

Rurality in Leisure Research: A Review of Four Major Journals

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Abstract

Rurality maintains a significant position in the United States' culture and economic system. A key aspect to enhancing rural areas is appropriate research to inform policy and practice. The purpose of this paper was to systematically review leisure and recreation research and summarize how academics in this field conceptualize rural settings and issues. For our sample, we selected four major leisure journals in the U.S. given their leading roles as sources of research and knowledge. We identified 57 articles focusing on U.S. rurality and six topical themes. Findings suggested that future research in this area should consider the context of different rural settings, account for axiological orientations in approaches to rurality, and recognize the complexities and implications of rural measures.

KEYWORDS: Rural, leisure, research, integrative review, recreation

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Introduction

While the U.S. is a predominantly urban nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), rural areas maintain a position of significance in the country's culture and economic system (Brown & Swanson, 2003; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Miller & Bates, 1987). Over 59 million Americans resided in rural communities in 2000, representing 1/5 of the entire population (Brown & Swanson; Hart, Larson, & Lishner, 2005). Additionally, 75% of the U.S. landmass can be classified as nonmetropolitan (Hart et al., 2005). Despite their relevance, significant problems in economic development, health, and quality of life dimensions exist in rural areas (Beaulieu, Israel, & Wimberley, 2003; Brown & Swanson; Jensen, 2006; Jensen, McLaughlin, & Slack, 2003; Luloff, 1998). Additionally, considerable changes to rural social and economic structures in the U.S. (e.g., the rapid loss of middle-class residents and shifts in economic activities away from agriculture and manufacturing) potentially threaten the very existence of rural life (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Lobao, 2004).

A starting point to understanding the disconnection between rural areas' relevance and the current realities of rural life resides in how our views of such areas and their populations are often idealized. Representations of rurality could be characterized through several myths. Rurality has been shaped from the perspective of urban residents who portray it as a simpler lifestyle, traditional values, strong family ties, and connections with natural resources. Simultaneously, rural inhabitants have been perceived as objects of pity, looked down upon for their perceived ignorance, narrow worldviews, and backward way of life (Howarth, 1996). Rural areas are also popularly viewed as sanctuaries from the industrialized city, full of natural amenities and rustic landscapes that must be preserved as playgrounds for urbanites. Finally, evidence from lay and expert observations portray many rural areas as experiencing heightened levels of resource extraction and environmental destruction (Bourke, 2010; Gottfried, 1996).

Appropriate conceptualizations of rural localities are critical for the advancement of research associated with these places. Given the importance of rural social life and environments for this country's leisure and recreation experiences, research in this field requires a better understanding of rural areas. Leisure behavior also exists within broader social, political and cultural systems (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). In order to be meaningful and relevant, research in leisure and recreation should ultimately lead to collective social change, within dimensions of human and community development, which ensures equitable distribution of resources and improves the quality of life for all people (Arai & Pedlar; Henderson, 1997, 2009). In his seminal work, Hende (1969) called for researchers to move beyond residence solely as an independent variable and examine how community-based social structures function as a determinate of leisure behavior. Unfortunately, little progress has been made within the leisure research in understanding leisure in the context of rural areas (Trussell & Shaw, 2009).

In this article, we propose that the first step toward increasing our understanding of rurality is to systematically review the existing "rural" research in the recreation and leisure literature. Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to critically examine the leisure and recreation research conducted with rural popula-

tions and in rural areas of the U.S. In addition to identifying the number of articles and sources of research addressing rurality, we intended to examine how authors measured rural in their studies. Finally, we sought to identify ways in which leisure research contexts influenced our understanding of rurality. For the purposes of this review, we analyzed two interrelated dimensions of rurality: rural locations and rural populations. That is, "rural" research must consider the contextual contribution of rurality from multiple perspectives while attempting to understand the behaviors and attitudes of people living in rural areas. For simplicity's sake, we use rurality as an interchangeable term for both rural locations and populations. To limit our scope, we evaluated research related to rural areas and populations as conceptualized within the leading U.S. leisure and recreation journals.

Background

Two important criticisms related to this review have been directed toward U.S. leisure research since its formative period. First, this research came to be dominated by social-psychological methods of inquiry that focused on highly individualistic attitudes and behaviors with less consideration of the social and structural context of these behaviors (Hemingway & Parr, 2000; Henderson & Bialeschki, 2005; Rojek, 1989). This individualistic approach to leisure research, exemplified in the works of Neulinger (1981), Csikszentmihalyi (1990), and Iso-Ahola (1980), assumes that people are self-motivated to intentionally act based upon cognitive or emotional responses to external stimuli in their environments (Newton, Watson, Kim, & Beacham, 2006). While these psychological frameworks have provided a wealth of understanding of motivations, attitudes, and behaviors, their overarching individualistic focus does not fully capture the nature of leisure behavior in the context of important social and cultural structures (Burton & Jackson, 1989; Henderson & Bialeschki, 2005). Specifically, emphasizing individual characteristics in isolation without fully accounting for context hinders the ability of these approaches to answer many of the research questions they are designed to explore (Hemingway & Parr, 2000). Although social-psychological approaches attempt to account for the influence of environmental factors, Rojek (2005) argues that these forces are analyzed exclusively as the location of independent action, rather than as the structural context for that action. Therefore, from the basis of studying leisure behaviors of rural populations, the theoretical connections between people and spaces beyond the centrality of motivation, may be less developed in the leisure and recreation literature.

