique leisure experiences and leisure needs among young families who are often affected by unstable living arrangements, language barrier, economic constraints, discrimination and fear of deportation. Floyd et al. (2014) also called for more research on minority older adults and cautioned against homogenizing ethnic and racial groups. They argued that more focus needs to be placed on similarities *across* ethnic populations and differences *within* them based on subcultures and acculturation levels. They believed that future research should acknowledge and embrace people's multiple intersecting identities shaping their leisure experiences and that development of new theories and more theoretical integration in leisure studies are needed.

Are these research questions still relevant in light of the social and political trends?

Shifts in immigration patterns

While most scholars of ethnicity and race have predicted continued relevance of such research given the current demographic trends (Murdoch, 2014), few expected the extraordinary shifts in the social, cultural and geopolitical situation brought by the massive migration crisis that has swept Europe in 2015–2016. In 2015 alone, European Union (EU) Member States experienced a record number of over 1.2 million asylum seekers (Eurostat, 2016). An additional 359,000 applications for refugee status were processed in 2016 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2016a), mostly from people from the war-torn regions of Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and North and East Africa. At the end of 2016, the UN Refugee Agency released a statement that “we are now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record” with “unprecedented 65.3 million people around the world [who] have been forced from home” (UNHCR, 2016b). UNHCR statistics show that, as a result of conflict or persecution, nearly 34,000 people are forcibly displaced every day. Over half of these refugees are children under the age of 18.

Such unprecedented migration flows led to a global humanitarian crisis and contributed to the emergence of exclusionary policies, confrontation tactics, and the rise of far-right movements in many destination countries in Europe and North America (Payne, 2016). For instance, according to a recent PEW report, almost two-thirds of the surveyed Dutch and Italians agreed that “Refugees will increase the likelihood of terrorism in our country,” and 72% of Greeks, 65% of Italians and 53% of French concurred with a statement that “Refugees are a burden on our country because they take our jobs and social benefits” (Simmons & Stokes, 2016). Similar anti-immigration sentiments have dominated much of the 2015–2016 election campaign in the United States and the postelection period in early 2017.

In light of these trends, Stodolska and Walker's (2007) cautionary words about the rise of intergroup conflicts sparked by the global crisis, increased migratory flows, and problems with securing borders are salient more than ever. It is hard to ascertain to what extent such conflicts will play out in leisure settings and how the rapid increase in the number of refugees in Europe and other Western countries will affect the utilization of local recreation resources. What we know, however, is that the existing research shows leisure can be a vehicle for coping

with the stress of dislocation among the migrants and can facilitate their integration into host societies (Peters, 2010; Rishbeth & Finney, 2006). For instance, the existing studies have shown that visiting urban parks for leisure can give immigrants an insight into the culture of the host society (Rishbeth & Finney, 2006) and allow for interracial interactions, which can contribute to the development of place attachment, cross-cultural understanding, and positive integration (Leikkilä, Faehnle, & Galanakis Peters, 2010). Participation in leisure activities that carry significant cultural components (e.g., tae-kwon-do) can promote cultural understanding (Kim, Heo, King, & Kim, 2014; Rishbeth & Finney, 2006). Studies have also shown that recreational sport participation can facilitate “intergroup harmony” because of its unique ability to foster intergroup contacts and friendships, and thus reducing prejudice and hostility (Lee & Scott, 2013, p. 268). In the coming decades, research on the roles of leisure in reducing stress and loneliness among displaced persons, defusing conflicts, reducing intergroup tensions, bridging the gap between refugees and their host societies, and promoting their integration will be of utmost importance (Mohadin, 2015; Troop, 2015). More studies on the global trends that sparked these migratory flows, their long-term consequences, and on the ways immigrants’ leisure is shaped by the broader societal and political discourses will also be needed (Floyd et al. 2014).

Continued significance of race and racism

Over the last 16 years, many researchers have assumed the inevitability of the slow march toward the equality for all and some even heralded the end of the significance of race and ethnicity in shaping people’s leisure opportunities and choices (Hutchinson, 2005). In 2014, however, Bonilla-Silva challenged the notion of the postracial society and argued that racial progress has stagnated and even regressed since the 1980s. He claimed that in the last 40 years, we have witnessed the rise of the “color-blind racism” and that racial inequality is a persistent problem in America. Bonilla-Silva argued that the overt racism of the past has been “swiped under the carpet” and that people are no longer free to express their true racial attitudes in a society that shuns overt expressions of racism.

