
Articles

Class Polarization and Leisure Activity Preferences of African Americans: Intragroup Comparisons

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This study breaks from the practice of making comparisons between races and focuses on the influence of gender, education, and income on the leisure activity preferences of African Americans. Applying the class polarization perspective, we expected to find significant differences between the leisure preferences of African Americans of different socioeconomic status. Further, we expected the differences to be greater between men of different socioeconomic groups as compared to women of different status. Similarities were found between the leisure preferences of men and women in the higher social classes, but not between those in the lower social classes. Additionally, results showed a positive association between the leisure preferences of men of different socioeconomic groups, but not between women of different classes.

KEYWORDS: *Leisure preferences, social class, gender, class polarization*

Introduction

A number of studies have been conducted over the last ten years regarding the relationship between gender and leisure behavior (e.g. Firestone & Shelton, 1994; Henderson, 1990, 1994; Henderson, Stalnaker & Taylor, 1988; Searle & Jackson, 1985; Shaw, 1985, 1994). The thrust of this research has examined differences *between* gender groups and has been grounded in a theoretical understanding of gender relations within a patriarchal society. Although some research has been conducted regarding leisure behavior differences *within* gender groups (e.g., Dattilo, Dattilo, Samdahl, & Kleiber, 1994; Harrington & Dawson, 1995; Riddick & Stewart, 1994), this issue has not received the same amount of attention.

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A similar pattern of research is evident with regard to race and leisure behavior. Much of the work that has been done in this area focuses on differences between racial groups (e.g., Edwards, 1981; Hutchison, 1987, 1994; Philipp, 1995; Washburne, 1978; West, 1989), while the research which addresses differences within racial groups is more sparse (e.g., Floyd, Shinew, McGuire, & Noe, 1994; Shinew, Floyd, McGuire, & Noe, 1995; Stamps & Stamps, 1985; Woodard, 1988). The purpose of the present study is to extend these lines of research to gain a greater understanding of similarities and differences within the Black population. More specifically, we compared the leisure activity preferences of Black subgroups defined by gender and two objective indicators of socioeconomic status: income and education. Given that gender and racial groups are often treated as homogeneous entities, variations among Black men and women of different social classes are frequently not addressed. The class polarization perspective provides the theoretical rationale for the study (Wilson, 1987).

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the nature of the interrelationship of race and social class is one of the most important tasks facing the study of race relations today. Wilson's class polarization perspective (Wilson, 1978, 1980, 1987) has been used to explain "a growing cleavage between lower class blacks who, because of past discrimination, are oppressed because they are poor-and a growing number of middle class blacks who are able to take advantage of the recently developed opportunities" (Thomas, 1993, p. 328). For example, Gilder (1981) stated that "although intact Black families are doing better than ever and discrimination has vastly diminished, the condition of poor blacks has radically worsened" (p. 12). Thomas (1993) concluded that economic growth, government intervention, and the implementation of affirmative action policies has created a large Black middle class which experiences the same labor force opportunities as Whites with little or no "residual race effect." He maintained that this Black middle class grew primarily through the creation of job opportunities and the elimination of racial barriers in education and employment. Conversely, underclass blacks, particularly males who have been displaced from blue collar jobs by deindustrialization, have been left behind.

Farley and Bianchi (1985) concluded that not only is the Black community "bifurcating along class lines," but that this division corresponds with a geographic separation as well. Underclass blacks are trapped in urban ghettos while middle class Black families escape to better neighborhoods in the suburbs. Moreover, as middle class Blacks have moved into suburban neighborhoods and professional lifestyles, their behavior and attitudes have become more similar to their middle class White counterparts (Barr, Farrell, Barnes, & Welte, 1993).

The forces creating class polarization may be affecting Black women somewhat less than Black men due to educational attainment and expansion of employment opportunities available to women (Barr et al., 1993). Black

women have been more than twice as likely to find positions in the expanding sectors of the economy (e.g., service and clerical jobs), while Black males have remained concentrated in declining areas (e.g., heavy industry) (Bowman, 1991; Wilson, 1987). Further, Wilkie (1985) stated that over the course of the twentieth century, the occupational profiles of Black and White women workers in the United States have become more and more alike. Findings from her study indicated that changes in occupational structure were more important than decreasing segregation within occupations in accounting for the overall decline in occupational segregation between Black and White women.

