# Are We Welcome? African American Racial Acceptance in Leisure Activities and the Importance Given to Children's Leisure

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This study investigated differences between middle-class African American and middle-class European American adults in their perceptions of how "welcome" African Americans are in 20 leisure activities common to the study area, and in the importance given to children's participation in these activities. A random sample of 45 blocks from a southern U.S.A. metropolitan census tract composed of racially integrated middle-class neighborhoods yielded 124 African American and 170 European American households who rated the activities on Likert-type scales. Using 2-tailed $t$ tests, with an $F$ (folded) statistic to test for equality of the 2 variances, and a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparison tests, significant differences ($p < .001$) between African Americans and European Americans were found for 16 activities (80%) on "welcome" scale scores, and 10 activities (50%) on children's "importance" scale scores. When scale scores were ranked, a strong association was shown between the racial groups for both "welcome" ($R = .95$, $p < .001$) and "importance" measures ($R = .48$, $p < .05$). The present study suggests three major conclusions: (a) Middle-class African Americans and middle-class European Americans strongly agree on where African Americans are most likely to be welcomed and where they will not be welcomed, (b) Middle-class African Americans feel much less welcome in most leisure activities than middle-class European Americans believe, and (c) Middle-class African Americans and middle-class European Americans, when thinking of themselves as parents, believe many of the same leisure activities are important for children; however, European Americans rated many more leisure activities as very important when compared to African Americans.

KEYWORDS: *Race, African American, acceptance, discrimination, children, leisure*

## Introduction

The literature has acknowledged racial differences in leisure preferences and participation for decades. For example, Lee (1972) found that some leisure activities and settings could be assigned the labels *Black* and *White*. Schuman and Hatchett (1974) showed that African Americans participated in different leisure activities even in integrated neighborhoods. In a widely cited study, Washburne (1978) found that African Americans were significantly underrepresented in less developed, more natural outdoor recreation

areas. More recently, West (1989) showed that African Americans were more likely to use city parks, while less likely to use surrounding regional parks, and that "interracial relations factors do seem to play a role in explaining underrepresentation by minorities in regional parks" (p. 11). From a similar viewpoint, Philipp (1995) found that the appeal of many leisure activities to African Americans, and the comfort felt while doing these activities, might be lessened by feelings of discrimination which were associated with the activities.

Much of the discussion in the literature over this extended period has focused on explaining racial differences in leisure behavior using either "marginality" (e.g., income, social class, access) or "ethnicity" (e.g., subcultural values, language, traditions) theories, while at the same time largely ignoring the perceptions and emotions of African Americans in different leisure activities and locations. In addition, most of these investigations have also avoided discussion of the interactive effects of prejudice and discrimination in shaping African American leisure behavior despite the historical significance of racial discrimination in the United States over the last several hundred years and the scholarship that continues to document this discrimination (Bobo, 1987; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985). West (1989) refers to this situation as the "cognitive tyranny of the dominant paradigms in leisure research on minorities" (p. 12), and states that the separation of the races in leisure places is staring many investigators in the face, "yet, due in part perhaps to the dominance of the 'subcultural' paradigm . . . this stark fact goes unnoticed (or at least without comment)" (p. 12). In addition, "a consistent body of evidence in support of either (i.e., marginality or ethnicity) has not emerged" over several decades (Floyd, Shinew, McGuire, & Noe, 1994, p. 159). It appears a different conceptual approach is needed to move the literature beyond the present theoretical boundaries of marginality and ethnicity to provide a more complete understanding of African American leisure behavior and why race matters. Such a conceptual framework would acknowledge the power of racial discrimination in the formation of African American attitudes and behavior, and then address African American perceptions of racial acceptance and discrimination which may be associated with leisure activities and locations. This kind of framework would most likely provide a more complete explanation of African American leisure than investigations which only addressed marginality or ethnicity factors.

In addition, a theoretical framework which acknowledged discrimination and the racial acceptance associated with leisure activities would have important consequences for understanding how some leisure preferences are formed in African American children, since the literature suggests that children's behavior has been strongly influenced by parental beliefs and behavior (Sigel, 1985). Barnett and Chick (1986) found that parents subtly communicate "leisure messages" (p. 266) which the child then mirrors in many ways. Parental perceptions of the racial acceptance associated with leisure activities may then have considerable influence upon children's leisure preferences and participation patterns.