The divisive dialogue that accompanied the 2015–2016 election in the United States and the postelection period, and the campaign that led to the eventual Brexit vote in the United Kingdom made it clear that the overtly prejudicial attitudes are no longer reserved to the fringe element of society but are now common among large portions of the North American and European populations. At the dawn of 2017, many mainstream Americans no longer feel constrained to voice their opinions on the issues of undocumented immigration and the U.S. immigration policy. Executive Orders 13769 (issued on January 27, 2017) and 13780 (issued on March 6, 2017) titled Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States restricted admission and halted new visa applications of citizens from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen for 90 days and suspended the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for 120 days (WhiteHouse.gov, March 6, 2017). Although both executive orders have been stopped by the courts on the grounds of violating the Establishment Clause, the challenge against 13780 and other executive orders and legislations is likely to continue in the foreseeable future. Arrests of undocumented immigrants increased 32.6% in the first weeks of the new administration (Sacchetti, 2017). Not only anti-immigration sentiments have been common at the dawn of 2017, but confrontations between Black protesters and the police that play out in urban settings deepen the mistrust between the law enforcement and the communities of color.

Such hostile climate will lead to further division of communities and is likely to have an effect on how people will interact in leisure settings, and how leisure services will be provided to people of color. In light of these trends, issues of racism, including its institutional forms and processes that lead to exclusion (Allison, 2000) should be the front-center of future leisure research. We have elaborated on this issue in more detail elsewhere (Floyd & Stodolska, *In press*). Moreover, examinations of intergroup interactions in public spaces and the roles of leisure in creating a sense of community in diverse neighborhoods (Shinew et al., 2006) will be clearly needed. With respect to the predictions of Bonilla-Silva (2002), cited by Shinew et al. (2006), Stodolska and Walker (2007), and Floyd et al. (2014), the racial hierarchy based on the skin color has certainly *not* disappeared but became augmented by divisions along the lines of the legality of status and religious affiliation (Hiemstra, 2005). We are yet to see if the three-tier racial hierarchy will materialize, but the “black-white” color line that divides U.S. society is more visible than ever.

Social justice

Allison (2000) argued that more emphasis on social justice is necessary if we are to achieve equality for all. This line of research has received significant attention in recent years (e.g., Arai & Kivel, 2009; Bocarro & Stodolska, 2013; García, 2013; Johnson & Parry, 2015; Parry, Johnson, & Stewart, 2013; Stewart, 2014), but more focus on this area is needed. Parry et al. (2013) called for embracing critical theories as an effective path to social justice and contended that “leisure is a context where people can create changes that may bring about a more socially just world” (p. 83). Stewart (2014) added that lines of inquiry grounded in the social justice perspective “are motivated by needs to end various kinds of oppression and marginalization related to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual identity, ability, and socio-economic status within leisure-related contexts” (p. 325). Such research perspective that shares a commitment to challenging and breaking down social structures (Stewart, 2014) is ideally positioned to critically examine the ways in which poverty, structural racism, white hegemony, and migration regimes condition lives, including leisure, among immigrants and people of color. Embracing the social justice framework could also lead to a much-needed shift among the existing race/ethnicity scholarship from the largely descriptive accounts of variations in leisure patterns among minorities to more explanatory investigations of the *reasons* for the existing differences and providing possible *solutions* to achieve social change (Arai & Kivel, 2009; Stewart, 2014).

Evolving structure, characteristics, and adaptation pathways among minority populations

As Floyd et al. (2014) argued, contemporary migration trends and higher (although currently decreasing) (Colby & Ortman, 2015) fertility rates among some immigrant groups led to changes in the age structure of the U.S. population. These trends prompted both the authors of the concluding chapter in *Race, Ethnicity and Leisure* (Floyd et al. 2014) and the 2008 review article (Floyd et al. 2008) to call for examinations of leisure among minority children and youth, with a particular focus on Latino and African American populations. Current projections confirm that the diversity among U.S. children and youth will grow in the future. As Colby and Ortman (2015) argued, “The total population [of the United States] is projected to be 17% Hispanic in 2014 and 29% Hispanic in 2060. In contrast, nearly one-quarter (24%) of the child

population is projected to be Hispanic in 2014, and this group's share is projected to increase to 34% in 2060" (p. 11). According to the authors, by 2060, 64% of children in the United States will belong to racial and ethnic minorities. Given the current and projected geographic distribution of minority groups, some regions of the country are likely to be affected by these demographic shifts more than others (Peake, 2012). These statistics alone should serve as a reminder to leisure researchers and practitioners that the population they will be serving in the next 40 years will be markedly different from their current constituents. We should not, however, lose sight of the fact that the majority of these children and youth will comprise of second or third generation ethnics whose life experiences, aspirations, and challenges will be markedly different from their foreign-born counterparts (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly, & Haller, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2007). Despite strong cultural influences of their families and ethnic communities, they will face strong acculturative pressures from their peers and the American educational system. It will be a challenge for leisure researchers to determine to what extent leisure participation patterns, needs, aspirations and constraints of U.S.-born minority children are different from the first generation youth, what societal-, community-, family-, and individual-level factors condition their leisure experiences, and how to best serve their leisure needs.

