

Crossing the Color Line With a Different Perspective on Whiteness and (Anti)racism: A Response to Mary McDonald

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Abstract

This paper is a response to the keynote address by Mary McDonald delivered at the 2008 NRPA Butler Lecture. Her paper on “Dialogues on Whiteness, Leisure, and (Anti)Racism” was subsequently published in the *Journal of Leisure Research* in the first quarter of 2009. While there are several areas of congruence and historical accuracy regarding McDonald’s work, this present article includes a distinctive line of reasoning for how whiteness influences the leisure experiences of ethnic minorities. A different perspective on understanding racism in relation to recreation and use of parks as leisure spaces is offered and some competing viewpoints provided. This response paper provides a contribution towards the discussion of power, privilege and the continued existence of oppression and discrimination in this field. It suggests we continue to explore critical race theory in recreation and leisure studies yet this must begin with perceptions of “justice,” coupled with a fundamental belief in the mere existence of injustice, if change is truly to occur. The intention of this paper is to support key components of McDonald’s premise while also challenging conventional thinking. Additionally, assorted questions are asked to counteract some of those noted by McDonald, relationships between social and environmental justice and leisure are explored from a different lens, and suggestions for research directions are offered.

KEYWORDS: Whiteness, race, multiculturalism, social justice, environmental justice, parks

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How do White people construct and redefine whiteness in their own terms and as a means of preserving their social privilege, their place in the hierarchy of power, and their dominance in leisure entitlements? Over the years, scholarly inquiry of race and ethnicity has occurred in a myriad and aggregate of ways including various special journal issues and technical reports across recreation, parks, and leisure studies (Chavez, Winter, & Absher, 2008; Floyd, 1998; Floyd, Bocarro, & Thompson, 2008; Manning, 2001; Roberts & Rodriguez, 2002b; Sasidharan, 2002). A contribution to the discussion of race and whiteness has occurred in leisure studies somewhat with a focus on sports (Burdsey, 2008; Hylton, 2005; Long & Hylton, 2002). In my experience, how whiteness manifests itself as a topic for inquiry in this field may be known as a scarcity to some, inadequate to others, and perhaps too complex to touch and therefore not studied by others (see Floyd, Bocarro and Thompson, 2008); hence, the need for this special issue on critical race theory and social justice perspectives on whiteness, difference, and anti-racism.

This paper is a response to McDonald (2009) and her work on “whiteness, leisure, and (anti)racism” including how whiteness functions to benefit white hegemony. She also discusses some of the issues and problems linked with studying whiteness and related intricacies that arise. I agree with some of her principles, yet in other ways I provide provocative counter-perspectives grounded in both theory and practice as they relate to multiculturalism in the sphere of parks and recreation. My overall purpose is twofold: (1) to challenge those who are interested in working for equity and social justice to engage in purposeful and practical areas of inquiry; and (2) to inform future research and practice concerning whiteness and privilege in the field of recreation, parks, and leisure studies. I draw parallels between McDonald’s premises, my personal and scholarly experience, and offer suggestions for how our field can move in new directions regarding discourse on race and culture. I also pose new questions and suggest new approaches to studying whiteness, leisure and racism, which may heighten our capacity to reach common ground on these matters and potentially strive for equality in the face of racism, which so often divides.

My response is rooted in American soils due to the racial makeup of our country and is based on similar U.S. context as provided by McDonald (2009). While McDonald offers an account of whiteness in leisure, including somewhat of a broader social and political connection, my focus will revolve around this topic in relation to park use and exploring the outdoors during our leisure time. In this article I utilize aspects such as Smith’s ethnic identity theory (1991), and assorted views of race connected with gender inequality and white privilege for contextual purposes. Furthermore, and significant to this topic, I provide a description of my own bi-racial and multicultural background as an offering and a challenge to the way academics make invisible (and benefit from) “whiteness” within the framework of academic discourse.

