

Reviewed by
Katherine James, Ph.D.
California State University, Long Beach

Katherine James is an Associate Professor in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at California State University, Long Beach. Her research has been in environmental and outdoor education, focusing on issues of diversity in those fields. Her teaching experience at an urban university with a very diverse student population has further increased her awareness of and responsiveness to issues of diversity.

As a human-service profession, we know that recreation must meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population. In the last decade several popular textbooks have been revised to include chapters addressing gender, race and ethnicity, however, the field still lacked a text that provided a comprehensive approach to issues of diversity. Allison and Schneider's text fills that gap with a very readable text modeling the principles of diversity it exposes. The content and presentation of this text make it readily applicable to a variety of recreation courses.

Maria Allison's introductory chapter, *Diversity in Organizational Perspective* clearly establishes the right tone for the book. Allison identifies the core dimensions of diversity (race/ethnicity, gender, social class, age, sexual identity, and mental/physical ability), secondary dimensions (first language, education, religion, work experience, etc.), and clarifies the relationship between these dimensions and prejudice, discrimination, and power. Allison characterizes organizational responses to diversity as a continuum of policies and practices that are discriminatory or exclusionary to anti-discriminatory or inclusionary. Most of us will find our organizations and ourselves somewhere between the extremes of perfection and imperfection. Acknowledging this continuum provides a less threatening context in which readers can examine their role in responding to diversity. There is never a hint of assigning responsibility or blame. Instead, the underlying tone throughout the text is that everyone will benefit by becoming aware of and working to redress the unintended consequences of societal norms and organizational policies that prevents the full participation of all people.

Throughout the text readers are reminded that often the best source of information are the people themselves. This text draws on the contributions of 24 authors who represent the core dimensions of diversity: race, gender, physical ability, age, and sexual orientation. They comprise the wide array of specialties in recreation, including outdoor recreation, tourism, youth services, hospitality, non-profit management, and therapeutic recreation. The authors also include university faculty, recreation professionals, and diversity trainers. This selection of contributing authors reminds readers that diversity in our profession is not an issue to be addressed "someday," rather an issue many people have been working on for years, and we can all learn from their experiences.

Three sections of the book, identified as “Professional Voices Speak to Diversity,” include a total of 10 short chapters in which recreation professionals share insights from their years of experience. Each chapter provides a rationale for working to increase diversity within the profession. While some authors acknowledge moral and ethical motives, all provide far more pragmatic reasons: it increases an agency’s ability to respond to diverse clients, it increases innovation, and it will be more profitable in the long term. Each chapter also presents guidelines for addressing diversity within recreation agencies. The professionals speak from their experience in a specific area of recreation, but their guidelines are not limited to their area of specialty.

Sandwiched between the professional voices are six chapters addressing the core dimensions of diversity, strategically sequenced into parts one and two. Part one addresses mental/physical ability, gender, and social class. While all dimensions of diversity can be controversial, these are the three we are generally most comfortable discussing. Part two addresses the dimensions of diversity we often find less comfortable: age, sexual identity, and race. If the text is used within a course and read from front to back, this sequencing allows a class to build rapport in part one before moving on to part two.

Each of these six chapters includes appropriate terminology, a summary of current knowledge, illustrative scenarios, guidelines that enable recreation professionals to better address the specific dimension of diversity, discussion questions, suggested readings, and an extensive reference list. This format provides the vocabulary needed to discuss diversity respectfully as well as the rationale behind the preferred terminology. The summary of current knowledge provided in each chapter is not exhaustive. Some chapters present a brief historical review, but most focus on the theoretical perspective with which the specific dimension of diversity is viewed. In addressing disability, the medical/therapeutic model is contrasted to the “new paradigm” that focuses on “removing barriers, creating access through accommodation and universal design...and maintaining wellness and health” (p. 55). Social class is addressed by through three perspectives; sociodemographic, marginality, and identity orientations. The meaning of age is discussed in terms of biological, psychological, and sociological age. The chapter addressing race/ethnicity acknowledges that our understanding is evolving but we still have competing hypotheses to explain ethnic and racial differences in recreation participation: the marginality hypotheses, the ethnicity hypothesis, selective acculturation, and perceived discrimination. Scenarios in each chapter illustrating the theories presented further clarify these theoretical perspectives of diversity. Each author then presents guidelines for addressing diversity, and questions to facilitate self-examination by the reader of their personal perspective as well as the organizational response of their agency. These guidelines are presented as a place to start, rather than as the definitive answer. Each chapter concludes with discussion questions and additional resources.

The last three chapters of the text provide tools for addressing diversity as a whole (Core dimensions are no longer addressed independently but as inseparable components

of an individual's identity). The first tool is a summary of organizational models of change. Organizations can inadvertently create and maintain barriers to full participation for people of difference. Removing these barriers requires organizational changes. Strategies for accomplishing these changes are presented.

Of course, individuals within the organization cannot accomplish organizational change without increased awareness. Therefore, the next chapter addresses diversity training. One of the strengths of this chapter is its caution that diversity training must address diversity in terms of what (the diversity goals are) and how (to accomplish these goals). The text assumes that the reader may someday facilitate diversity trainings, so principles, limitations and weaknesses, and recommendations for strengthening diversity training are presented, followed by a variety of interactive activities.

The final chapter of the text addresses the concept of allies and acknowledges that the most effective voices for change are often those who will not directly benefit from the changes they seek: able bodied people working to insure universal designs are implemented, men working to promote women's rights, heterosexuals promoting equity for gays and lesbians. The chapter provides strategies for becoming an ally.

The combination of content, skills, and resources make this an invaluable text. The theoretical content of the text makes it appropriate for graduate students, but the illustrative scenarios do such a good job of clarifying these theories that it is also appropriate for undergraduates. The question is where will it fit within each department's curriculum? There are several options. If your department has a course addressing recreation for diverse populations, this is an ideal textbook. In fact, if you do not have such a course this text might provide incentive for creating one. If this is not an option in your department, there are several other alternatives. This text would be very appropriate for an advanced leadership class, especially in demonstrating the ways that recreation leadership must be responsive to participants and clients. Another alternative is to use this as a text in an administration class, since it presents an organizational perspective to diversity. A fourth alternative is to use this as a text in a philosophy and issues class. While the chapters on the core dimensions of diversity can be seen as critical issues for the profession, the book as a whole illustrates the impact of philosophy on professional service. Each author presents a slightly different philosophy toward diversity, and therefore, different strategies for addressing diversity.

In summary, this is a well-crafted text that models the principles it teaches. It fills the gap in the literature and will help prepare recreation professionals to identify and redress the unintended consequences of societal norms and organizational policies that prevent full participation of all people. In my opinion, the question is not whether this is an appropriate text to use, but which course in our department will get to use it.