In the second important criticism of U.S. leisure research relative to our review, Dunn (1980) suggested that early leisure and recreation research developed a rural bias, becoming too focused on recreation in the countryside with leisure as an end unto itself. During the formative years of the leisure and recreation academic field, researchers clearly recognized the value of rural areas as important sites for outdoor recreation (see Etzkorn, 1964; Sessoms, 1963). However, this research was primarily interested in the natural resources located in rural areas. Parallel to increased U.S. urbanization, researchers were concerned with a loss of connection to the natural environment and reduced demand for outdoor recre-

ation services (Clarke & Crysdale, 1967; Foster, 1964; Nash, 1978). Consequently, increased attention was focused on outdoor recreation and preservation of environmental amenities (Hauser, 1962). However, the result of this focus was that leisure research developed in a framework that assumed leisure and recreation in rural areas equated to outdoor recreation. Further, even when place of residence was included as a demographic variable (e.g., Hendee, 1969), the theoretical relationship between residence and leisure behavior remained largely underdeveloped beyond the presence or development of environmental attributes as external stimuli for individual activity choices.

While many authors remained predominantly focused on either individual leisure motivation or environmental attributes, other leisure research developed that explored the interdependence of individuals and environments (Henderson, 2006). Researchers also began to investigate leisure's role in human development (e.g., Barnett & Wade, 1979; Driver, 1976; Kelly, 1974; Ulrich & Addoms, 1981; Witt & Crompton, 1996) as a result of the interaction between socio-cultural systems, environmental settings, and leisure behavior (e.g., Driver, 1976; Dunlap & Heffernan, 1975; Jackson, 1983; Kelly, 1978; O'Leary, 1976; Shaw, 1985; Washburne, 1978). Situated within the activist foundations of the parks and recreation movement, researchers advocated for accessible leisure services as a mechanism to improve social conditions and quality of life (Duncan, 1991). Understanding the role of leisure and recreation from the perspective of improving rural quality of life may be an important step in informing policy and practice that develops sustainable rural communities. This is particularly essential when one recognizes the adverse situations in which many rural residents and communities exist.

Extensive technological shifts in agriculture production and declines in the U.S. manufacturing sector have left many rural areas with high levels of unemployment and underemployment (Beaulieu et al., 2003; Buttell, 2003; Jensen, 2006; Luloff, 1998; McGranahan, 2003). As a result, poverty rates in rural U.S. counties exceed those of metropolitan areas (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Egan, 2002). Largely fueled by the distribution and use of methamphetamines and other drugs, crime rates in some rural areas have risen exponentially in the past decade (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Egan, 2002; Weisheit, Wells, & Falcone, 1995; Wermuth, 2000). Such areas also present higher rates of malnutrition, disability, and mental disorders (Lichter, Parisi, Taquino, & Beaulieu, 2008). Each of these conditions limits the ability of many rural people to develop and secure jobs, attract investment, and promote good quality of life opportunities.

Certainly living in some rural areas has benefits. These benefits are reflected in the increased population migration from urban to rural areas experienced in the U.S. since the 1970s (Johnson & Beale, 1994; Johnson, 2003). In-migrants to rural areas have been drawn to the availability of natural amenities, lower housing costs, and romanticized visions of lifestyles in the rural countryside (Barcus, 2004; McGranahan, 1999). However, generalizations of rural communities as amenity-rich underline the need to recognize the complex and contextual conditions of rural areas. Willits, Bealer, and Crider (1982) argue that "rural persons and communities are not all alike. They do not present a single, united, or differentiated position on any characteristic" (p. 74). Characteristics associated with rural loca-

tions in the U.S. are often very different based upon regional location and distance from urban centers.

We sought to evaluate the state of the research on rurality in the leisure literature. The concerns that guided our evaluation are summarized as follows: (1) sensitivity to a psychologized tradition of leisure research that may preclude insight to social and cultural contexts of rurality, (2) awareness of the multiple idealizations of rurality that may serve as underlying value orientations of leisure-based rural research, (3) reduction of rural leisure to outdoor recreation settings and environmental attributes, and (4) insight gained from other disciplinary bodies of literature suggesting urgent needs in rural areas of the U.S. related to health, education, and poverty. These guidelines provided a lens to critique the extent leisure research has examined issues related to rural populations. Research in leisure studies should not only add to the body of knowledge and build sound theories, but also should inform policy and practice (Burton & Jackson, 1999; Griffiths & Tann, 1992; Hemingway & Parr, 2000; Rothman, 2004). Therefore, we were interested in whether useful theory development and unique advancement of knowledge on rural conditions had emerged within leisure research. Similar to concerns raised within the rural sociology and public health literature (see Yousefian, Ziller, Swartz, & Hartley, 2009), if this understanding has not developed, research may encourage poor policy recommendations and promote ineffective or unsustainable practices in improving conditions in rural areas.

Methods

Article Selection

Following the article selection process and content analyses from previous studies (e.g., Bocarro, Greenwood, & Henderson, 2008; Floyd et al., 2008), we examined the four most prominent leisure journals within the U.S.: *Journal of Leisure Research (JLR)*, *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration (JPRA)*, *Leisure Sciences (LSci)*, and the *Therapeutic Recreation Journal (TRJ)*. Within these four journals, we searched for articles published since their inceptions through 2009 related to rural areas or rural populations in the United States. As the leading journals in the U.S. leisure and recreation field, these journals represent the most current and innovative sources of research, serve as the core body of knowledge within the discipline, and served as an optimal sample for our review.