A Foreground: Critical Race Theory and Critical Questions

Definitions of race within academic discourse have no longer been rooted in essentialism, but rather understood as social constructions (e.g., Johnson, 1997; Stanfield & Dennis, 1993). According to Feagin, this understanding of racism itself is “not just about the construction of racial images, attitudes and identities. It is even more centrally about the creation, development and maintenance of white privilege, eco-

conomic wealth, and sociopolitical power for over four centuries” (as cited in McDonald, 2009, p. 9). Thus, at its very base in both discourse and written scholarship, whiteness is known as a function of power and privilege.

In a critical inquiry committed to social justice, a definition must also consider how whiteness perpetuates itself through the intertwining poles of “normality” and “invisibility” (Ramos-Zayas, 2001, p. 74), for as a direct result of changes in antidiscrimination laws and policies over the past 40 years, there is the widespread belief among Americans that racial matters have dramatically improved (Davey & Bales, 2008). Yet many critical race theorists, however, caution against this misperception. West (1994), for example, states, “race is still the most explosive issue in American life precisely because it forces us to confront the tragic facts of poverty and paranoia, despair and distrust” (p. 156). Despite obvious advances since the Civil Rights era, racism continues to manifest itself in the American cultural landscape (Morrison, 1992).

In the realm of parks and recreation, research reviews indicate visitor groups to national parks and other natural resource areas are largely Whites of European descent (e.g., Chavez, Winter, & Absher, 2008; Floyd, 1999, 2001). Subsequently, a relevant and persistent research question regarding White privilege is the following: Why do so few people of color visit national parks and other natural resource/protected areas? Two particulars concerning this question reveal the invisible and normalized workings of racism in the United States: (1) after more than 45 years of research, findings are broad-based to outdoor recreation across land agencies (e.g., fear/safety, comfort and lack of “feeling welcome”, access, economic factors), and (2) the “answers” are discussed yet few empirical studies of national park use, in particular, regarding race and ethnicity appear in the literature (Floyd, 2001; Rodriguez & Roberts, 2002a, 2002b). Support for this inquiry regarding park visitation and the embrace of new perspectives is woven throughout this paper. A great influence on this investigation—also cited by McDonald (2009)—is the seminal work of Omi and Winant (1994) who link racial formation and related theoretical frameworks to “the evolution of hegemony as the way in which society is organized and ruled” (p. 56).

Within a theoretical discussion, race must be considered and crucial questions revolving around this topic must extend to asking questions about whiteness and its accompanying responsibility. McDonald seems hesitant to ask some of these questions, but I maintain there are investigative exigencies for both Whites and people of color within both academic and mainstream discourse. Some of these questions include the following (many of which are interrelated): Where and with whom should the awareness and responsibility for whiteness lie? How responsible and aware of whiteness should Whites be? How should people of color and Whites relate to the historical past without getting debilitated by many of its horrible truths? How should people of color relate to whiteness? What are some of the strategies used by White allies to resist and challenge various forms of “White power” that continue to oppress people of color?

My hope is these questions and others that arise in this paper will be used for future research and have potential for practice. In many cases, asking the difficult questions indicates the challenging process of taking responsibility has begun.

McDonald's Overall Conception of Whiteness in Sports and Leisure

McDonald (2009) provides a narrative on how social constructionist views—reaching back to W.E.B. DuBois—deconstruct race as a biological marker and reconstruct it as a “human creation eminently tied to inequitable social relations” (p. 8). Her analysis of “whiteness within leisure contexts” includes subject matter showing various ways that whiteness functions to benefit White hegemony. She also discusses some of the issues and problems linked with studying whiteness and related intricacies. The key premise of McDonald's paper is what she calls “Thinking through Whiteness,” where she asserts there are three “persistent, overlapping themes or tactics” that conceptualize whiteness: (1) color and power evasiveness, (2) normalization, and (3) intersectionality. McDonald also offers the caveat that these three themes are not definitive “as there are innumerable ways in which whiteness performs...given diverse histories both locally and globally”. She also warns, appropriately, of the hazardous misconceiving of whiteness in “narrow, essentialist ways” (McDonald, p. 10).