Some researchers (Marrett, 1980; Thomas & Hughes, 1986) have disagreed with Wilson's theory and have contended that the advancements that blacks have experienced are limited. They have maintained that Blacks continue to suffer from both overt and institutionalized oppression and discrimination and that race remains a more telling predictor of life chances than does social class. Nevertheless, Wilson's perspective does recognize that Blacks should not be regarded as a homogeneous group, but examined as a diversified group which consists of different occupational, educational, and income levels (Barr et al., 1993). Woodard (1988) concurred with this position and claimed that part of the reason why we have a such a limited understanding of the leisure behavior of Blacks is due to researchers' preoccupation with comparing the leisure behavior of Blacks to Whites. He contended that this type of research provides only a "glimpse" into the leisure behavior of Blacks and called for more research which examines leisure behavior patterns by social class indicators within the Black population.

Related Studies

In general, findings from previous studies in this area have indicated that although the leisure behavior patterns of individuals of different social classes are fairly equal on most "core" leisure activities (Kelly, 1996), behavior patterns on some specific leisure activities vary with socioeconomic status. In other words, middle class individuals participate in certain leisure activities which are distinct from those of lower class individuals. For example, Woodard's study (1988) of leisure behavior among Blacks found that social class was an effective predictor of participation in metropolitan activities. Metropolitan activities were characterized by the "requirement of frequent travel outside the neighborhood . . . proper attire . . . capital investment in training, equipment, knowledge, and/or a 'cultural appreciation' usually acquired through higher education" (p. 94). Included in this category were such activities as attending the symphony-concerts-theater, eating out in restaurants, traveling for pleasure, and attending conventions. The findings indicated that Black middle class individuals were more likely to participate in this type of leisure activity.

Other studies that have examined the relationship between race, social class, and leisure participation or preferences have focused primarily on differences between Blacks and Whites. Stamps and Stamps (1985) found

greater similarity among the leisure preferences of lower class Blacks and Whites than those from the middle class. They stated that this result was "startling" since theory would suggest that middle class groups would be closest in association. Dwyer and Hutchison (1990) examined the effects of social class and race across 11 leisure activities and their analyses indicated that differences in leisure participation was more a result of race than social class. More recently, Philipp (1995) examined the "appeal" of leisure activities among Blacks and Whites in the middle class and found significant differences between the races in 12 of the 20 leisure activities studied.

Two earlier studies, utilizing the current study's data set, examined leisure preferences as they related to race and *subjective* social class. In these studies, respondents were asked to place themselves in a social class category. Both within group and between group comparisons were made for Blacks and Whites in the two studies. Floyd, Shinew, McGuire, & Noe (1994) hypothesized that Blacks and Whites who defined themselves similarly on social class would exhibit similar leisure preferences. Contrary to Stamps and Stamps' (1985) earlier findings, the results indicated a significant association among the leisure preferences of Blacks and Whites who reported that they were middle class, and no association among Blacks and Whites who perceived themselves to be poor or working class. This was the case for both males and females. Further, there was a significant association between the leisure preferences of Blacks from different social class categories.

The second study by Shinew, Floyd, McGuire, and Noe (1995) expanded the analysis to include a greater number of comparisons. More specifically, comparisons were made regarding the leisure preferences of eight groups subdivided by gender, race, and subjective social class. The multiple hierarchy perspective (Markides, Liang, & Jackson, 1990) provided the theoretical framework for the study. The results indicated that the leisure preferences of Black women who defined themselves as poor or working class were significantly correlated with similarly positioned Black men and with Black women who defined themselves as middle class. However, their leisure preferences were distinct from poor or working class Whites (both men and women) and from middle class Black men. Once again, there was a strong correspondence between Black and White women and men at the middle class level, but not between the groups at the lower or working class level. Additionally, the leisure preferences of Black men of different social classes were significantly associated.

The purpose of the present study was to extend this line of research and gain a greater understanding of the leisure preferences of various groups within the Black population. Moreover, with Woodard's appeal in mind, the present study breaks from the practice of categorically comparing Whites and Blacks. As stated by Jackman and Senter (1980), "the categorical description of a group represents a closed and insensitive perception that routinely pigeonholes group members and leaves the perceiver unreceptive to contrary evidence, which is either overlooked or dismissed as a mere exception" (p. 343).