Article searches began with a query for the word rural in all available electronic database indices (e.g., EBSCOhost, ProQuest, WilsonWeb, and InformaWorld) for all text within all articles of these journal titles. We manually checked early journal volumes that were not electronically indexed. The specific use of the term rural by the authors was important for this review. While other words (e.g., country) may describe similar settings, the connotation of rural specifically identifies not only a geographic location, but an underlying shared social and cultural field (Wilkinson, 1991). This process yielded 156 articles that included the word "rural" anywhere in the text (including references). We compared each set of results and removed duplicate articles. Each article was examined for its use of rural, and articles were removed from the sample if rural only appeared in the reference list or as

a descriptor of a sample in the literature review. Additionally, only articles that examined a U.S. study population or setting were included. Fifty-seven articles were selected based upon articles meeting at least one of three criteria: (a) its author or authors included the word rural as a keyword or within any keyword phrases, (b) the subject of analysis focused on geographic differences based on rural or urban residency or rural was a central independent variable, (c) its authors described the study setting or population as rural.

It should be noted that our goal was not to uncover every research article ever published on the topic of rurality and leisure across all disciplines or specializations within the field of leisure and recreation. This process was instead designed to explore how researchers within our field have framed the study of rural areas and rural populations in the U.S. Specifically, through a measurement of the quantity of literature and exploration of the thematic approaches used, our method sought to provide an overview of how the scholars in the field have considered rurality in their research (Floyd, et al., 2008).

Analysis

Our review of articles followed several steps. The analysis procedures used similar protocols established in similar literature reviews (Bocarro et al., 2008; Floyd et al., 2008; Jackson, 2004). First, the numerical count of articles by journal was determined in 10-year increments and compared to the total number of articles published within these periods. The institutional background of authors, study locations, and study populations also were identified. Second, the methodology of each article was reviewed to identify the measurement of rurality used. Finally, a content analysis (Babbie, 2007; Rubin & Babbie, 1989) was conducted related to how rurality was studied by the researchers. Overall, we sought to explore the approaches to studying rurality by identifying various thematic dimensions developed in leisure research. Through a process of open coding, concepts related to rurality were determined by the two authors of this paper based upon keywords and content. Initial lists of themes were compared and discussed by us, refined, and combined into six non-exclusive themes and further organized into three thematic categories related to the domain of rurality examined.

Results

Article count, institutional background of authors, study locations, and study populations

Of the 3,751 articles published in the selected journals through 2009, 57 or 1.5%, cited rurality as a significant part of their research (Table 1). *JLR* published the most articles selected (42% of sample) with 11 articles being published in the journal's first decade and 13 in the three subsequent decades. For the 57 articles selected, 120 different authors were identified representing 48 colleges and universities and seven government agencies. Authors from the USDA Forest Service produced nine articles in the sample. Researchers at Pennsylvania State University published the most articles in the sample (eight) from academic institutions, followed by the University of New Hampshire and North Carolina State University

Table 1

Comparison of Number of Articles on Rural Areas and Rural Populations as a Percentage of the Total Number of Articles Published Per Journal in 10-year Increments

Journal	-1979			1980-1989			1990-1999			2000-2009			Total		
	Rural articles	Total articles	% of total	Rural articles	Total articles	% of total	Rural articles	Total articles	% of total	Rural articles	Total articles	% of total	Rural articles	Total articles	% of total
JLR	11	225	4.8	4	321	1.2	6	417	1.4	3	333	< 1	24	1296	1.9
JPRA ^a	--	--	--	0	116	0.0	6	237	2.5	10	338	3.0	16	691	2.3
LSci	0	42	0.0	3	214	1.4	3	268	1.1	7	327	2.1	13	851	1.5
TRJ	0	245	0.0	0	268	0.0	1	200	< 1	3	200	1.5	4	913	< 1
Total	11	512	2.1	7	919	< 1	16	1122	1.4	22	1198	1.8	57	3751	1.5

^a *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* began publication in 1983.

(five each). Academic researchers within recreation and/or leisure studies departments were represented in 34.5% of selected articles. Other disciplines with multiple authors were natural resources, geography, fish and wildlife sciences, forestry, public health, exercise science, physical education, preventive medicine, and multiple branches of economics.

Within the sample, 52 articles (91.2%) employed primary data collection from individuals while five studies examined economic characteristics through use of secondary data sets (e.g., home values). Most articles studied adult populations with four articles (7%) investigating youth. Thirty-two articles (56.1%) gave no indication of the racial or ethnic characteristics of their study samples while 13 articles (22.8%) included a multiracial sample. A predominantly African American sample was used in two articles (3.5%) while authors explicitly indicated a predominantly White sample in 10 articles (17.5%). Key descriptive indicators of samples used in the article sample are presented in Table 2.

Measurement of Rural

One of the first observations and a primary finding of our analysis was related to the numerous strategies to define and measure “rural.” In 26.3% the studies selected, the authors described their study settings or populations as rural, with little additional descriptive or supporting information. A similar approach was used in 17.5% of articles that assumed their study setting or population to be rural due to geographic proximity to specified natural resource amenities or wilderness sites. The most popular systematic approach to measuring rurality, found in 19.3% of the articles, was the use of county-level designations of metro/non-metro or rural/urban provided by government agencies [e.g., Office of Management and Budget (OMB) or U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)]. Two articles (3.5%) used Census or other population data for smaller-scale geographic units (e.g. census block). Similarly, 15.8% of the articles in the sample adopted existing categorizations created in secondary data sets or as previously designated by non-profit centers or state government projects. For example, Yu (1985) used population locale classifications in the National Outdoor Recreation Survey, Payne and Schaumleffel (2008) selected study counties participating in the Illinois Rural Recreation Project, and Cardenas, Henderson, and Wilson (2009) categorized participant residence based on county rural classification provided by the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center. Rural status was self-reported by study participants in 10.6% of the articles. Finally, we could not determine the measurement of rural used in four sampled articles (7%).