Color and Power Evasiveness and Race Cognizance

Within McDonald's (2009) first theme of color and power evasiveness, she cites Frankenberg's analysis of 30 White women's ideas about the impact of race in their lives. Frankenberg argues for three framings of race, which are inter-connected and can be likened to historic shifts in the public understanding of race in the U.S.; these include the factors of racial essentialism, color and power evasiveness, and racial cognizance (McDonald, p. 10). McDonald also cites Doane's argument in support of Frankenberg, where “meaningful conversations” with Whites about race are muted due to White denial of seeing race and/or the polite distancing of the topic (p. 11). These are frameworks where both color and power are ‘evaded’ and thus, made invisible, maintain White hegemony.

I agree with McDonald's (2009) overall discussion of power and color evasiveness; however, she mentions no specific examples of racial essentialism. In my own study and research, I have observed this to still be an important factor where the use of racial identifications, for instance “maintain and normalize inequitable social conditions” (Kivel as cited in McDonald, p. 9). While “playful” leisure spaces are beautified with parks, urban gardens, and open spaces so the affluent can enjoy nature within steps of their homes, poor minorities may typically be pushed away from it all. For example, Roberts (2007) describes the experience of a Latina woman who was fishing with her son in a national park and was asked to leave by a White man; he told her that she was fishing in his spot and that she did not belong there. Another example of social inequity and racial essentialism can be noted in a feature story about ethnic diversity in parks by the National Parks Conservation Association called “Designing for Diversity” (Goldsmith, 1994). The first issue that following year highlighted a series of letters to the editor. One excerpt is as follows:

...Our parks are overcrowded now. Whether Goldsmith wishes to be realistic or not, bringing in blacks and Latinos from the ghettos will only contribute disproportionately to vandalism and other criminal activities, including robbery, murder, drug trafficking and gang activity... By publishing the article, national parks does current visitors a dis-service. (Lange, 1994)

Six years later another article was written about the need for cultural diversity (see Wilkinson, 2000) and again, in response, a series of letters to the editor admonished Park Service employees for “being paid to fulfill some arbitrary racial and ethnic goals” (Luttich, 2000). Even if only a handful of people make negative statements in any given circumstance, such instances should not be viewed as insignificant or inconsequential and need to be identified and challenged. Furthermore, my observations and experience demonstrate that when harmful assertions are made public, this often means others are likely thinking in the same manner and may even “act” on these beliefs, which infringe upon the rights, or even safety, of ethnic minorities. And, there are a multitude of case examples that could be provided (e.g., Martin, 2004; Roberts & Rodriguez, 2008; Schelhas, 2002; Winter, Jeong, & Godbey, 2004). This substantiates the increased challenge for park managers (and others) to ascertain how best to mitigate these unpleasant remarks, or attitudes and behaviors of others (visitors, employees), so parks can truly be “enjoyed by all” regardless of social, economic, or racial background.

In her discussion of power and color evasiveness, McDonald (2009) states that Whites do not see themselves as “raced” or enjoying advantages; this is part of the worldview that helps maintain White hegemony. I agree with this assertion. Although she does not use the language of “color blindness” this is present in other domains such as multicultural education (e.g., Banks & Banks, 1997). Subsequently, the seminal work of McIntosh (1988) described the advantage of White privilege as:

an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks. (p. 3)

She created a long checklist indicating how she automatically enjoys privilege simply because of the color of her white skin. While shaped more than twenty years ago, scholars continue to explore her framework using fresh perspectives and relevant connections to leisure studies.

In the context of outdoor recreation and adventure, for instance, Warren (2009) created an adaptation of McIntosh’s (1988) “Knapsack” and presents this in a form of social justice education. Like McIntosh, Warren uses “I” (as a White woman) but to get my point across as a woman of color, I changed the pronoun to “you” in the examples below and refer to White people:

- *You can consider going on a trip with an outdoor organization and be assured that people of your race will be on the course with you.*
- *You can see your race presented on energy bars, and be assured that the trip food you are given to eat will include the staple foods that fit with your cultural traditions.*
- *You can do really well as a rock climber and not be a credit to your race.*
- *You can hike up the mountain and be reasonably sure that if you meet people on the trail that they will be of your own race.*
- *When you read an outdoor leadership textbook, you can be sure that members of your race will be represented, and that the history of outdoor adventure will show you that people of your color made it what it is. (Warren, p. 227)*

The majority of White outdoor enthusiasts have never thought about statements like these because they do not have to; this is simply not part of their vernacular or lived experience. Awareness is, however, part of their responsibility.

