

The Impact of Immigration: Leisure Experience in the Lives of South American Immigrants

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Though leisure researchers have, in recent years, show a growing interest in the Hispanic¹ community, most of the research conducted has focused almost exclusively on the leisure experiences among Mexican Americans or Hispanics from Central America. The purpose of the investigation was to explore the impact of immigration on the leisure experiences of a selected group of South American immigrants living in the United States. This investigation was based on a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews of 9 females and 8 males. Analysis of the interview data revealed changes in the immigrants' lifestyles after migrating to the United States. Some of these behavioral changes were observed in the participants' socialization patterns, in their views about work, and in their perception of time. These changes had an impact on the individuals' leisure experiences, and recreation participation. The findings strongly suggest that during the informants' adjustment process, social class was a more important indicator for behavioral changes than ethnicity. These results reinforce past findings in that social class plays an important role in individuals leisure behavior (Floyd & Gramman, 1993; Floyd, McGuire, Noe, & Shinew, 1994).

KEYWORDS: *Ethnicity, leisure perceptions, immigration, social class*

Cultural differences have been recognized as a critical factor in the interpretation of leisure behavior among different ethnic groups (Allison & Geiger, 1993; Carr & Williams, 1993; Edward, 1981; Floyd & Gramann, 1993; Gobster, 1998; Hutchinson, 1987; Outley, Floyd, & Shinew, 1997). Most of these differences have been described in terms of ethnic/racial influences, recreational preferences, and participation rates (Carr & Williams, 1993). In general, the focus of previous research has been on outdoor recreation indicating that ethnic minorities tend to recreate closer to home, use city parks, be more family oriented, and utilize local facilities rather than national, state, or regional sites (Kelly, 1980; Meeker et al., 1973; O'Leary & Benjamin, 1982; Stamps & Stamps, 1985; Washburne, 1978; Washburne & Wall, 1980). Although, research has been conducted on the leisure behavior of the Hispanic population, specifically on Mexican and Central American communities, little empirical work has explored differences among other

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¹The term Hispanic is used by the U.S. Government to describe all people who have their roots in Spanish-speaking countries. For the purposes of this article, this definition is used by this author.

Hispanic populations, such as South American immigrants. This paper examines the role of immigration on the leisure experiences of a group of South American individuals, and offers some suggestions to administrators and researchers.

Theories Explaining Minorities Leisure Participation

The literature review provides a considerable insight into the meaning of leisure for ethnic minorities. However, much of the differences of minority under participation have been explained using the marginality/ethnicity framework. Floyd (1998) recognized the need for alternative approaches to understanding racial and ethnic variation in leisure behavior and preferences. For example, other theories such as assimilation and acculturation examine the variation in leisure behavior and the constraints faced by ethnic minorities. The following sections provide a review of these theoretical explanations.

The Marginality Theory

The marginality or socio-economic status hypotheses suggest that differences in leisure participation are a function of poverty and/or discrimination. Leisure differences are due to unequal access and inequitable distribution of recreational facilities and other public goods (Washburne, 1978). According to this theory the inequality in resources allocation could be an important structural barrier for blacks and other ethnic and racial minorities. Cheek, Field, and Burdge (1976) suggested that variations in activities of whites and blacks disappear when measures of social background (income or occupation) were considered. Similar results were reported by Woodard (1988) who examined the effects of social class and intragroup regionality on the leisure behavior of black Americans in Chicago. Education and occupation were used to determine social class, and regionality was determined according to the geographic region where the black Americans were born and reared the first sixteen years of their life. The results showed that black Americans were more likely to participate in informal domestic activities (television/listening to the radio, barbecuing/cooking out, visiting families, and reading newspapers/magazines) rather than metropolitan or night-life activities. Social class was an "effective predictor" of participation in urban oriented leisure activities such as visiting libraries and museums, dining out, and bicycling. For example, middle-class blacks were more likely to participate in these activities. It was suggested in this study that social class and regionality were important factors in understanding how black American leisure behavior and preferences vary.

West (1989) explored the leisure patterns among black and white participants in Detroit city parks and surrounding regional parks. The focus of the study was to examine the role of interracial, marginality, and subcultural factors in explaining differences in participation between black and white

residents. The findings showed that black residents use Detroit city parks more than whites, but less than whites in surrounding regional parks. Marginality, specially restricted access to transportation, played more of a role than subcultural factors in this underrepresentation by black residents in regional parks. Interracial factors were also a contributing element in inhibiting the use of the regional parks by minorities in Detroit.

Class awareness or subjective social class is also an important component for determining individuals' leisure behaviors. By identifying with a particular social class, the individual subscribes to the attitudes, values, and special interests of the group (Jackman & Jackman, 1983). Floyd, McGuire, Noe, and Shinew (1994) examined the relationship between race, leisure preferences, and class awareness. They expected that those occupying the same social class share similar lifestyle choices and leisure preferences. The results showed that blacks and whites who defined themselves as middle-class have similar leisure preferences and that the effect of race on leisure preferences may be different at different levels of social class. The data also indicated similarities across race when controlling for subjective social class. However, contrary to expectation, differences in leisure preferences were found between blacks and whites who defined themselves as poor/working class.

Lindsay and Ogle (1972) proposed a marginality-related explanation of minority participation. They supported the opportunity/demographic theory which maintains that differences in opportunity (time, money, access) causes variation in recreation; and such opportunities are affected by one's ethnic group membership, education, race, income, occupation, and residence. Lindsay and Ogle maintained that external conditions determine which activities and resources are available, and these factors influence choices of leisure activities, where, and with whom such activities take place. They found that income and education were less useful than the availability of resources in the prediction of park visitation.