Thematic Domains of Rurality

Themes emerged from the content analysis that identified six topical areas related to rurality found within the selected literature (Table 3). Our goal was to explore themes directly related to research approaches to rurality, and we were not concerned with other topics of research (e.g., gender, race). It is important to note that our identified themes are not mutually exclusive. Although several articles entirely focused on one thematic area, some articles were placed in multiple themes to maintain the integrity of the research. Themes related to rurality emerged along

Table 2*Population Sample Information from Sampled Articles (N=57)*

	Category	Number of articles	Pct. of sample
Age ^a	Youth	4	7.0%
	All Adult (incl. older adults)	48	84.2%
	Older Adults	7	12.2%
Race/Ethnicity ^b	Predominantly Black	2	3.5%
	Predominantly White	10	17.5%
	Multiple	13	22.8%
	No indication	32	56.1%
Gender ^c	High Female	4	7.0%
	High Male	9	15.8%
	Both males and females	23	40.4%
	No indication	21	36.8%
Region ^d	National	12	21.0%
	Northeast	12	21.0%
	Southeast	11	19.3%
	Midwest	11	19.3%
	West	11	19.3%

^aCategories represent specific age groups of youth (under 18) and older adults (65+) and specific researcher descriptions of sample as youth or older adults.

^b"Predominantly Black" and "Predominantly White" categories indicate where one race or ethnic group was represented in the sample population at a cutoff of > 90% of the sample or if researchers described sample as "predominantly white" or "virtually all white."

^c"High Female" and "High Male" categories indicate where one group was represented in the sample population at a cutoff of >75% of the sample.

^dNational includes sample across more than 10 states. Northeast includes New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, District of Columbia, and "New England"; Southeast includes Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina; Midwest includes Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Michigan, North Dakota, and Wisconsin; West includes California, Colorado, Idaho, Texas, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

Table 3

Articles on Rural Areas and Rural Populations in the Recreation and Leisure Studies Literature Categorized by Predominant Research Themes

research themes.

Theme	JLR		JPRA		LSci		TRJ		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Rural as descriptive characteristic or trait</i>										
1. Rural as a location description	13	22.8	11	19.2	8	14.0	4	7.0	36	63.2
2. Rural as a demographic variable	10	17.5	4	7.0	2	3.5	0	0.0	16	28.1
<i>Rural settings as instrumental for leisure benefits</i>										
3. Utilitarian use of rural resources for recreation	7	12.3	9	15.8	4	7.0	0	0.0	20	35.1
4. Rural as a context for increased access to and opportunities for recreation	9	15.8	3	5.3	5	8.8	0	0.0	17	29.8
<i>Leisure and rural deprivation</i>										
5. Rural as a context for constraining access to and opportunities for recreation	5	8.7	6	10.5	1	1.8	2	3.5	14	24.6
6. Leisure in the context of the rural tragedy	2	3.5	4	7.0	2	3.5	1	1.8	9	15.8

Note: Percentages represent percentage of sample (N=57)

continua that simultaneously considered several aspects including an optimistic to pessimistic perspective toward rural settings and leisure, the degree of centrality of rural populations to the research question, and the degree to which researchers attempted to understand, interpret, or explain the characteristics of rurality. The six themes were further coded into three broader categories. Theme 1 ("Rural" as a location description) and Theme 2 ("Rural" as a demographic variable) presented rurality as a descriptive characteristic or trait. Theme 3 (Utilitarian use of rural resources for recreation) and Theme 4 (Rural as a context for increased access to and opportunities for recreation) presented an optimistic narrative of rural settings as instrumental for leisure benefits. Theme 5 (Rural as a context for constraining access to and opportunities for recreation) and Theme 6 (Leisure in the context of the rural tragedy) presented a pessimistic narrative of rural settings with a focus on highlighting rural deprivation and improving rural conditions. A description of each theme along with examples of our findings is presented below.

Rural as a Descriptive Characteristic or Trait

Theme 1: Rural as a location description. Thirty-six articles described their study setting as "rural." For example, typical uses of rural to describe study samples included "This project was conducted in a small rural community in the western United States" (Carter et al., 2004, p. 75) and "a sample of adolescents was drawn from a rural middle school in the northeastern United States" (Hutchinson, Baldwin, & Oh, 2006, p. 115). In seven articles (12.3%), rural served only as a description of the study setting or population sample and was not further interpreted; these articles were only classified under this theme (e.g., Caldwell, Baldwin, Walls, & Smith, 2004; Dunlap, 2009; Scott & Willits, 1998). While the findings of these articles had potential implications for our understanding of rural populations, the rural context of the sample or setting had no intentional significance to the underlying research questions. In these seven articles, the description of their sample or setting was the only time in which rural was mentioned.

Theme 2: Rural as a demographic variable. Research in this theme treated rural residence as an independent variable to predict individual-level behavioral outcomes. Schroeder (1983) suggested "one approach to studying differing perceptions is to subdivide a population into groups according to a priori characteristics" (p. 222). This approach to rurality implied the existence of a set of traits that develop within rural people and create similar preferences for leisure activities. Additionally, preferences and attitudes developed based upon living in rural areas would be distinctly different from the behavior of individuals who live in urban areas. From this assumption, characteristics of rural people would be expected to be generalizable across all rural populations. While these studies hypothesized that important differences existed between groups based on location, the inclusion of residence as an independent variable was not always theoretically supported. The relationship between rurality and behaviors was also minimally interpreted. Johnson et al. (1998), however, provided some insight into the inclusion of residence as a demographic variable, suggesting that rural "folkways, ecology, economics, populations size and density are all thought to contribute to the creation of a rural perspective which is distinct from nonrural ways of viewing the world" (p. 104).