In the present study, the leisure activity preferences of Black subgroups defined by gender and two objective indicators of socioeconomic status were compared. Applying Wilson's class polarization perspective, our research expectations were that (a) the leisure preferences of Blacks who were in the higher income and education groups would be different from the leisure preferences of Blacks in the lower income and education categories; and (b) there would be greater differences between the leisure preferences of Black men at the different class levels than between Black women of different classes.

Methods

Sample

A secondary data set was used for the study. The original study involved a national random telephone survey which was conducted to obtain information regarding the leisure preferences of adults between the ages of 21 and 65 (Noe, Hutchison, & Snow, 1986). The sample was stratified by counties according to size and systematically drawn from an array of working telephone blocks. From 2,148 contacts, 1,711 interviews were completed, resulting in a 70.8% completion rate.

To evaluate the representativeness of the original sample, its demographics were compared to the U.S. Census. The age distribution of the sample is comparable with the same age distribution for the U.S. as a whole. Race was measured by self-report, resulting in a sample comprised of 138 Black respondents. The proportion of Black respondents is about three percentage points below the U.S. Census count. Respondents' incomes are skewed toward the upper income levels. Individuals with incomes over \$50,000 are overrepresented while those with incomes below \$20,000 are underrepresented, which may be the result of the age parameters of the study. Therefore, in general, the original sample differed from the U.S. population in that it contained fewer minorities and was skewed toward the upper income levels. However, the subsample that was used for the present study, which was limited to Blacks only, is not skewed toward the upper income levels.

Measurement

The independent variables were gender, race, and two measures of socioeconomic status—years of education and family income. Income is one of the most significant factors in determining economic well-being in our society (Oliver & Shapiro, 1989). It is associated with access to goods and services as well as the ability to acquire wealth and economic security. Likewise, education is directly related to social status in our society and is a primary source of upward mobility (Thomas, 1993).

Education and income were measured as categorical variables and then due to low cell sizes, were collapsed into two classes. Education was measured

by asking respondents, "How many years of education did you complete?" This variable was then collapsed into two classes, lower education (12 years or less) and higher education (more than 12 years). Income was measured by asking respondents to indicate their household's total income before taxes. This item had seven response categories: 0) less than \$10,000; 1) between \$10,000 and \$20,000; 2) over \$20,000 but under \$30,000; 3) between \$30,000 and \$40,000; 4) over \$40,000 but under \$50,000; 5) between \$50,000 and \$60,000; and 6) over \$60,000. Again, this variable was collapsed into two classes, lower income (0,1, and 2) and higher income (3, 4, 5, and 6). The income classification was, in part, based on the income distribution of the subsample. The race criteria used for inclusion was that the respondent indicated that their background was "Black, other than Hispanic". Table 1 provides a summary of the income and education distributions for the study's subsample.

Leisure preferences were measured by asking respondents, "What is your favorite leisure or free-time activity?" Responses were then grouped by type into 14 thematic leisure preference categories based on Kaplan's (1960) taxonomy and later factor analytic updates by Noe (1974) and McLoughlin and Noe (1988); the 14 activities are listed in Table 2. The frequency with which each of the 14 activity types was identified as an individual's favorite was tabulated and used to rank the activity type by gender, education, and income. The activities were ranked for each analysis and then based on these rankings, comparisons were made using Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient.

Results

Comparisons by Education and Gender

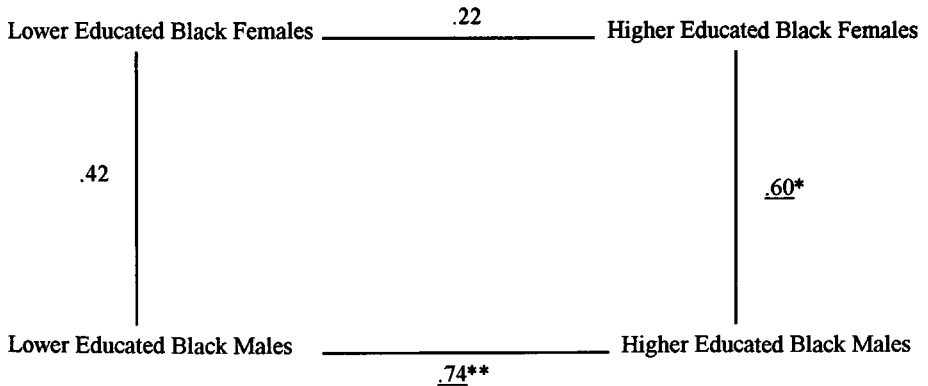
The first comparisons examined leisure preferences while controlling for gender and education. A summary of the correlations are shown in Figure 1. The leisure preferences between the lower educated Black women and higher educated Black women were not significantly associated ($r_s = .22$;