Race cognizance: “*When is one ‘black’ enough?*” McDonald (2009) then discusses the third (and most optimistic) leg of the historical shift in conceptions of whiteness; that is, *race cognizance*. As Frankenburg describes, race cognizance involves a shift whereby people (usually people of color) “appreciate the distinctive contours of cultures, values, aesthetics, etc., while simultaneously acknowledging the historical, social, economic and political contexts, which help to produce such differences” (as cited in McDonald, p. 11). McDonald’s description of race cognizance, and her appreciation for its distinctive contours, resonates with my comprehension of Smith’s (1991) model of ethnic identity development. That is, meeting a common human need for ethnic identity includes validation and reinforcement “in a positive manner by both his membership group and by the structure of the society’s institutions” (Smith, p. 183). In this way, race cognizance is carried to the level of empowerment (e.g., “majority status”) where the individual is freed “to focus on aspects of his or her life other than ethnicity” (Smith, p. 183) and is a challenge well worth rising to. It can take an enormous amount of strength within a specific cultural group to break stereotypes and appreciate a group’s “distinctive contours.” How, then, do our *distinctive contours* benefit or hurt us, as individuals, regarding how such variations encourage us to embrace difference while also being sources of conflict?

Great fortitude is required for people to pursue something they enjoy when constraints exist both within one’s culture and without. For instance, when is someone considered *black enough?* (or insert any race). There is stigma surrounding some ethnic minorities recreating in the wilderness, for example, where there’s the oft-repeated line that blacks “do not do that kind of activity.” The elements of social permission and peer pressure figure heavily where an individual is respected only if she or he conforms to a certain set of standards and lifestyle (Roberts & Rodriguez, 2008). If someone acts in a way that is non-traditional in their community, they may be labeled as having less of an identity or attempting to reject their identity. An example of this challenge is reflected in this quote from Roberts’ (2003) study of attitudes, experiences and constraints of Blacks and Latinos in relation to recreational park use:

I think when I talk to my friends or family that there’s this invisible class barrier about the outdoors. And that I go but they don’t go. Some say ‘it’s not cool’. I mean it’s kind of strange because we’re talkin’ about within black, within culture differences – And it seems to me like an obvious kind of class and political question. So does it make me less black because I like to go hiking? (Roberts, p. 174)

How does this question, and ones similar to it, frame our assumptions (as leisure service providers) about the connection of blackness to whiteness? The quote highlights how we (as leisure researchers) should consider the complex factors that inform one’s participation in parks and outdoor recreation activities. In addition, to avoid risk of assimilation into a dominant culture, it may be appropriate to create awareness of how people of color internalize whiteness and, with this, enable a deeper understanding of self-imposed, or internalized, oppression.

Whiteness: A Normalizing Practice?

McDonald (2009) appropriately calls attention to the “active, elastic, and adaptable character of whiteness” and I applaud her use of Gabriel’s statement where she underscores the fluid nature of whiteness in the following statement: “rather than simply describing what whiteness is, it is more useful to explain what whiteness does” (as cited in McDonald, p. 9). As a second theme of “Thinking Through Whiteness,” whiteness as normalization is a solid premise. Also cited by McDonald, Dyer’s statement that “white people create the dominant images of the world and don’t quite see that they thus construct the world in their image” (p. 12) is aptly ‘reflected’ in studies where images of African Americans, and other ethnic minorities, lack a visible presence in outdoor magazines (e.g., Finney, 2006; Martin, 2004).

Finney (2006), for example, found a critical connection between blackness and the sense of a lack of visual and textual representation of African Americans in relation to the environment in the mass media, national parks, schools, and within the mainstream environmental movement. By examining visual representation of African-Americans in *Outside* magazine over a ten-year period, she found 4,602 pictures of people with only 103 visibly identifiable as African Americans. Drawing critical attention to what usually passes for a standard reference point, where whiteness is considered “natural, normal, and/or inevitable” (McDonald, 2009, p. 12) can help us begin to extricate ourselves (as scholars) from its power as the dominant discourse. Towards this end, I pose the following question: To what extent do we uphold or assert whiteness as a normalizing practice in recreation and leisure studies? In the following section, I will take this a step further in relation to nature and parks.