Many studies in this theme built upon the assumption of rural preferences for outdoor recreation (e.g., Cordell, Green, & Betz, 2002). However, the findings related to rural and urban differences in leisure and recreational patterns were also mixed. For example, Cordell et al. (2002) determined that rural residents were more likely to participate in outdoor recreational activities than urban residents. Similarly, Warnick (2002) found growth among some outdoor recreational activities and a greater importance of family time for rural residents. However, the findings of Li et al. (2003) suggested little support for the idea that rural upbringing influences preferences for outdoor recreation. Spencer, Kelly, and Van Es (1992) and Cardenas, Henderson, and Wilson (2009) also found little difference in leisure preferences between rural and urban populations. The implications of rural residents' perceptions toward natural resources also may be less straightforward than has been assumed. While authors found a stronger wilderness attachment and preference for natural recreation settings for rural residents in comparison to urban residents (e.g., Schroeder, 1983; Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992), Cordell et al. (2002) determined rural residents may place less importance on environmental concerns.

Rural Settings as Instrumental for Leisure Benefits

Theme 3: Utilitarian use of rural resources for recreation. Articles in this theme framed rural settings as sites of natural resources that should be valued and used for recreational purposes and leisure benefits. Rural populations were of less direct interest in these articles. Instead, articles in this category focused almost exclusively on rural land and resources for outdoor recreation use by urban populations, describing study settings as "rural countryside" (Siderelis & Moore, 1995, p. 345) and "amenity-rich" rural areas (Van Patten & Williams, 2008, p. 455). One key assumption evident in articles found in this theme was rurality being typified by abundant open land, wildlife, and natural amenities (e.g., Betz & Perdue, 1993; Nicholls & Crompton, 2005).

Studies in this theme also took a utilitarian approach to the development and promotion of rural natural resources for their potential contribution to individual and community economic gains. Research in this area suggested rural communities are increasingly dependent on recreational tourism for economic sustainability (e.g., Donnelly, Vaske, DeRuiter, & Loomis, 1998; Johnson & Bowker, 1999; Keith & Fawson, 1996; Pope III, Adams, & Thomas, 1984; Stein, Anderson, & Thompson, 1999; Warnick, 2002). For example, Betz (1993) determined "Recreation and tourism development is increasingly being viewed as a rural economic development strategy, especially in the wake of rural America's long-term decline in agriculture" (p. 16). Thus, rural communities and landowners were urged to intentionally engage in development, management, and promotional strategies to increase awareness and attract recreational visitors from urban areas (e.g., Lawton & Weaver, 2008; Williams et al., 1992). In addition to recreational tourism, rural natural amenities were also examined for their capacity to increase property values (e.g., Pope III et al., 1984; Shaw, 1985) and attract urban residential migrants (e.g., Van Patten & Williams, 2008). Although a few authors presented concerns related to a loss of rural recreation sites and open spaces due to increased expan-

sion of urban areas (e.g., Li, Zinn, Barro, & Manfreda, 2003; Nicholls & Crompton, 2005) as well as conflict between urban immigrants and local rural populations (e.g., O'Leary, 1976; Peterson, Mertig, & Jianguo, 2007), little emphasis was placed on the impacts of recreation and tourism resource development on local populations. Rural recreational and tourism development, as well as migration patterns of urban residents into rural areas, were largely presented as positive economic opportunities and desired enterprises for rural communities.

Theme 4: Rural as a context for increased access to and opportunities for recreation. Research in this theme suggested the proximal availability of outdoor recreational resources in rural areas provides rural populations with greater access to outdoor recreational pursuits. While both themes three and four presented an optimistic narrative and focused on outdoor recreation in rural settings, rural populations were more central to research in the fourth theme.

Research in this theme adopted the assumption that leisure and recreational opportunities and accessibility varied depending on place of residence. This research suggested proximity to natural resources and open space encouraged higher levels of participation in outdoor recreation among rural residents (e.g., Burch, 1969; Hendee, 1969; Johnson, Bowker, English, & Worthen, 1998; Warnick, 2002). Based on the opportunity hypothesis (Hendee, 1969) that increased access leads to increased participation, Churchill et al. (2007) argued "children in rural areas are more likely to be engaged in outdoor activities on a regular basis" (p. 292). Conversely, because urban residents presumably have less proximate access to outdoor recreation environments, they would be less likely to engage in these activities. For example, Yu (1985) stated, "the living environment may limit the urban resident's participation in fishing, hunting, and off-road driving more than rural residents" (p. 118).

This research also presented some implications of rural residents' increased access to natural resources and levels of participation in outdoor recreational activities. Despite some contradictory findings related to rural minorities (Johnson & Bowker, 1999), this research portrayed people residing in rural areas as advantaged in access to and enjoyment of leisure experiences, particularly in comparison to urban residents (e.g., Shaw, 1985). Because the recreation preferences of rural residents were developed through their access to the outdoors, these preferences were assumed to be similar to those of recreational tourists. Therefore, focusing on developing outdoor recreation resources for urban-to-rural tourists would have positive effects for locals. For example, Betz (1993) argued "high levels of tourism development tend not to harm local residents' perceptions of outdoor recreation opportunities" and because of the alignment in leisure preferences between the two groups, might simultaneously increase leisure enjoyment for local populations (p. 23).

Leisure and Rural Deprivation

Theme 5: Rural as a context for constraining access to and opportunities for recreation. Research in this theme presented a more pessimistic perspective toward rurality and suggested rural settings increased constraints to accessible recreational resources and leisure benefits. In comparison to previous

themes, these articles also highlighted more multifaceted dimensions of disparities experienced by rural populations, including a lack of public services (e.g., Wright, Harwell, & Allen, 1998), poorer health outcomes (e.g., Bocarro et al., 2009), and increasing social problems (e.g., Payne & Schaumleffel, 2008). This theme also represented a shift away from research focused almost exclusively on outdoor recreation in rural areas to an approach that examined public recreation and leisure services for rural populations.