The Ethnicity Theory

This theory focuses on cultural differences in ethnic leisure styles due to micro-cultural variations in values, norms, and socialization patterns that differ considerably from that of the majority white population (Edwards, 1981; O'Leary & Benjamin, 1982; Washburne, 1978). Testing ethnicity, Meeker et al. (1973) stated that blacks were more likely to use urban recreational facilities and participate in more group oriented activities, while whites were more individualistic and more likely to participate in outdoor wildlife recreational activities. Washburne (1978) compared use of wild-lands areas for a sample of black and white urban Californians. The results showed that blacks were less likely than whites to participate in undeveloped areas even when socioeconomic factors were held constant. Stamps and Stamps (1985) reported similar results. To test the relationship of race and class to participation in leisure activities, the researchers hypothesized that middle class individuals, no matter what race they were, had similar leisure patterns.

Results showed that racial/ethnic patterns were more powerful than social class in predicting recreational patterns.

Other ethnic characteristics could be responsible for differences in recreation participation. The social science literature comparing white and Hispanics groups reports systematic cultural differences in family structure (Mirande, 1977), social values (Rubel, 1968), and social participation (Antunes & Gaitz, 1975). Alvarez and Bean (1976) described several characteristics of the Mexican-American family including: familism (the importance and extended family), male dominance (where the father and male children exercise authority over female members of the household), segregation by age groups (involving respect for elders and subordination of younger persons), and segregation of activities by sex (male children have freedom while female children are more protected). Hutchinson (1987) conducted an observational study in thirteen neighborhoods and regional parks in Chicago to determine ethnic and racial variations in white, black, and Hispanic leisure and recreation. The results suggested that black and white participated in activities oriented toward smaller groups, while Hispanic participated with in family and family extended groups. Hispanics made more use of the neighborhood facilities and they follow the cultural tradition such as sex and age segregation. Hutchinson and Fidel (1984), using observational data, reported very different patterns of recreation participation and in the social organization between Mexican-American and Anglo-American groups in Chicago public parks.

In a study on Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans, Irwin, Gartner, and Phelps (1990) examined the influence of cultural differences on the groups' recreation styles. The researchers were interested in whether Mexican-Americans form a subculture in American society, and if recreation facilities provided opportunities to strengthen their cultural values. Significant differences were found between the two groups. Mexican-Americans camped in larger groups than Anglo, and placed higher priority on tangible campground design features such as toilets and fire rings. Anglo campers preferred quite surroundings and privacy, whereas Mexican-American did not care if other people were around. It was suggested that differences between the groups were related more to cultural differences rather than socioeconomic or social class variances.

Although, the marginality/ethnicity theory did contribute to the understanding of the meaning of leisure for ethnic groups, this paradigm presents some weaknesses when it comes to understanding the leisure behavior and recreation patterns within a given group. Some of the problems stem from inadequate definitional distinction between race and ethnicity, and weak operationalization of the two concepts. Researchers confuse the use of race and ethnicity, as well as ethnicity and culture (Washburne, 1978; Washburne & Wall, 1979; Edwards, 1981). According to Taylor (1992) the terms have been used synonymously causing problems with the interpretation of the results. Ethnicity has been defined as membership in a micro-cultural group on the basis of country of origin, language, cultural traditions, or

religion different from the dominant society. Race, on the other hand, is based on socially constructed definitions of physical differences. Ethnicity is the result of a process; an indication of the way groups are organized in terms of interaction, values, attitudes, and life styles. It could change over time through assimilation and acculturation but race generally will not change even with acculturation (Hutchinson, 1988).

Pfister (1993) maintained that previous studies have used race or ancestry of the respondent to designate an ethnic group, ignoring meaningful criteria related to ethnic traditions, values, or customs. Therefore, understanding the difference between ethnic identity and ancestry is essential to identify the forces that influence leisure behavior. Ethnic identity is defined as "one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership" (Rotheram & Phinney, 1987, p. 13). Hence, membership in an ethnic group is not only ascribed by others in the society but also by how the individuals define themselves.

In the past, research tended to view ethnic groups as culturally homogeneous despite significant cultural, educational, and socioeconomic differences that exist within the ethnic group. Simply because groups participate in similar activities does not indicate that the meaning of their participation is the same. What can be considered a leisure opportunity by one cultural group may not be defined as leisure by another group (Kelly, 1987). Within a group, differences could also be observed due to their micro-cultural differences (e.g., social class, education, values, beliefs, and ancestral background). Membership in an ethnic group (e.g., Hispanic) may be determined by commonality in language, religion, or ancestral country, but differences will result from association with a specific micro-culture. These micro-cultural differences are found in elements including social class, education, music, food, and residential location (Carr & Williams, 1993; Hutchinson, 1988; Irwin, Gartner, & Phelps, 1990). Therefore, not only the effects of ethnicity, race, and social class on participation in outdoor recreational activities should be used to analyze the differences in recreation patterns, but factors such as family, friends, neighborhood, life cycle indicators, length of time living in the community, and the accessibility to resources should be examined to expand our knowledge of what determines leisure participation (Taylor, 1992).

Acculturation and Assimilation

The literature also reveals that the marginality/ethnicity did not examine the effects of cultural assimilation or acculturation on leisure preferences. Assimilation theory provides a conceptual framework for the analysis of intra-ethnic variations and their implications on the recreation behavior and socialization patterns among ethnic groups. Whereas, acculturation involves the acquisition by a minority group of the cultural characteristics of

the dominant group, and the loss of the ancestral cultural traits (Carr & Williams, 1993). Acculturation is part of the ethnic assimilation theory or melting pot theory (Gordon, 1964). According to Yinger (1981) ethnic assimilation is "a process of boundary reduction that can occur when members of two or more societies or of smaller cultural groups meet." This theory addresses the structural assimilation dimension which refers "to the entry of a minority group into the social institutions of the majority, including economy, education, civic affairs, and government" (Floyd & Gramann, 1993). Therefore, a minority group is considered fully integrated in the economical sense when an individual have achieved same economical and occupational levels as the mainstream population. The degree of assimilation of a group is a meaningful factor to describe the effects of culture on leisure and the intra-ethnic variation on leisure behavior. Changes in an individuals' the of acculturation and assimilation have an effect in the type of their leisure constraints and recreation activities, and the ethnicity of friends who are most likely to accompany them during these activities.