TABLE 1
Distribution of SES Indicators of Subsample

SES Variable	Male (N = 59)	Female (N = 79)
Education		
Twelve years or less	56.9% (n = 33)	47.4% (n = 37)
More than twelve years	43.1% (n = 25)	52.6% (n = 41)
Income		
Under \$30,000	67.9% (n = 38)	76.7% (n = 56)
\$30,000 and above	32.1% (n = 18)	23.3% (n = 17)

TABLE 2
Fourteen Thematic Leisure Reference Categories

Activity Categories	Examples
Immobile Activities	Resting, loafing, media usage
Outdoor-Individual Activities	Swimming, bicycling, sailing
Sports Activities	Bowling, baseball, basketball, soccer
Hunting-Fishing	Hunting, fishing
Camping-Hiking	Camping, hiking
Popular Art Activities	Woodworking, remodeling, sewing, gardening
Exercise-Health Activities	Running, aerobics, weightlifting
Fine Art Activities	Dance, ballet, painting
Golf Activities	Golf
Games Activities	Cards, gambling, board games
Risk-Skill Activities	Snow skiing, rock climbing, sky diving
Mobile Activities	Motorcycling, traveling, sightseeing
Boating-Skiing Activities	Boating, water skiing
Association-Sociability Activities	Visiting friends/relatives, participating in church activities, voluntary organizations, attending parties



Note. *p < .05; **p < .01

Figure 1. Spearman's Correlation Comparisons of Leisure Preferences By Education and Gender

NS). While both groups frequently reported that team sports were a favorite activity, fine arts and games were reported more frequently by the higher educated Black women and association-sociability activities were reported more frequently by the lower educated Black women. Association-sociability includes activities such as attending dances and parties, visiting friends and relatives, as well as participating in church activities, club meetings, and voluntary organizations.

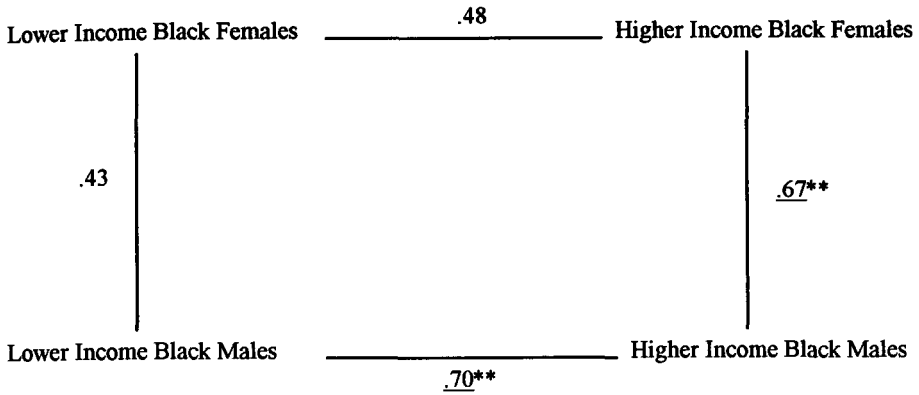
A moderately high association was found between the leisure preferences of Black men in the different education categories ($r_s = .74$; $p < 0.05$). Team sports were reported as the most preferred type of leisure activity by both groups, and immobile activities were also similarly reported by the two groups. The groups differed in their reporting of some activities. For example, the lower educated Black men were more likely to report that hunting-fishing and popular art (e.g., woodworking, gardening, remodeling) activities were their favorite, whereas the higher educated Black men were more likely to report that exercise-health activities were preferred.

Comparisons were made between men and women of the same educational status. At the lower education level, the association was not significant ($r_s = .42$; NS). Although both groups were likely to report that team sports were their most preferred activity, their preferences for several other activities were dissimilar. Women were more likely to indicate that association-sociability activities were their most preferred activity, whereas men were more likely to report hunting-fishing were favorite activities. A moderate association was found between the leisure preferences of men and women in the higher education categories ($r_s = .60$; $p < 0.05$). Both groups were likely to report that fine arts, team sports, exercise-health, and risk-skill activities were favorites, whereas boating-skiing and games were ranked quite low.