Uncovering and naming ‘white nature’ as the norm. To the extent that wilderness and nature are associated with the sublime or ultimate ‘transcendent’ moment, or that civilization/wilderness or culture/nature are assumed to be opposites demonstrates the normalization of nature as white. According to DeLuca (1998), getting blissfully lost in an outdoor experience such as mountain biking disguises the assumption that this experience is equally available to all people. But by naming “wilderness, nature, and humanity as white,” he writes, we “begin to make visible the invisible center that has structured United States environmental discourse” (DeLuca, p. 224).

The ideal of White wilderness, as posited by DeLuca (1998), has historically been a middle and upper class sensibility, where wilderness is something to be “consumed” if one has the means and thus leisure to do so. National parks, for example, were created and have historically functioned as a part of White ideology on various levels (see Meeker, Woods, & Lucas, 1973), where whiteness is assumed to be the norm that must be preserved. According to Mels, “The exclusion of the poor and people of color was a hallmark of the US national park system ... [and] Wilderness ideals were complicit in the dispossession of Native Americans from land designated for national parks” Byrne & Wolch, 2009, p. 5). So to consider parks as “ideologically neutral spaces” (p. 3) is to deny parks as being reinforced by “Anglo-normativity” (Floyd, as cited by Byrne & Wolch, 2009).

Intersectionality: Whiteness, gender, and wilderness

A related discussion for McDonald (2009) is intersectionality where the forces of racism and sexism interact, rendering race invisible where race is “colonized” in the

service of White privilege. This, according to McDonald, has served to minimize the issue of the “inequity experienced by women of color while doing little to investigate both the racial privilege of White women and the gendered advantages enjoyed by men of color” (p. 15). For example, McDonald cites the idealization of the middle-class White woman as “pious, pure, gentle (sic), and domestic” (p. 15) while the broader context reveals this image tied to “a historically specific articulation of whiteness and heteronormativity” (p. 15).

A particular assertion by McDonald (2009) that struck a chord with me, as a woman of color, is this, “[s]imilar intersectional perspectives by feminists of color have theorized the multiple ways people of color are various and differently sexed, raced and classed thus challenging white feminist preoccupation with white women’s experiences as the alleged foundational standpoint of feminism” (p. 15). I also agree with the lack of inclusion of ethnic minority perspectives in discourse on feminism and gender inequality having seen this through the lens of my mother’s involvement in the women’s rights movement of the 70s. As recommended by Shinew, et al. (2006), because race, gender, and class remain as “major sources of inequality” (in America) scholars must continue to examine the intersection of these and other variables, regarding leisure behavior (p. 405). I suggest future research take this intersection further and explore the specific role of whiteness across demographic variables including—and beyond—race, class, and gender.

Extending a discussion of intersectionality to parks and wilderness areas, if one understands myth as a “naturalized, ahistorical, depoliticized” construct (Barthes as cited in DeLuca, 1998, p. 233), then whiteness intersects with the mythologizing of nature where the Grand Canyon, for example, may be viewed in the romantic tradition of the sublime, that is, without human history or explanation. From a historical and traditional perspective, according to DeLuca, at the “heart of nature we find whiteness” (DeLuca, p. 218). He means that purely from a social and political context. Nature, I agree, can be understood as a social domain, the meaning of which is culturally defined. In environmental discourse, there is an unstated assumption (although sometimes it is stated) that nature is white nature, that it is white wilderness, and that political efforts must be directed toward saving such a nature for all humanity (DeLuca). Some would interpret that to refer primarily to White, highly educated, privileged people who have the money and leisure time to be tourists, hikers and bikers. To trace the intersection of whiteness and its mythologizing in outdoor recreation is to begin to interrogate its privileged position.