A growing number of investigations exploring the outdoor recreation behavior, style, and preferences of Hispanic Americans have appeared in the literature (Carr & Chavez, 1993; Carr & Williams, 1993; Chavez, 1996; Floyd & Gramman, 1993, Shaull & Gramann, 1998). Carr and Williams (1993) found that Anglos and Hispanics with longer generational tenure (length and depth of exposure to the culture in the host country) and higher levels of acculturation tended to visit more with friends and less with their extended family. The most significant findings were related to intra-ethnic differences, both in terms of Mexican American and Central American ancestral respondents as well as within the Mexican group. Most of the Central American population were born in Central America, had less time in this country, and therefore had lower acculturation levels. This group was more likely than those of Anglo and Mexican origins to be in organized groups and with their "compadres", while Mexicans were more likely to be at the site with their extended families. Reason for visiting the site varied among the groups. For individuals of Anglo-American and Central American origin, enjoying the place itself was the most frequently given reason. For individuals of Mexican American ancestry, finding the site a good place for picnicking, relaxing, and swimming, was one of the reasons.

Floyd and Gramann (1993) examined the effects of acculturation and assimilation on outdoor recreation patterns. It was hypothesized that the greater the level of acculturation the more similar Mexican-Americans would be to Anglo-Americans in outdoor pursuits. Results showed that the recreation behavior of highly assimilated Mexican-Americans was more similar to Anglo-Americans than to less-assimilated Mexicans. Assimilation has its effects on site visitation, while acculturation was reflected in activity participation patterns. Similar results were found in recent investigation on the influence of cultural assimilation on the family-related and nature-related recreation among Hispanic Americans (Shaull & Gramman, 1998). It was

reported that the more assimilated the Hispanic respondents were, the more similar they were to Anglos in the perception of the nature-related benefits from outdoor recreation activities.

Despite the increasing volume of research on the meaning of leisure for ethnic minorities, a limited number of studies have explored the leisure experience of immigrant populations. Stodolska (1998) suggests that immigrants are likely to encounter cultural and language barriers, and many times they do not have access to information. As the level of assimilation increases the perceived importance of immigration related constraints on leisure diminishes. For newcomers to the United States, life experiences may be shaped in ways that are vastly different from what is considered to be the norm for the general populations.

The focus of this study was to understand not only the role of social class and ethnicity on leisure behavior, but also learn about the major barriers to leisure involvement that Latin American immigrants face when arriving in the United States. Research designed to advance understanding of the needs, cultural values, and traits of this group will aid Recreation planners in the provision of programs and recreational facilities for the community. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the impact of immigration on the leisure experiences of a selected group of South American immigrants living in the United States and to identify the major themes about the lives of immigrant population. Through a qualitative, in-depth interview approach, this study examined the following questions: How does immigration influence leisure behavior, recreation participation, and social interaction among South American immigrants? The following served as supporting questions: How do differences in culture, income, education, occupation, language, race, and length of time in the United States influence leisure behavior? How does variation in level of acculturation and assimilation impact the individual's leisure patterns? What are the ethnic influences on leisure behavior and recreation participation among individuals of Hispanic descent?

Methods

The symbolic interaction approach, based in-depths interviews, was selected to explore the leisure experiences of a group of immigrants. The focus of symbolic interaction is to understand reality by studying how individuals interpret objects, events, and people in their lives and how this interpretation leads to behavior in specific situations (Henderson, 1991). According to Samdahl (1988), meanings are the interpretation of the social context, and they are the source of freedom and constraints that regulate their actions. Samdahl maintains that typical behavior and experiences are affected by constraints such as norms, expectations, personality, past learning, and other socially regulated factors; and that symbolic interaction theory offers a way to understand those constraints. This qualitative approach enabled the re-

searcher to examine the meaning that South American immigrants attribute to their behavior in the social context of their new culture.

Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was used to gain in-depth information about each of the cases (Patton, 1990). Since finding the informants depended on the research questions, the selection of the participants had to meet the criteria of being adults, and native of South America living in the United States for at least 7² years who were planning to stay in the U.S. and who had at least 18 years of residence in their native country. The informants were classified as either middle or working-class. Occupation and education were the criteria used to measure social class. For the purpose of this study, middle class was defined as individuals with college and post-graduate degrees who were employed at present or have been employed in the past in professional or managerial positions. Working class, on the other hand, was defined as those individuals with high school degrees or less who held blue-collar jobs or work at home. In all cases the interviewees confirmed this classification with their own self-definitions. The researcher gained access to the informants through local businesses and organizations serving the Hispanic residents. Most of the organizations and businesses were found in the "Barrio Latino", a neighborhood located in the North Philadelphia area. After the initial contacts, the "snowball sampling" technique was employed in which the participants were asked to recommend another informant (Denzin, 1978).