Comparisons by Income and Gender

Similar analyses were made comparing the groups by income. Figure 2 displays the correlations for women while controlling for income. The leisure preferences of Black women in the lower income group were not associated with the preferences of Black women in the higher income group ($r_s = .48$, NS). Those in the higher income group were more likely to report that games and popular arts were preferred activities, whereas those in the lower income group were more likely to indicate team sports. Both groups were more likely to identify immobile activities as their favorite activities and less likely to identify hunting-fishing as their favorite activities.

Correlations among men while controlling for income are also shown in Figure 2. The leisure preference rankings of men in the two income groups were significantly associated ($r_s = .70$, $p < 0.05$). Both groups were likely to report that team sports, hunting-fishing, and exercise-health were their favorite activities. Some noted differences were that those in the lower income group were more likely to report that outdoor-individual activities (i.e., swimming, bicycling, etc.) were favorite activities, whereas the higher



Note. ** $p < .01$

Figure 2. Spearman's Correlation Comparisons of Leisure Preferences By Income and Gender

income men were more likely to report that risk-skill activities (i.e., snow-skiing, rock climbing, skydiving) were their favorite activities.

Again, comparisons were made between women and men in the two income categories. As with the education findings, males and females in the higher income groups had similar leisure preference ($r_s = .67$; $p < 0.05$), but males and females in the lower income categories were not significantly associated ($r_s = .43$; NS). At the higher income level, males and females were likely to report that immobile activities and team sports were their most preferred activities. Games and exercise-health were also reported frequently by both groups. Men and women in the lower income categories were both likely to report that exercise-health activities were favorites, but differed in their preference for most of the other activities. Males were more likely to identify golf, hunting-fishing, and team sports as favorite activities and women were more likely to report that association-sociability, fine arts, and camping-hiking activities were favorites.

Discussion

This study compared the leisure activity preferences of Black subgroups defined by gender and two objective indicators of socioeconomic status: income and education. It was hypothesized that there would be significant differences when comparing the leisure preferences of Blacks who were in the higher income and education groups to the leisure preferences of Blacks in the lower income and education categories. Further, it was hypothesized that there would be greater distinctions between the leisure preferences of

Black men of different social classes than between Black women of different classes. The findings of the study provided partial support for these hypotheses.

Comparisons by income and education produced matching results. The leisure preferences of Black women of different income and education levels were dissimilar; however, the leisure preferences of Black men of different income and education levels were significantly associated. Thus, the findings indicated greater differences between the leisure preferences of Black women from different class background than between Black men of different classes.

This finding contradicts, in part, what is predicted by the class polarization perspective. Given that Black men of different education and income classifications reported similar leisure preferences, it appears that the bifurcation along class lines is not being translated to the leisure arena for men. However, as Stamps and Stamps (1985) stated, "the assumption being made here is that social class determines, to a large extent, life styles" (p. 41) and further, that life styles are related to leisure behavior and preferences (Walker & Kiecolt, 1995; Woodard, 1988).

In contrast, among women there does appear to be some distinct differences between the leisure preferences of those at the higher income and education levels, and those at the lower levels. Previous research has also reported differences in the leisure participation patterns of women of different social classes, with women in higher socioeconomic groups being "considerably advantaged" (Kay, 1996). Green, Hebron, and Woodard (1987) noted that differences in leisure experiences among women are related not just to income and access to resources, but are based on "broader cultural differences" which establishes the framework within which leisure choices are made. Women in higher socioeconomic groups experience leisure that is diverse, involves participation in out-of-home activities, and takes place with a wider range of social agents. In comparison, the leisure of women in lower groups is more home-centered, less diverse, and is more likely to involve family members and other relatives.

Comparisons were also made between Black men and women of similar income and education groups. Black men and women in higher income and education groups did report similar leisure preferences; however, different results were found for the lower income and education groups. To summarize, similarities were found between the leisure preferences of Black men and women in the higher groups, but no correlation was found between men and women in the lower categories. Smith's (1987) earlier work sheds some light on this finding. Her analysis suggested that the leisure participation of mothers and fathers in the lower class categories was more strongly differentiated than the leisure participation patterns of mothers and fathers in the higher class categories. Kay's (1996) explanation for this finding is that women in the lower class categories are more likely to assume more traditional female roles and have the bulk of the family responsibilities; therefore, their leisure patterns are more likely to be distinct from men.