Changing the Lens: The Intersection of Whiteness, Critical Race Theory, and Academic Discourse

McDonald (2009) is right to offer the caveat that her three themes regarding whiteness are not definitive “as there are innumerable ways in which whiteness performs” (p. 10). Here I acknowledge that within what may be considered the limits of acceptable scholarship, for various reasons (e.g., standards) as scholars we do not ordinarily reveal our own biases or the degree to which whiteness functions in our own discourse. The dominant narrative of White scholars, for example, suggests the invisibility and normalization of whiteness in the sense that there is a lack of conscious use of White privilege in examining these issues. This is also maintained by Collins

who “accused white social science of struggling to maintain the credibility of being the most appropriate viewpoint from which to study ‘race’ and racism in society” (as cited in Hylton, 2005, p. 82).

My concern also relates to the ever important intersection of theory and practice. I believe a common goal for academics is to use theory as a basis for systemic solutions, and possibly even policy reforms, that will ultimately contribute to leveling the playing field and nurturing social justice as well. If research and work in this field addressing and documenting whiteness and White hegemony exists to the extent it does, what questions have we not asked that would be useful in both practical and measurable ways? McDonald (2009) asks, “what about organizations such as the YWCA, which feature a stated commitment to ending racism – do policies and programming reflect race cognizance discourse?” (p. 12). I suggest the question be strengthened by asking how agency actions and behaviors genuinely reflect what may be a written policy? Organizations should ask themselves why policy implies but does not always lead to action? Furthermore, do we need to re-examine the way that scholars carry out this conversation? For example, are we making sure we talk about systems of privilege as a form of social injustice when we talk about race cognizance and whiteness?

I offer my story in keeping with the foreground of critical race theory to provide a different way of analyzing “the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvii). I present this here to provide a bridge between theory and practice, and between whiteness and Smith’s (1991) theory of ethnic identity development. I am multiracial. In full, my father is White (from Liverpool, England), and my mother is mixed race. Her mother (my maternal grandmother) is also of mixed race including East Indian (from Madras) and Cherokee (from mid-western America). My maternal grandfather was of West Indian heritage, from the island of St. Lucia. Subsequently, I represent the multiracial Americans who are becoming one of the country’s fastest growing demographic groups. The U.S. Census estimates for this population an increase of approximately twenty-five percent since the 2000 Census (Tauber & Singh, 2009).

An important vantage point regarding my work is that my parents were interracially married in the 1950s when such marriage was illegal in many states across the U.S. until the 1967 *Loving vs. Virginia* Supreme Court case legalized this type of union (Association of Multiethnic Americans, n.d.). Based on phenotype, knowing one of my parents is White would be difficult if not impossible, yet this afforded me a certain privilege during my childhood. Nonetheless, my brown skin has automatically placed me in the social status of ethnic minority thereby considered part of an “oppressed” group. In addition to being a minority, being female places me in another oppressed position, yet I still have privilege as middle-class and educated. How is all this connected to my “race” that has no clearly defined box to check? An essential bridge began with the 2000 Census which allowed people of a distinct mixed heritage to check “two or more races”. This still, however, relegates us to “other” when precisely what those races might be is not known from this particular checked box.

A Focus on Ethnic Identity Development instead of Race

I propose an overall reframing of the way we look at whiteness by shifting the language we use and thus re-conceptualizing racial identity development so we are not just limiting our perspective to the issue of oppression (Smith, 1991). The ensuing outcome of using a CRT perspective in how sport and leisure is experienced, for instance, as indicated by Hylton (2005) is “likely to lead towards a resistance to a passive reproduction of the established practices, knowledge and resources comprising the social conditions that marginalize ‘race’ as a core factor” (p. 81). Furthermore, Birrell argues it is essential that “the experiences of marginalized groups come through clearly in the stories disseminated by research and policy communities” (as cited in Hylton, p. 82). A critical black theoretical standpoint challenges social scientists to (re)interpret the black experience, racial formations and processes in the study of ‘race’ and race equality, therefore generating a more invigorating discourse (Hylton).

I believe the preceding discussion on whiteness validates its importance as a tool for critical inquiry—but in the minds of many ethnic minorities, you cannot separate race from class or gender. As affirmed by Omi and Winant (1994), while race should be kept central to the discussion on CRT, none of these variables can truly stand alone. It is my conviction (and supported by Sasidharan, 2002) that, as scholars, we therefore need to ask more questions about culture rather than race to advance the discourse. One way to begin is by exploring ethnic identity.