Sample Profile

The sample consisted of 10 females and 8 males, ranging from 27 to 78 years of age, with an average age of 44. The interviewees were immigrants from Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela. The length of time this group of immigrants had been in the United States ranged from 7 to 24 years. The average time of residence in U.S. was almost 10 years. Ten out of the 18 participants were married with children, 3 were single, 2 widows, 3 were divorced, and 1 was separated. The respondents represented a spectrum of occupations. They included university professors, agency directors, a secretary, a car mechanic, a doctoral student, one homemaker, a nurse-aid, a street vendor, a housekeeper, a hairdresser, a shoe-repair storeowner, an accountant, and one retired. All of the study's participants had some formal education. Eight had post-graduate education, 1 had a college degree, 3 had post high school training, 3 finished high school,

²The author chose this criteria considering that the immigrants need time to learn, adapt, and function in the new society. This criterion was taken by consensus from a group of immigrants

and 2 had finished primary school. In order to keep the informants' identities confidential, pseudonyms were used throughout the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data analysis process includes the discovery, coding and displaying, and interpreting the data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). These processes occur throughout the entire research process and during data discovery (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The purpose of data discovery is to collect facts and information. In-depth interviewing is a qualitative method for discovery of qualitative data. The study employed in-depth interviewing as the method of data collection to help individuals organize their perception of reality, and to discover the participants experiences (Fetterman, 1989). A series of open-ended, semistructured questions were developed with the purpose of exploring issues related to the guiding research questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1980). Questions were designed to elicit information about informants' backgrounds, purposes of immigration, and social networks. A set of questions examined the informants' leisure experiences and meaning, leisure constraints encountered after immigrating to the United States. The section dealing with perceptions of social class, opportunities, and education as related to recreation began with a question on how they thought of themselves in terms of social class? They were also asked to what ethnic or cultural group they preferred to have others think of them? Why? Questions about leisure began with a general question about free time leisure experiences in their home country and the United States, changes in activities, and reason for changes. Probes designed to gain more information about the interviewees' opinion followed up each question. The word "leisure" provided diverse responses among the informants. For most of the South American societies, the word "ocio" (the Spanish translation of "leisure") means idleness and a non-productive time. This term has a negative connotation, whereas free time is understood to be time for oneself and relaxation. The investigator used "leisure" and "free time" as distinctive terms even though the two terms are almost interchangeable.

The interviews were conducted over a period of 5 months, from October of 1995 through March of 1996 and took place at the informants' homes and at their places of work. The subjects were asked to use their language of preference during the interviews. All the interviews were conducted in Spanish, except for two using English. Since the researcher is fluent in Spanish and English, the use of an interpreter was not required. The interviews were tape-recorded for accuracy and to verify informants' comments. Each interview lasted between one and one-half to two hours producing approximately 27 hours of information. Follow-up interviews were conducted over the phone to clarify and confirm information gained from the first interview. Additionally, field notes kept in a form of reflective memos were used as a means of recording the researcher's thoughts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After collecting the data, the investigator produced write-ups on each informant

that included insights from interviews and summaries of major points of each contact.

The first task in the process of analysis was scanning and coding the data through a systematic content analysis using the constant comparison method to identify the emerging themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1980). In constant comparison, the researcher allows conceptual categories and properties to emerge, and then compares each piece of data to fit. The analysis of the data began during the interviews with follow-up questions that probed for connections and understanding of emerging concepts. During the transcription process, the researcher was also able to find patterns and connections among ideas. The researcher determined content themes and identified patterns by reading the interview notes, write-ups, and transcripts. The data was coded into conceptual indicators and several categories such as lack of time, increased work and changes on the informants' socialization patterns were identified. To assist with the integration of categories the investigator developed a network including the main categories where the boxes (nodes) represented the concepts and the arrows represented the relationship among the concepts. For example, some of the themes in this study were "Adjusting to this society"; this category was linked to the "Incorporating this society's cultural behaviors" and "Retaining own cultural values." Following the identification of the categories, the researcher compared the concepts against other incidents for similarities and differences. After several drafts, the researcher developed a framework based on the emerging themes.

Procedures to Ensure Trustworthiness

To confirm the findings and assess the trustworthiness of the study prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, referential adequacy, and member check strategies were applied in this investigation (Patton, 1990). Prolonged engagement is the process of investing sufficient time to learn about the culture to be studied, detecting and minimizing distortions that may slowly shape the data and building trust with the respondents. The investigator of this study is a native of Argentina who immigrated to the United States in 1996. At the time of the study, the researcher was an active member in the Hispanic community in Philadelphia. As a member of a South American music trio, the investigator had the opportunity to work with several cultural centers in the community and learn about the diversity among the South American population in Philadelphia. These experiences gave the researcher a better understanding of this community's reality and setting. Peer debriefing provided an opportunity to test working hypotheses that may be emerging in the investigator's mind. This objective was obtained by having meetings with a Hispanic psychotherapist who had worked with the community for the past 9 years. Planning and feedback meeting were scheduled on a monthly basis from the beginning of the study. The emphasis of these meeting was on decisions concerning emergent design, modifications of the methodology, project progress, perceived problems and/or concerns. Another

procedure used was referential adequacy. The investigator of this study tape-recorded each interview. This material was transcribed and used in the study to test the adequacy of the data analysis and for the interpretation of the results. Quotes from the transcripts were used to confirm emerging themes. Member checks or cross-examination was another procedure used to check conclusions and to corroborate what was observed. This process was done on an ongoing basis with one informant. One theme was that newcomers tended to spend more time alone and their lives were more isolated. In checking this theme with Ana, she noted “. . . in this country I spend more time alone. People are always busy. There is rigidity with time.” This theme and other observations were also checked during the phone interviews.