Interestingly, when these data were analyzed using a subjective measure of social class, slightly different results were found. As reported earlier, Floyd et al. (1994) and Shinew et al. (1995) found that, in general, the leisure preferences of Blacks of different social classes were significantly correlated. The present study's findings deviated from this pattern in that the leisure preferences of women of different income and education status were not correlated. Moreover, Shinew et al. found that the leisure preferences of Black men and women of the higher social class were not correlated, whereas Black men and women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were significantly correlated. Again, the findings of the present study depart from these earlier results in that men and women in the higher income and education categories did indicate similar preferences, whereas men and women in the lower categories did not. Consequently, the question arises as to why different results were found when objective versus subjective measures of social class were employed.

In a previous paper (Shinew et al., 1995) it was argued that subjective evaluation of class position correlates with objective circumstances. However, the effects of income and education on leisure preferences may be more easily seen. Such variables may be clearer markers for social class boundaries. Although the different conceptions of social class share some common attributes, as we have argued, the *extent* to which they share underlying dimensions, and the *nature* of these dimensions have received little research attention (Smith, 1985). Beyond objective status characteristics such as education and occupation, Jackman and Jackman (1983) suggest that lifestyle, personal values, and family background are criteria individuals use to determine their subjective social class membership. Structural factors underlying income and education (e.g., occupational and industrial sectors) are likely to be manifested in leisure differently than the dimensions underlying subjective social class. The relationships between the various dimensions underlying different conceptions of social class and leisure preferences should be examined in future research.

Moreover, the interaction of different conceptions of social class with race also have consequences for leisure preferences. Regarding subjective class, Blacks and Whites differ on the value placed on various criteria used to define social class membership (Durant & Loudon, 1986). On objective class indicators, there is debate over the extent Whites and Blacks receive similar occupational and income gains from their investments in education (Smith, 1986). The norms and expectations within subgroups defined by objective social class may be more salient than those associated with subjective class and may operate to produce behavioral similarities, particularly among upper status Blacks. Gordon (1964) used the term "ethclass" to describe this phenomenon.

The "ethclass" concept is a useful model for analyzing interactive effects of race and class, both of which play an important role in accounting for social stratification in society. This concept contends that race and class interact to produce combinations of behaviors and choices for racial groups

of different social classes. Gordon suggested that when people are from the same racial group and the same social class they share both behavioral similarities and historical identification, and therefore, develop a sense of participational identity. The collective effect of race and class results in several distinct ethnic classes; however, "the most remarked about and perhaps the most interesting is the category represented by upper status Blacks." (Gilliam & Whitby, 1989, p. 90). Gilliam and Whitby (1989) postulated that upper class Blacks may be more aware of their racial identity than their lower class counterparts and further, there may be more behavioral similarities among those at the upper level. The current study's findings are more aligned with Gordon's ethclass concept than are the findings from our two previous analyses.

The results of this study must be treated with caution given the limitations of the sample and the method. First, the small number of Black respondents suggests the need to explore these issues with larger samples. Low Black representation is an issue that permeates the leisure literature, and this study is not an exception. Second, respondents were asked to indicate their single most favorite leisure activity. This type of single response format has obvious limitation and thus, future research efforts should employ a multiple response format that allows a pattern of preferences to develop. Third, due to the low number of Black responses, both income and education were collapsed into lower versus higher categories. A classification scheme which allows for greater variability might provide additional insight. Finally, the results are based on a telephone survey, which may have under-sampled the poorer segments of the population. A sampling method that is more inclusive should be used in future research efforts.

Limitations notwithstanding, the present study represents a fertile area of research. The study's findings suggest that social class, and more specifically income and education level, is a meaningful variable when attempting to understand the leisure preferences of African Americans. We concur with Woodard's (1988) conclusion that social class "highlights the extent of vertical differentiation among Black Americans and compels one to consider socioeconomic differences as fundamental to explanations of Black Americans' leisure behavior" (p. 103). Additional research is needed to elucidate this study's findings and to gain greater insights into the multiple sources of inequality as reflected in different conceptions of social class and how they relate to the leisure lifestyles of African Americans.

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