Smith (1991) proposes redefining racial groups in terms of ethnicity where an ethnic group shares a common history, culture, symbolism, physical features, and values and also identifies itself as being such a group. The emphasis on identity as a process and something located “both in the core of the individual and in his or her communal culture” (Smith, p. 182) is crucial to my point about the challenges and benefits of being multiethnic and multicultural in the field of parks, recreation, and leisure studies.

Another important aspect of the ethnic identity development theory is the concept of majority/minority status, where a group’s superiority is defined primarily in terms of its power within a given society (Smith, 1991). Smith postulates that ethnic identity development, as a process beginning with childhood, includes the constant drawing of boundaries and deciding what individuals and groups are included in one’s inner boundary (ethnicity) and outer boundary (non-ethnic membership group) (Smith, p. 183). Important to note in the context of this paper that use of the term “boundary” includes where places of leisure and recreation designate and construct boundaries as well. Thus, a person of color in the U.S. living amidst the White majority group may face the daily challenge of dealing with personal boundaries. Another complex element for scholars (and practitioners) to consider is: How do these boundaries (culture and recreational pursuits) either intersect or clash?

How does all of this relate to the many questions asked in this paper, including “why do so few people of color visit national parks?” Smith’s (1991) delineation of how someone with minority status may become empowered within a majority culture may be the key. Leisure scholars can begin to think about this process of identity development in ethnic terms. As Smith proposes we should understand how an individual resolves conflicts regarding one’s ethnic identity and minority status when surrounded by a majority of White visitors in parks. She develops seventeen propositions which relate to the healthy resolution of ethnic identity conflicts. For example, prejudice can

be reduced when interethnic contact involves equal status, intimacy, interdependency, cooperation, and “superordinate goals” (Sherif as cited by Smith). Applied to a park setting “when the contact is pleasant and rewarding ... and when a social climate exists that favors intergroup contact and harmony” (Smith, p. 185), then the experience may be more positive thereby offering greater opportunity for crossing cultural boundaries.

Environmental and Social Justice: Theory into Practice

We may then look to the work of Environmental Justice (EJ) groups over the last 30 years (DeLuca, 1998) to reframe and reconstruct what is considered “environment” in a way that allows for complex and multi-faceted counter-perspectives on culture, race, whiteness, and ethnicity. Environmental justice groups challenge mainstream environmentalism by enlarging the boundaries to include not just the stereotypical “sublime, romanticized wilderness,” but ourselves as people in the places we live and work (DeLuca, 1998, p. 236). In 1991, the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit was deemed the single most important event in the EJ movement (Environmental Justice Resource Center, 2002). This Summit impelled people of color to join forces around environmental, social, and economic justice and health issues as basic human rights. This reversed the assumption of the modern industrial mindset which views nature as something outside one’s self and thus easily justifying its’ subjugation and colonization (DeLuca, 1998). EJ groups “conceptualize their struggles as being about environmental justice because their communities are often targeted as sites due to class discrimination, institutional racism, and regional bias” (DeLuca, 1998, p. 235). According to DeLuca, the EJ efforts should not be seen as an abandonment of environmentalism, rather seen as an “expansion that opens up opportunities for both radical critiques of multiple forms of domination and for formulations of liberation projects previously constrained by whiteness, enabling such groups to focus on issues and deploy tactics that expand what counts as environmental politics” (p. 240). One such opportunity for outdoor recreation research would be to ask the following questions as posed by Byrne and Wolch (2009): “How do ethno-racial formations configure park spaces? How, in turn, do ethno-racially inscribed park spaces influence park use or non-use?” (p. 12).