Findings

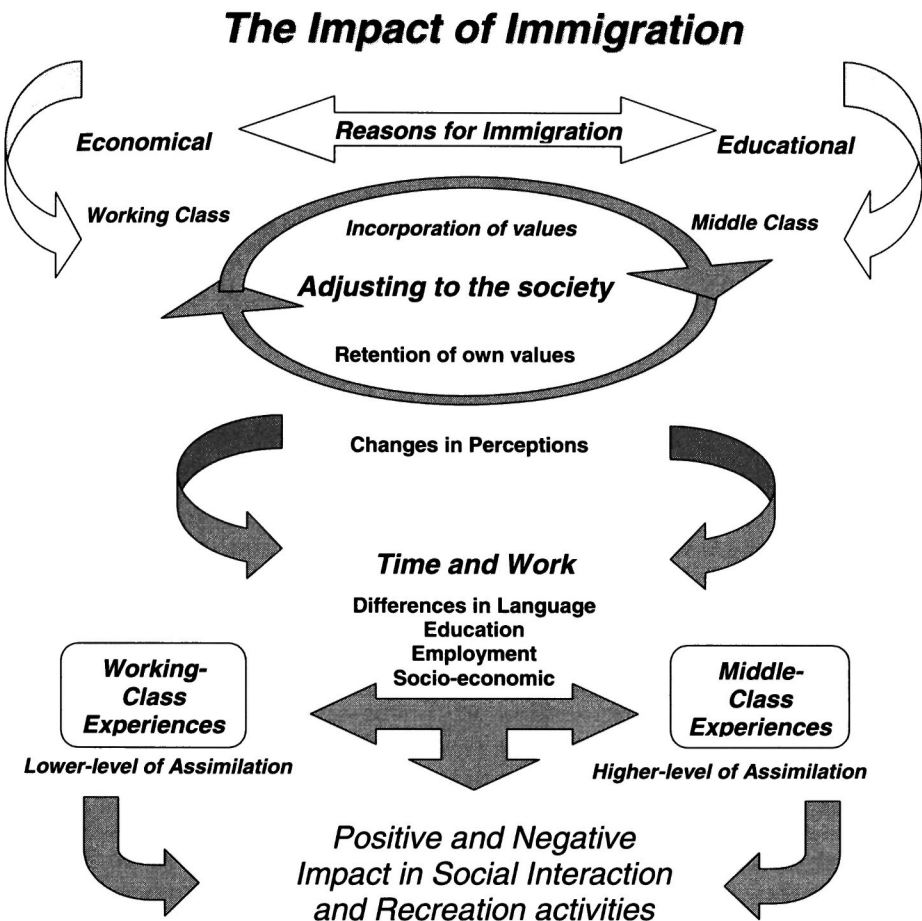
The emerging framework depicts the immigration processes and its influence on the newcomers' adaptation to living in this new society (see Figure 1). Major themes are presented in this section with supporting quotations whenever appropriate.

The Impact of Immigration: Changes in Cultural Values and the Incorporation of New Ones

Each informant came to this country motivated by different reasons. They all brought a set of values, norms, beliefs, rituals, and traditions. Some of the values and beliefs were common to all the informants regardless of their class differences, and some others were shaped by the informants' social class. Latin American cultures place high value on group-oriented activities and human interaction. For these cultures, social interaction is stressed during leisure time and considered an important recreational activity. Getting together with friends for coffee or for a cook out are examples of how social relations are developed during leisure time. In these societies less concern is given to the productive use of time and people tend to be more flexible and spontaneous when it comes to socializing. Individuals in this study had to integrate behaviors of the American culture in order to function in this system and as a way of becoming part of this society. Some of these behavioral changes were observed in the participants' socialization patterns, in their views about work, and in their perceptions of time.

Perception of Time and Work

Immigrants were likely to experience similar leisure constraints regardless of social class. The main structural barriers identified by the informants were lack of time and increased work responsibilities and obligations. Time was seen as precious and valuable and work became a priority in the lives of the newcomers. Upon immigration most informants claimed to work harder and have less time for leisure. This perception of time and work was tied to



Leisure Meaning

Figure 1. The Role of Immigration on Leisure Experiences

the informant's need to achieve success in this society. Nonetheless, there was a difference in the individuals' attitudes towards work. For some, work was a financial necessity to pay bills and meet other financial responsibilities:

. . . I believe that people in this country work more than in my country. It is because of this society's system, the rhythm of life. Here [in the United States], people spend hours worrying about things such as work. It is different than over there [Argentina]. [In Argentina], one works in one or two jobs; but after

work, people have time for their families and for entertainment. But here, time is very limited . . . one must work more hours to get what one needs. (Antonio, 63 years old, widow, father of 2, grandfather of 2, retired mechanic, Argentina).

According to the narratives there was also a need to plan the use of time; while before, that rigidity was not essential, time was not a real concept in the sense of productivity and money.

Here, there is an order with time, with the use of time. Time becomes so valuable, every minute, that it is not possible to see your friends a lot. One is always busy and there is a control over time, on how to use free time. (Ana, 42 years old, separated mother of 1, music composer, Colombia).

Changes in Social Life and Recreation Activities

Immigration had positive and negative influences of their social life and recreation participation regardless of the informants' social class. In reflecting on their social interaction experiences, they indicated that this society is more individualistic, and that there is a tendency to spend more time alone. For most immigrants, socialization in their home countries was easier and more intense. Social interaction with other people was an integral part of their everyday life. After immigrating to the United States, the newcomers tended to spend more time alone and their lives were more isolated. When it came to socializing with friends, they tended to be less spontaneous. These variations became interpersonal constraints for the immigrants' social life and recreation participation. Here, they saw socializing as requiring more of an effort:

I think, that here, it [social life] requires more of an effort to be more sociable and to overcome the resistance of being absorbed by work and of being always busy (Miriam, 46 years old, married mother of 2, University Professor, Argentina).

According to the informants, life seemed more isolated and there was a lack of informal communication between people. Some individuals found it difficult to get to know their neighbors or to even have an informal conversation with them. The distinctions between social life in the past and present were further validated by participants' accounts of their present socialization experiences as compared with their past ones:

Here, my social life has changed a lot. When I was in Paraguay, I was more sociable, more social than I am now . . . In Paraguay we get to meet our neighbors; we invite them for dinner. Here is different, everybody is always rushing to get to their jobs (Ricardo, 27 years old, single man, shoe-repair worker, Paraguay).