These articles suggested municipal parks and public recreation programs and other public leisure spaces were less available in rural areas compared to urban areas (e.g., Anderson & Heyne, 2000; Bocarro et al., 2009; McCormick, 1994; Mowen, Payne, Orsega-Smith, & Godbey, 2009). Rather than promoting access to outdoor recreation resources as a substitute to these programs and services, research within this theme suggested significant segments of rural populations, particularly older residents (e.g., Cardenas et al., 2009; McCormick), persons with physical disabilities (e.g., Anderson & Heyne; Sable & Bocarro, 2004; Sable, Craig, & Lee, 2000) and youth (Wright et al., 1998), have increased barriers to accessing recreation and leisure activities than comparable groups of urban residents. For example, Wright, Harwell and Allen summarize the perceived lack of services for youth in rural communities, "Children who live in rural areas suffer from a variety of limiting factors. Some of these include: geographical isolation, low population density, and the general lack of facilities, programs, and opportunities" (pp. 98-99).

The recognition of issues facing rural populations led researchers to identify a need for increased rural community park and recreation services. According to Payne and Schaumleffel (2008) "many rural communities have unique problems to overcome when attempting to deliver community recreation services" (p. 118). In particular, it was proposed that rural communities may have fewer economic resources from which to fund recreation programs and services (Cardenas et al., 2009). Additionally, barriers to social interaction among rural residents may decrease social bonds necessary to develop and sustain grassroots efforts to provide recreation and leisure services (McCormick & McGuire, 1996). Finally, parks and recreation agencies located in more isolated rural communities may be less able than those in urban areas to form partnerships with other community organizations to deliver services (Mowen et al., 2009).

Theme 6: Leisure in the context of the rural tragedy. The final theme portrayed an almost nihilistic perspective on the state of suffering perceived by rural residents in the context of contemporary changes in rural conditions. Of particular importance were the implications of changes within rural social institutions (e.g., the decline of agriculture and local schools). As such, this theme represented a complex portrayal of rural life conditions and focused on the role of leisure in constructing meaning in the lives of rural residents and used inductive qualitative approaches. For example, Henderson and Rannells (1988) explored the "meaning of work and leisure among a group of rural women over their lifespan on the farm" (p. 41) while McCormick (1994) examined "the social lives of a group of rural elderly residents" (p. 47).

This research suggested a loss in traditional rural environments and reduced quality of life for rural residents, and older residents in particular (e.g., McCor-

mick, 1994). It was argued that transformation of rural areas, and the decline of conventional socializing institutions, has led to a perceived loss of social structures and increased social isolation in these communities (McCormick; Wright, Owen, McGuire, & Backman, 1994). For example, McCormick argues, "Over the course of the lives of [rural] village subjects, many of the opportunities for social interaction became unavailable within the villages, principally due to changes in economic production and school consolidation, and few replacements have appeared" (p. 59).

Constraints related to accessible recreational resources in rural communities were acknowledged. However, these barriers were presented as part of broad restrictive social conditions and suffering perceived in rural communities. In addition to sparse infrastructure and lower economic resources, the clinging of residents to traditional values and socio-cultural characteristics was suggested as obstacles to leisure benefits (Wright et al., 1994). For example, Henderson and Rannells (1988) found, "that because of the barriers which have prevented women from a public position in the work place, the lack of recreational opportunity, the necessity of slotting leisure into the time and space determined by others, the work ethic undermining the luxury of leisure, and the lack of free time available, women have to lead holistic lives to find leisure meaning" (pp. 41-42). Thus, many of the authors within this theme argued that rural life conditions are constraining in ways distinct from populations in non-rural areas.

Discussion

Research related to rurality remains a small topical area on the periphery of the leisure and recreation field's most important journals. The collective focus of these leisure and recreation journals is naturally broad, and therefore many different research topics and populations must be represented within published articles. So, while the low emphasis on rural research found in this review might have been expected, it is important to note that the lack of studies in this area greatly limits the field's understanding of leisure behaviors and may have implications for practice in rural communities.

The attention on rurality in the selected journals increased to some extent in recent years, and thematic emphasis of the collective journals has shifted from a near exclusive emphasis on rural settings for outdoor recreation to a broader approach to rurality in recent years. While these moderate increases in research attention on rurality is encouraging, our analysis also identified three key areas that may inhibit the development of theory and understanding of rural areas and rural populations. These areas were the lack of representativeness in socio-demographic characteristics of rural study populations, methodological issues related to the conceptualization and measurement of ruralness, and contradictions within the thematic approaches to rurality.

Socio-demographic characteristics of study populations

The sampled articles had little information on racial and ethnic minority, low income, and female residents of rural areas. Glenn (2002) argues that studying

socially constructed group structures in isolation provides an inaccurate representation of the realities faced by a population. For example, feminist literature often failed to account for the structural role of race, and therefore positioned White women as the universal subject of interest. Instead, she argues, social categories must be integrated and examined relationally to build a framework to fully understand social conditions for these groups. In this sense, the construction of “rural” preferences or even the conceptualization of the material and social conditions inherent to living in rural areas may be incomplete without incorporating the intersectional nature of other social groups.

Specifically, articles found in this review demonstrated the tendency to generalize from largely White male population samples. One problematic aspect of the lack of attention to representation across a population is the implied assumption that a universal rural condition exists across sociodemographic groups. Therefore, we cannot be sure that conclusions related to the perceived benefits of rural residence and rural population preferences for leisure activities, particularly outdoor recreation, were not biased by samples that were overrepresented by White males. Considering theoretical developments and practice recommendations within the leisure and recreation field that may have resulted from these generalizations, this oversight is not minor. As indicated by the few articles that examined rural women, racial and ethnic minorities, low-income populations, and other marginalized groups, there seemed to be significant differences in the experiences of members of these groups compared to those from majority populations. To provide a deeper understanding of rurality, future research should appropriately consider the different social conditions experienced by different sociodemographic groups and the effect of these conditions on leisure and recreation.