Policy put into practice can open the racial discourse to include further discussions and questions about ethnicity and culture for recreation and parks. A study by Davey and Bales (2008) found that the explicit invocation of race is not helpful in countering dominant race narratives. Results also showed the general public does not accept racist attitudes since discriminatory practices have been banned according to law, yet “the general public is not sure what can be done to further eliminate racist attitudes or behaviors” (Davey & Bales, 2008, p. 2). Also, people seem to view racism as affecting individuals; thus, crowding out “any consideration of systemic solutions or policy reforms” (p. 2). Davey and Bales defined and articulated a series of successful framing propositions and cues, which—across ethnic and racial divisions—resound with cultural values rather than racial distinctions. In brief, these include the following: (1) the value of opportunity as it applies to all Americans and the value of a linked fate or interdependence, and (2) the foregrounding of effective solutions on a systemic basis. In terms of racial cues, they found the more explicit the racial cue in communications, the greater the opposition to race-based public policies (Davey & Bales, 2008, p. 6).

If parks are supposed to embody the value of “all Americans”, then how do managers reframe communication surrounding race and ethnicity (or more valuable, culture) at the systemic and policy level?

Closing Thoughts: Opportunity versus Obligation

Anticipating the change in demographics in the next few decades, parks and recreation professionals have the opportunity, from classrooms to conferences, to bridge ethnic, racial and cultural divides. This is a discussion not to be avoided, but embraced and extended to include more critical questions concerning ethnicity and culture. As educators and professionals, it is our obligation to comprehend whiteness in relation to creating a more racially and socially just environment for people we work with and those we teach. Instead of framing this as an obligation, we need to view it as an opportunity.

To me, the purpose of understanding race is to ultimately recognize the power of one’s own mind and status, and to derive from that power the impetus necessary to reach individual and/or collective goals and permeate life with meaning. We are each responsible for some aspect of what we inherit, whether it be minority or majority status, or, as is the case with most people—a combination.

I understand my place in a line of distinguished scholars who have also approached their work with a commitment to social justice and creating change. The scholarship in leisure studies, however, is still seeking its place among dialogues on whiteness. As an approach to mitigating racism (and sexism), I am therefore advocating for the vital importance of challenging conventional wisdom regarding certain limitations of scholarship. By this, I mean embracing and encouraging research by more people of color about their experiences and knowledge that can bear a significant influence on the dynamics of leisure studies. This argument is based, in part, on my assertions above. I also contend that researchers might consider moving beyond what has been deemed as customary (e.g., a white scholar not self-identifying when writing, speaking, or researching about whiteness). By not acknowledging one’s self on the spectrum of whiteness, for example, does this place any limitations on making progress with studying critical race theory in our field? Do our current standards about what may be considered acceptable scholarship limit our ability to be more cognizant of, or distinctive with, research practices based on our own personal lens? In addition, I believe leisure scholars need to examine their participation in institutions that have a history of perpetuating whiteness as a function of power and privilege. Another imperative, not yet fully explored in parks, recreation and leisure studies, is that the multiracial and multicultural experience can no longer be ignored; although not everyone is ready for the use of more complex models or theories to understand and discuss race and culture from a multi-faceted viewpoint. As expressed throughout this paper, I am not so sure the right questions are being asked on either theoretical or applied levels.

Various racial and ethnic theories have had a profound impact on all levels and kinds of scholarship in parks and outdoor recreation (see Chavez, Winter & Absher, 2008; Floyd, 1999, 2001; Rodriguez & Roberts, 2002b). Entering a new upsurge of critical race theory, specifically, should move us towards building additional critiques of the inadequate theorization of race and other constructions of cultural difference in traditional recreation and leisure studies. I remain optimistic that we can transcend

racial barriers in our dialogues by embracing ethnic identity and even more so, culture. As noted by Root (1992), for example, “to transcend artificial, irrational racial barriers is not an act of deviance; rather it requires engaging in a process of adaptation and that one lay legitimate claim to the richness of one’s varied heritages and privileges” (p. 80). Furthermore we can expand the research about similarities and differences in relation to the leisure experience by starting to answer many of the questions I impart throughout this paper.

We need to understand the value of racial discourse, engage in antiracism efforts, develop or change organizational policy, and fully comprehend how critical race theory impacts our scholarship. In this way, both researchers and practitioners may effectively articulate how whiteness preserves social privilege, maintains its place in the hierarchy of power, and persists in its dominance in parks, recreation, and leisure entitlements. Positive change is not possible without moving social justice postulates such as these into action.

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