. . . of course, here you adopt some of this society values whether you want it or not. As a result of this society way of living, you end up being a consumer and you become more individualistic. (Miriam, 46 years old, married mother of 2, University Professor, Argentina).

The increase in working hours, tighter working schedules, and greater geographical distance from family and friends resulted in fewer opportunities for social interaction. For most of the informants personal contacts were less and became more formal; the spontaneity inherent to the Hispanic culture (i.e., unannounced visits to friends and family) has been lost. Here, one must make prior arrangements before visiting a friend.

In this country I spend more time alone. People are always busy. There is rigidity with time. . . Here, there is an order with time, with the use of time. Time becomes so valuable that every minute counts. It is not possible to see your friends a lot. (Ana, 42 years old, separated, mother of 1, music composer, Colombia).

I think that contacts with other people are less than the ones I had at home. Here, you must call [your friends] first before you visit them. This is if you have the time. In my country, at least with my friends, I knock at their door, and even if they are not there, I stay visiting with their family . . . or I might visit some other friends (Jorge, 40 years old, married father of 1, psychologist, social services agency Director, Peru).

In general, the informants have experienced variations in their leisure activities and recreation participation after moving to the United States. They did report changes in their recreation participation as compared to their participation in their home countries. Activities at the home country were reportedly more socially oriented and less structured. For example, the range of activities included going to the beach, going to a club for a barbecue with friends and family, or playing sports, meeting with friends for a cup of coffee, going out to a restaurant or a movie, attending concerts, or getting together for a party. Here, some of those activities have changed and the frequency they engaged in them decreased due to less time, more work, and climate. The participation in recreational activities became more structured and segregated:

Before [in Peru, and Venezuela] we my friends] and [me were always organizing parties and trips. I remember that we used to go out on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. One had the energy to do it. Here, it is different; people go out once a week but not twice; people get tired (Veronica, 42 years old, single woman, office manager, Peru).

But not all of these changes were seen as negative or detrimental to the informants' lives. There was an indication of personal enrichment in the individuals' experiences. They saw being exposed to other cultures as a unique and fortunate opportunity.

What has changed for me is my experience with other cultures. I think in South America, at least when I was there, each country had their own culture and there was not exposure to other cultures. You ate the same food, you spoke the same language and practiced the same religion . . . but when here, in the United States, you can find people from all over the world; this is a multicultural country (Roberto, 37 years old, married father of 1, Accountant-Auditor, Ecuador).

For any immigrant, having the opportunity to be exposed to another culture is incredibly enriching. We have the option to extract and incorporate the best of the two cultures (Carolina, 46 years old, married mother of 2, hairdresser, Ecuador).

The informants in this study, regardless of their social background, recognized that this country offered them a larger spectrum of recreational and cultural activities than their home countries and easier accessibility to them. The informants' economic standing influence their accessibility to these activities. The following excerpts describe the experiences of two working-class informants who recognized that even though this country offered them more opportunities they still faced some financial limitations:

. . . Here, there are many opportunities. If you can speak English you can have better jobs. There are better things to do as compared to our countries. [There] you still can do many things, but they are more expensive (Milagros, divorced mother of 2, homemaker, Venezuela).

In my country, you do not find the same kind of music, art, or ballet schools as you find them here. Here, in this country, you have big schools, small schools. It depends on your income. In my country, good schools are only accessible to the rich. At least here, everybody has a chance (Maria, 46 years old, divorced mother of 2, nurse-aid, Colombia).

The Process of Assimilation and Acculturation

Although nearly all the informants observed these changes, the impact of the assimilation process was different for each group. The various lifestyles and backgrounds marked individuals' experiences and shaped their personal lives, social relations, and recreation participation in this country, as well as the meaning they attribute to leisure. For the middle-class and college-educated immigrants, most of their social relationships were with individuals from other cultures. They tended to associate with people who shared their same interests and with whom they felt would understand their culture. Informants with higher levels of education tended to spend leisure time on culturally oriented activities such as going to concerts, visiting art exhibits, or going to the theater. Some of the informants engaged in physical activities such as going to the gym, walking, biking, playing soccer, and swimming. They watched television in English and listen to national public radio. Most of them liked to read newspapers in English and books in Spanish. From the informants' accounts, it was clear that upbringing and education had played a major role in shaping their leisure preferences as adults:

I think the education we received allows us to read more interesting books and to be more informed. There exists a direct relationship between education and the way we spend free time and recreation (Jorge, 40 years old, married father of 1, psychologist, social services agency Director, Peru).

The interviews indicated that for some individuals, their education and profession had directly influenced the way they employed their free time. Ana, for example, described it this way:

[Education] implies what I like to do; what I like to study. I concentrate in music because I have an education and a profession in music. Therefore, I employ most of my free time going to concerts. And because I am a composer, I like to listen to contemporary music. My profession and my education influence what I do with my time (Ana, 42 years old, separated mother of 1, music composer, Colombia).

On the other hand, working-class immigrants reported socializing with friends from their own ethnic background and with members of their extended family. Most of their recreation activities were confined to activities with family and to visiting friends of their own cultural background. Their leisure agenda included visiting with their families and friends, getting together with families and friends for a barbecue or for a birthday celebration. Most of them watched Spanish television, listened to Spanish radio, and some read Spanish newspapers. For these informants, the lack of English skills was one of the biggest barriers they faced in this society for communication and interaction with other cultures.

Language proficiency has been recognized as an indicator of acculturation. According to Oboler (1995) learning English is perceived as an essential ticket to entry into the United States society. Individuals in this study recognized the importance of the language in having access to better jobs and to other opportunities. Most of the working-class immigrants expressed their desire to communicate with people and foster interpersonal relationships outside their culture. They regretted not having the language skills to do this:

... I try to spend time with Latin American people because I feel more comfortable with them. But at the same time I know it does not help me improve my English (Veronica, 42 years old, single woman, office manager, Peru).