Only four articles in this sample contained research questions or study topics that focused on youth living in rural areas. This is particularly troubling because rural children may be particularly at risk for obstacles that reduce opportunities for positive psychological and social development and achieving a good quality of life. Lichter, Roscigno, and Condron (2003) suggest “Perhaps nostalgically, we cling to the belief that these problems have largely bypassed rural areas, affecting mostly disadvantaged children and minority youth living in inner-city neighborhoods” (p. 97). Children and youth in many rural areas live in conditions of high social isolation that prevent necessary levels of monitoring and support during leisure time (Osgood & Chambers, 2000). Additionally, intervention programs utilizing recreation resources and leisure programs that can occupy adolescents’ discretionary time and contribute to the promotion of positive youth development and social interaction may be sporadic, underfunded, and unsupported in rural communities (Boydell et al., 2009; Fahs et al., 1999; Riggs & Greenberg, 2004). Therefore, rural youth may be more likely to experience higher levels of leisure boredom (Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1990), which can facilitate delinquency and problematic behaviors (Caldwell & Smith, 1995). Future research in the leisure field should endeavor to provide a better understanding of the role of leisure and recreation for positive development of rural youth. Additionally, exploring the unique constraints to leisure faced by youth living in rural areas could be an important addition to the body of knowledge.

Underdeveloped Measurements of Rurality

Though differences between rural and urban populations remain a widely used concept in different academic disciplines, there is very little agreement over the definition of “rural” (Brown & Swanson, 2003; Miller & Bates, 1987). The consensus among many Americans is that “[we can] tell a place is rural when we see it” (Wimberley, 1997, ¶ 1), but it becomes more difficult to operationalize the concept of rural in empirical research. Additionally, some researchers have argued that rural is a socially constructed concept that requires a subjective conceptualization (Trussell & Shaw, 2009). Over 40% of the articles in this review seemed to agree with this view and simply proclaimed that their study site was indeed rural. Some of these articles framed conceptual definitions of rural, including 1) rural being a residual condition of “not being urban.” (i.e., rural formed a distinct and separate setting that existed outside the political boundaries of urban areas), 2) the presence of natural amenities or wilderness settings, and 3) historical and current locations of extractive industries such as mining, logging, and agriculture. However, more often any further descriptions of the characteristics of the rural environment were omitted.

Similarly, customary urban/rural dichotomies remained popular in the sampled articles despite evidence that they do not realistically capture the relative degrees along a rural-urban continuum or address the complexity of assessing the qualities of rurality (Brown & Swanson, 2003; Willits et al., 1982). The most popular of these approaches were taken from government designations reported by the OMB. Although it may be true that a satisfactory way to differentiate rural and urban areas is elusive (Isserman, 2005), the use of county-level data fails to recognize that large parts of counties classified as “metro” may actually be rural (Goldsmith, Stiles, & Puskin, 1992). The OMB classifies 2,051 out of 3,141 counties as non-metro (a proxy for “rural” in many studies). However, according to U.S. Census projections, 74.7% of the population in non-metro counties lives in urbanized areas while 16.8% of the population of metro counties lives in rural areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Therefore, using OMB county-level designations potentially risks misclassifying the rural or urban residence for nearly half of the U.S. population.

The purpose of the critique of methodological approaches in the recreation and leisure research is not to suggest there is a universally appropriate method to measure ruralness. Agreement on accepted measures of rurality has eluded nearly every academic discipline examining rural populations and we cannot expect the leisure and recreation field to be any different. There are diverse approaches to the assessment and measurement of rurality that may be valid based upon individual research questions. However, rather than using somewhat arbitrary or seeking universal measures of rurality, researchers should give more deliberate thought in matching measures of rurality with specific research questions. The current inattention to intentional conceptualization and measurement of rurality fails to recognize the multidimensional nature of rural settings. Future research of this nature should include clearer information that allows readers to gain a fuller understanding of the context of different rural places and populations. In this process, authors should also be more explicit about the effect chosen measurement techniques have on their results and research interpretations.

Thematic Contradictions

Examination of the thematic domains of rurality found in this review exposed a noticeable tension within the literature. The thematic categories of rural settings as instrumental to leisure benefits and leisure in the context of rural deprivation diverged greatly in the degrees of optimism or pessimism in their narratives about rural conditions. The two themes within the category rural settings as instrumental to leisure benefits highlighted rural settings as providing greater opportunities for access to outdoor recreation and for their economic potential as tourist destinations. The two themes in leisure in the context of rural deprivation suggested that the rural context constrains access to recreation and leisure and these conditions contribute to a diminished quality of life for many rural residents. From the perspective of rural settings as instrumental to leisure benefits, with its focus on natural resources, rurality is associated with abundance, while leisure in the context of rural deprivation, with its focus on rural populations, associates rurality with deprivation.