Current demographic predictions also alert us to the emerging trend of the aging of the foreign-born population in the United States. As Colby and Ortman (2015) argued, "in 2014, the majority of the foreign-born [were] concentrated in the ages 20–60. By 2060, the core of the foreign-born population is projected to expand to include the ages between 60 and 80" (p. 8). These changes will be the most pronounced among the foreign-born population 65 and older, which is expected to double from 13% in 2014 to 26% in 2060. In light of these trends, Floyd et al. (2014) appeal for more examinations of leisure among minority older adults is clearly warranted. Calls for a better understanding of the leisure needs of older adults in the United States have been made for decades (Gibson & Singleton, 2012). What we will need to explore, however, is how to provide leisure services to older adults from populations with cultural backgrounds and life experiences different from the "mainstream".

The concepts of "mainstream," "majority" and "white" population will also need to be reexamined. According to the U.S. Census (2015) projections, non-Hispanic Whites will cease to be the majority group by 2044. PEW Research Center estimated that the United States will reach this milestone in 2055 (PEW, 2015). As of 2010, four states (California, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Texas) and the District of Columbia have already attained the "majority minority" status (U.S. Census, 2011). The proportion of non-Hispanic Whites is likely to decrease in many states in the near future (e.g., the Hispanic population of California is projected to increase from 39% in 2016 to 46% in 2060 with a concomitant decrease in the non-Hispanic White population from 38 to 31%) (State of California, 2017). Moreover, the definitions of racial categories and people's self-identification are likely to change. The growing multiracial population in the United States has been termed "the leading edge of a vast change in the way Americans view their cultural and genetic heredity" (Kunkle, 2015). According to a recent PEW report, views on racial identity among young Americans are shifting, formerly fixed boundaries of gender, age, and race are becoming more fluid, and "our standard demographic categories are falling apart" (Kunkle, 2015).

Not only Floyd et al. (2014) and Stodolska and Walker (2007), but researchers as far back as 20 years ago (e.g., Floyd, 1998) also called for more nuanced examinations of minority groups and acknowledging their internal heterogeneity. As we move toward the future, this topic will be more important than ever. Much of the existing leisure research has been quite deterministic and far too often portrayed minority

populations as underprivileged, homogenous entities. In contrast, ethnic populations are extremely diverse, both in terms of their socio-economic status and cultural traits, and the adaptation pathways among the second- and third-generation ethnics can follow a number of distinct trajectories (Portes et al. 2009). While some members of minority groups follow “downward assimilation into poverty, unemployment, and deviant lifestyles” (Portes et al. 2009, p. 1080), many others embrace the path of upward mobility and achievement of a middle-class status. Some of the recent sociological models predict that factors such as parental human capital, modes of incorporation, family structure, racial discrimination, bifurcated labor markets and inner-city subcultures determine the assimilation pathways among the U.S.-born ethnics (Portes et al. 2009). Our field is in a unique position to contribute to this discourse by examining to what extent leisure-related choices and experiences affect the trajectories of success and advancement versus lead to downward socio-economic adaptation among ethnic and racial groups. Answering the question of how leisure can assist underprivileged populations in achieving successful outcomes should be a priority.

Moreover, I argue that we have retired Washburne’s (1978) marginality thesis far too soon. Instead, we should revisit the socio-economic marginality as an explanatory variable to people’s leisure experiences. Future research should better elucidate the mechanisms that contribute to the persistence of poverty enclaves and examine how social and economic dynamics of high-poverty neighborhoods shape their residents’ leisure opportunities and choices (Jargowsky, 2009). The last 40 years of research since the publication of Washburne’s thesis clearly showed that it is not the matter of either-or but that *both* the socio-economic disadvantage *and* culture affect people’s leisure behavior. Now is time to clearly operationalize and understand these concepts (Floyd, 1998) and provide in-depth investigations of the mechanisms through which they shape leisure experiences of people of color.

Theoretical developments and interdisciplinary approaches

More interdisciplinary endeavors will be needed to explore these new research avenues. The pursuit of new leisure-specific theoretical frameworks advocated by Floyd et al. (2014) should not stand in the way of leisure researchers’ adopting cutting-edge theoretical frameworks from the allied disciplines such as ethnic and migration studies, sociology, geography, and anthropology. Overall, we are doing a much better job than a decade ago in cross-pollinating social-science fields by placing our work in the journals of our cognate disciplines. However, still much needs to be done to make others appreciate the critical role leisure plays in the human condition, success, and quality of life.

Conclusions

As Shinew et al. (2006) argued in their essay:

Understanding the leisure behavior of ethnic and racial minorities is an important area of inquiry that has evolved over time. Progress has been made, but we have far to go. ... There is no doubt that we live in an extraordinarily complex society where cultural, religious, political, social, and economic forces are constantly at play. It is our responsibility to identify, understand, and appreciate these forces and incorporate them into our research. (p. 407)

These words are as current in 2017 as they were in 2006. In the climate of increased racial and ethnic tensions, the rise in global migration flows and increasing diversity of our societies, our role as leisure scholars, educators, and practitioners will be more important

than ever before. Overall, my assessment is that our predictions from the last 16 years have *not* missed the boat, but the new events and trends have created opportunities and necessitated research on subjects that go far beyond of what scholars of leisure, ethnicity, and race have previously advocated.

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