Almost all the informants stressed that knowing English is an essential factor if one wanted to take advantage of all the opportunities the United States had to offer; English skills were necessary for social and economic mobility. They associated knowing English with getting better jobs. Antonio explained that "the first thing one has to do is to learn the language, to be able to communicate and function in this society; then, there are a lot of opportunities. What happened is that if you do not know the language it is very difficult; communication is essential." Many of them expressed their wishes to make American friends or at least to be able to communicate with them. They believed that the day they master the language, new opportunities would come:

I would like to be able to communicate with Americans, but I can not because of my English. I always half speak English; I speak some English and when I can't speak it anymore, I speak Spanish. The only thing I need to do here is to learn English, this is the only thing (Milagros, divorced mother of 2, homemaker, Venezuela).

A middle-class informant noted that it was necessary to speak English at home. Ana, a music-composer, mother of one, felt pressure to learn the language, and it was a matter of survival. She explained that knowing English gives her more security and makes her capable to better fit in this society:

At home [I speak] English, because I feel the pressure to do it; I also read a lot in English, because I have the academic pressure. I think it is a good way of progressing. If I am able to read good articles and good newspapers, I feel better with myself. I feel that I am capable of fitting in this society. I do not think that I have any problems understanding English at all; [knowing English] makes me feel secure (Ana, 42 years old, separated, mother of 1, music composer, Colombia).

During the interviews, some of the working-class informants used some English terms while speaking Spanish such as “bills”, and “busy”, and used Anglicized terms such as “factorias”, “wikenes”. This phenomenon is an example, among other things, of how the informants have adopted terms of daily use and integrated them in their own vocabulary.

Meaning of Leisure: Class-related Perceptions

Perceptions of leisure varied among the informants. It seemed that the meaning of leisure and recreation was related to class differences, and therefore, these class differences have affected the meaning of leisure prior to immigration. Perception of freedom and perceived choice were common in the definitions of leisure among the middle-class immigrants of this study. These factors have been identified as a necessary element in the leisure experience (Neulinger, 1981). For the middle-class, leisure which means “ocio” in Spanish was also tied to time for relaxation and rest; time to recover energy; free time away from pressure and obligations. They experienced leisure as freedom to do what they wanted; some referred to leisure as having mental freedom:

For me, leisure time is the time where I am completely free; a time to do the things I like to do. It pleases me a lot (Ana, 42 years old, separated mother of 1, music composer, Colombia).

For me, leisure is having not pending work. It is the mental freedom of having nothing to finish. I can sit for a while and listen to good music, or I can read something unrelated to work without guilt. Leisure for me is being calm, reading a book, listening to music without pressure (Claudia, single woman, +40 years old, University Professor, Peru).

This definition is closely related to the classical or traditional conception expressed by Aristotle that views leisure as a “state of being” in which the activity is performed for its own sake (De Grazia, 1964). In the ancient times, leisure was valued and perceived as the basis of culture, while in the post-industrial societies work began to take precedence over leisure. When asking about the meaning of leisure, the attitudes of the working-class informants were more negative than those of the middle-class. In this study, the working-class’ perception of leisure was related to post-industrial views. The individuals placed value on work and on productive activities. According to working class informants, leisure implied idleness and had a negative connotation. Leisure was defined by the informants as “not productive,” “leisure is boring,” and “it means wasting time.” In their homeland, they had learned that leisure was wasting time, and they could not relate the concepts of leisure

and free time. For them, the idea of free time was independent of the notion of leisure. Free time implied the use of time in a productive way. They defined free time as "time away from work," "time without pressures," "time to do something productive."

I do not have free time, but if I have any, I take a nap because I am always very tired. For me, leisure is wasting time if one has free time. If one has free time, one could do something constructive, creative, and recreative. Leisure, such as watching television, is a waste of time (Maria, 46 years old, divorced mother of 2, nurse-aid, Colombia).

This perception of free time supports the quantitative and discretionary time conceptualization of leisure, which views leisure as time left over from work and from the necessary activities for existence (Kraus, 1984). Informants associated recreation with a physical activity, an activity which implied enjoyment and entertainment, and free time was defined as time away from work, time with no pressure or responsibilities:

I see recreation as doing an activity for pleasure. For example, I relax going to the beach. It is a relaxing activity and I really enjoy it (Carolina, 46 years old, married mother of 2, hairdresser, Ecuador).

Free time is the hours you have from the time you leave work until you go back to work. Anything that is not related to work is free time (Dario, 36 years old, married father of 3, computer analyst, Venezuela).

Discussion

Important changes in the lives of the immigrants in this study became clear in the analysis of the interviews. The newcomers' experiences were various and many of the differences were accounted by social class. There were economic and educational reasons that motivated this group of immigrants to leave their home countries in search of better opportunities. These reasons varied among the individuals but the essential motive for immigration was common to all respondents: hopes for improvement and for a better life. The study's results reinforce past explanations about causes for international migration to the United States, which focus on economic and political reasons as the main factors influencing individuals to leave their homeland (Oboler, 1995). Gann and Duignan (1986) examined newcomers including college teachers and professionals in the arts, literature, and medicine who found better research facilities and chances of promotion in the United States. Oboler noted in her study that the immigrants' expectations of a better life and the process of integration into the United States were shaped according to their particular age, gender, schooling, professional status, and social background. In this study, most of the individuals were able to fulfill their expectations of a better life. Working-class immigrants found more financial stability, better work, and more recreational opportunities. For the middle-class, college-educated people, having better opportunities meant professional growth and a richer cultural life.