Optimistic narrative of rural leisure and recreation assumed an economic growth model where in-migrants and urban tourists are drawn to the availability of natural recreation amenities and romanticized visions of country lifestyles in rural areas (Barcus, 2004). With some exceptions (e.g., Keith, Fawson, & Chang, 1996), articles situated within the optimistic themes were largely uncritical of the economic model and promoted tourism as a panacea for rural community development. Future research should take into account potential effects, including negative consequences, of this development on local populations (see Krannich & Petrzela, 2003; Matarrita-Cascante, 2010a). Additionally, rural areas experiencing the highest rates of economic growth and development are those located on the periphery of urban areas where improved transportation and communication systems helped facilitate a housing and development boom that led to a significant migration of middle class residents and urban sprawl into adjacent rural areas (Smith, Caris, & Wyly, 2001). Research related to outdoor recreation should address problems that many remote rural areas do not possess the level of natural amenities (e.g., mountains, lakes, and scenic vistas) necessary to draw urban migrants and tourists away from urban centers (Krannich & Petrzela, 2003; McGranahan, 1999; McGranahan & Beale, 2002).

Research presenting the pessimistic narrative of rural settings often failed to account for the perceived benefits of living in some rural communities—the reasons why many urban residents continue to move to rural areas. More importantly, while these articles did provide more complex descriptions of rural social conditions, they often did not fully integrate the rural context into their studies and often failed to consider whether assumptions about accessible leisure and recreation were universally appropriate for all rural areas. That is, many of these articles based assumptions of deprivation upon comparisons to an urban model of leisure service delivery. In doing so, they isolated solutions to suggested rural leisure and recreation deprivation (and thus improvement in rural conditions) to urban-based policy approaches that may not be practical in rural communities. For example, rural communities often have lower economic bases from which to draw sufficient tax revenue required to build and maintain recreation facilities and programs (Bocarro et al., 2009; Tickamyer, 2000).

Future research in rural leisure and recreation should attempt to reconcile these oppositional narratives to better account for both the benefits and limitations of living in rural areas, as well as addressing the complex nature of different rural contexts. By appropriately recognizing the heterogeneity of rural areas, research can more appropriately inform policy and practice to address rural issues. This entails a deeper understanding of rural communities based on the origins, persistence, alteration, and/or depletion of local resources (e.g., human, natural, economic), the sociocultural processes guiding such changes (e.g., power distribution, organizational structures, leadership), and the resultant local living conditions (Field & Burch, 1988; Luloff et al., 2007; Matarrita-Cascante, 2010b). One approach may be to situate leisure, recreation, and quality of life in the context of sustainable rural community development. This perspective should consider the importance building capacity of rural communities to deliver more comprehensive leisure services as well as how improved access to leisure and recreation can enhance rural quality of life. Considering that many remote rural communities may also be unable to support and sustain managed recreation resources, future research should explore the potential of developing natural amenities or outdoor recreation education as an approach to improving leisure access for rural populations. For rural areas situated among abundant natural amenities, this development may not only expand the recreation supply available to residents, but may also serve as catalysts to attract local investments (Betz, 1993; Lawton & Weaver, 2008). However, because many rural areas do not possess developable natural amenities (McGranahan & Beale, 2002), and not all rural residents prefer outdoor recreational activities (Floyd & Johnson, 2002), new research approaches should be used to identify the strengths of these rural communities and determine how local jurisdictions can build upon those assets to promote development and equitable distribution of leisure benefits.

Limitations

Findings of this review should be interpreted in light of its conceptual and methodological limitations. First, the thematic categories used to classify research approaches were developed by the authors and have no prior standards of comparison. It is possible that another set of researchers would not identify the same thematic categories. Second, while the journals selected for this review represent the core body of knowledge for the leisure and recreation academic field, we do not wish to imply the journals used in this review represent the full spectrum of recreation and leisure research. Leisure and recreation research articles, particularly those in specialization areas, are published in other journals (e.g., *Leisure Studies*, *Loisir*) and outside the field. Additionally, published conference proceedings and other types of publications were excluded from the review. However, despite these limitations, our findings made significant contributions to the body of knowledge and is the first systematic and integrative review of leisure and recreation research related to rurality.

Conclusion

As researchers, why should we care about rural areas of the U.S.? First, rural residents represent a significant minority population of the country's population and may represent some of the most vulnerable members of our nation's society. Additionally, rural areas are considerably interconnected with urban areas of the U.S., representing the primary source of food, energy, and inputs for manufacturing and industrial processes, in addition to being the places where urban dwellers dispose of their waste and recreate. Because America's future depends on rural resources, and these resources are interrelated with rural populations (Brown & Swanson, 2003), maintaining the vitality and sustainability of rural areas is of primary importance to the country.

Despite this reality, rural areas face a number of problems, especially amidst broad social and economic changes (Townsend, Moore, & Mahoney, 2002). Wilkinson (1991) contended that rural community development goes beyond economic goals and should include provisions to improve the social, physical, and mental well-being of all people in rural areas. Therefore, rural leisure research may take on added importance in the future and researchers in our field stand to make a significant contribution. Historically, however, rural research in the leisure and recreation field has been limited and primarily focused on outdoor recreation, recreational tourism, and rurality as a descriptive characteristic or trait. These approaches have limited our field's understanding of the rural leisure context to consumer demand and uncertain rural economic development. We suggest future rural leisure research can help policy makers better understand the implications of investments in leisure and recreation on rural population sustainability, health outcomes, positive youth development, and improved quality of life. Regardless of how the field moves forward, we suggest that improvements are needed in the field's approach to "rural" research. As indicated in our analysis, future research in this area should consider the representativeness and context of different rural populations and areas and recognize the complexities of defining and measuring rurality in relation to research questions. It is also important that future researchers recognize the divergent value-orientations that developed within the traditions of rural leisure research and the resultant axiological tension underlying the field's understanding of rurality. Value-orientations are embedded in research, and axiological positions, and their ideological foundations, should be a more transparent part of leisure research in different rural areas (Dupuis, 1999). We hope that this review will prompt additional research questions and provide further opportunities to explore and understand leisure and recreation from the perspective of individuals living in diverse rural areas.

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