Along with fulfilling their dreams, the immigrants underwent a process of adjustment to this new society. This adaptation was necessary in order to function in this new culture and to meet certain hopes of success. During this process of assimilation the newcomers adopted many values of the host culture such as individualism and materialism. But, they also saw themselves as retaining many of the traditions and cultural values of their homeland. The social reality of these immigrants was characterized by the "cultural pluralism" explanation which suggests that cultural differences can persist despite the interdependence of two cultures (Barth, 1969). These women and men felt part of this society and adapted to the new culture. However, regardless of social class, they emphasized the importance of keeping their own language and customs as a way of preserving their cultural identity. This adaptation gave the immigrants the ability to function in a multi-cultural society. Ramirez (1984) explains that people from bicultural backgrounds need to develop skills to function in two cultures simultaneously. Taft (1977) suggests that individuals may acquire an array of skills (e.g., language, behavioral, knowledge) to interact and to function comfortably in different social/ethnic groups.

Those who knew how to speak English were proud of their accents and preferred to keep their foreign status although some held an American citizenship. For them, total assimilation meant losing their cultural identity. These findings were consistent with the concept of "selective acculturation" presented by Keefe and Padilla (1987). They defined selective acculturation as the retention of cultural traits such as traditional foods and music preferences, and family organization, while traits of the majority group that contribute to socioeconomic advances are adopted very quickly.

Although, immigration led to a better life, the process of assimilation and acculturation affected the newcomers' leisure behavior in various ways. Immigrants in general perceived and experienced certain constraints to leisure and a decline in their social activities. Lack of time and increased work responsibilities were both noted as major barriers that have influenced their lives after settling in the U.S.

The conditions of having ties with South America and sharing the same language were not enough to make this group homogenous. The intra-ethnic differences were found primarily based on social class. To understand this particular finding, one needs to consider the immigrants' level of assimilation. Their socio-economic status and educational level shaped their experiences in the United States. The findings of this study suggest that social class determined the level of assimilation of this group of immigrants and the type of constraints they perceived. Those with higher levels of economic assimilation were likely to report fewer constraints, having more access to recreational activities, and developing more personal contacts with the mainstream. It has been shown in previous research that the level of assimilation is associated with the perceived importance of constraints to leisure (Stodolska, 1998). This investigation supports Stodolska's view in that affluent immigrants who held managerial positions found it easier to socialize and to

recreate with members of the dominant culture as well as persons from other cultures. These results were indicators of the high level of structural assimilation (personal interaction and economic assimilation) of the middle-class individuals. The working-class, on the other hand, associated with members of their own ethnic group and with their extended families. Language proficiency hindered their process of integration into America's society. Learning the language was perceived as necessary for social mobility and economic advancement. Although they were better off financially here than in their countries, the lack of good English skills presented an obstacle for having access to better jobs. The individuals stressed that language had been a barrier for communication with English speaking people. Therefore, they interacted mainly with members of their own background. Their lack of command of the language also affected their social interaction with other ethnic groups and limited their leisure opportunities. They were confined to their own culture with little chances to interact with the general population. These observations support the findings of Rublee and Shaw (1991) that immigrants from Latin America experience some constraints in their leisure choices due to their lack of social contacts outside their ethnic groups.

Class awareness and education were also indicators of the immigrants' level of assimilation. According to Jackman and Jackman (1983), by identifying with a particular social class the individual subscribes to the attitudes, values, and special interests of the group. Class distinction is a strong criterion in the construction of a social identity. Leisure preferences among the middle-class, college-educated immigrants were oriented toward cultural activities. Education and their upbringing have shaped the informants' interests. These factors have also influenced their leisure preferences including what type of movies they enjoyed watching, the music they listened to, or the literature they read. The findings of this study reinforce Floyd and Gramann's (1993) explanations about the influences of class-based identity on leisure preferences. Results indicate that individuals occupying the same social group subscribe to a similar configuration of attitudes, values, and interests.

It was noted in this study that the meaning of leisure was tied to existing differences in social class. The results of this study indicated that immigration in this instance had not influenced their perceptions of leisure and therefore these differences existed prior to immigration. Consequently, social class emerges again as a major factor discriminating among this group of South American immigrants.

Implications and Recommendations

This investigation raises issues for leisure researchers and practitioners. The findings of this study suggest that the immigrants assimilated to the society but look for ways to preserve part of their culture. The challenge seems in providing leisure opportunities to reinforce the immigrants cultural practices. Leisure providers should address issues of lack of language skills

in less acculturated populations. When designing and implementing culturally based programs, recreation leaders could involve individuals representing the targeted culture. One possibility is hiring bilingual personnel as part of the professional team. This would make a significant contribution in understanding the Hispanic population's needs and interests and ease their transition into the mainstream. Washington (1996) suggested that educating for diversity could be another way to reach the community and integrate the newcomers. These programs should include, (a) orientation activities to help the immigrants adjust to the United States and learn about the society, (b) an education component which include English classes and job training, (c) multi-ethnic recreational and social activities to help the community learn about different cultures and, thus, promote interaction and integration with the community, and (d) recreational and social activities that promote social interaction and networking among the immigrants. These programs could serve as a means of support and help within the Hispanic community.

Given the growing immigrant population in the U.S. research in this area warrants more attention. Future investigations should examine: (a) differences in leisure behavior and socialization patterns between single and married immigrants, (b) differences in assimilation process taking into account the age of the immigrants upon arrival to this country, (c) differences in the assimilation and acculturation process when marrying an American as compared to marrying an individual from the same ethnic group. The model that emerged from this study should be considered as the initial step in developing a theory on the impact of immigration on leisure behavior. For example, a survey could be developed based upon the different themes. Each theme could become the guide for the questions. It can also provide the direction for future research, which should examine the influence of immigration on other ethnic groups and their process of adjustment. The model should provide the hypothesis for future research, which should examine the influence of immigration on other ethnic groups and their process of adjustment. It is also recommended that future studies explore the leisure experiences of the United States born descendants of South American immigrants as compared to their parents and grandparents.

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