Another important concern for leisure research concerns the growing importance of the African American middle-class. The African American middle-class doubled in numbers during the 1980's, and is making similar gains in the 1990's (Banner-Haley, 1994). In a comprehensive review of African American social class issues, Banner-Haley (1994) found that the African American middle-class has set most of the important social roles for lower-class African Americans. Thus, middle-class African American perceptions concerning United States society become important for also interpreting the desires and ambitions of lower-class African Americans. For example, if middle-class African Americans continue to believe that racial discrimination is a pervasive force in their everyday lives, then lower-class African Americans will also be affected by this negative information in many important ways. Another question develops from this line of inquiry: do perceptions of racial discrimination during leisure negatively impact middle-class African American life satisfaction and happiness? Philipp (1997) suggested that the "leisure benefit preferences of middle-class African Americans, coupled with their success at securing these preferred benefits, have influenced their perceptions of life satisfaction and happiness in some important manner" (p. 195).

Many recent investigations have found little difference between the leisure preferences of middle-class African Americans and middle-class European Americans, but have found significant differences between the lower classes in these racial groups (e.g., Floyd, Shinew, McGuire, & Noe, 1994; Shinew, Floyd, McGuire, & Noe, 1995; Shinew, Floyd, McGuire, & Noe, 1996). These recent findings seem to suggest that rising incomes and social access will bring increasing similarity between racial groups during leisure in the U.S.A.. These studies, however, have failed to investigate perceptions of racial "acceptability," and other similar measures of discrimination, which may be found in leisure activities and places. Therefore, many important questions remain to be answered in the literature, including: a) do middle-class African Americans feel racially "welcome" or "acceptable" in most leisure activities and places, and b) do middle-class European Americans also feel leisure activities can be associated with African American racial "acceptability?" If both middle-class African Americans and middle-class European Americans believe that African Americans will be more "welcome" in some leisure activities and less "welcome" in others, then these perceptions would likely indicate that this racial information is well-known and has been institutionalized at some level in the larger culture. The answers to these, and other questions, are important beyond the African American middle-class, because if middle-class African Americans believe that racial discrimination and a lack of racial "acceptability" continue to be associated with leisure activities and places, it may also lead to a loss of hope in securing a better life for lower-class African Americans.

With the above concerns in mind, the purpose of this investigation is fivefold: (a) to determine the racial acceptance associated with selected leisure activities by middle-class African Americans, (b) to determine if middle-

class European Americans have similar perceptions of African American racial acceptance in these leisure activities, (c) to determine how much importance middle-class African Americans place on children's participation in these selected leisure activities, (d) to determine if middle-class European Americans place similar importance on children's participation in these leisure activities, and (e) to theoretically explore the relationships between middle-class African American perceptions of racial acceptance in leisure activities and the importance given by them to children's leisure.

## Related Literature

### African Americans, Discrimination, and Leisure

Race has influenced, in one manner or another, most institutional decisions in the United States, and nearly all educational, housing, and employment opportunities have been severely affected by racial attitudes (Jaynes & Williams, 1989). While the segregated pools, parks, and playgrounds of the 1950's and 1960's in the U.S.A. have been replaced by leisure areas without official racial restrictions, most African Americans continue to understand when they are welcome and when they are not welcome in most leisure areas (West, 1989). Many social science investigations have found that this kind of information (i.e., the racial characteristics assigned to specific neighborhoods and regional locations) is well-understood, if not usually discussed by most African Americans (Bobo, 1987; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985). In other words, African Americans understand where they, in the eyes of European Americans, "fit" and "don't fit" with regards to most social occasions and settings. Indeed, most current African American writers continue to emphasize the importance of race-based discrimination in the daily lives of African Americans (e.g. Bell, 1992, 1994; Cose, 1993; Gates & West, 1996). Hacker (1995) argued that despite places where the races "mingle" in the United States, separation is pervasive and penetrating in most places African Americans meet after school or work (i.e., during their "freely" chosen leisure time). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to believe that race also matters in many African American leisure preferences, choices, and behavior.

Unfortunately, the recreation and leisure literature has not well-addressed the influence of racial discrimination in shaping African American leisure preferences and participation patterns. Lee (1972) first focused the need for this kind of research using participant observation studies. Some of the major findings from Lee's (1972) investigation included: (a) African Americans can name "White" and "Black" parks, (b) African Americans feel uncomfortable in "White" parks outside their urban neighborhoods, and (c) when using parks outside their urban neighborhoods, African Americans would usually go in large groups and stay together in specific areas, maintaining racial homogeneity in a perceived hostile turf. In a later study, Hutchison (1987) discussed separation of the races in Chicago's parks; although he explained this racial separation as due to "subcultural" differences and not race. West (1989) cited an example of a Chicago park "in a white ethnic

neighborhood with a sign erected by white racists saying 'whites only,———
keep out' (I don't know if it is still there, but for some time, city park officials
let it stand)" (p. 12). While West (1989) admitted that this kind of overt
discrimination was rare, he countered that overt discrimination did not have
to be present to cause an African American family to think twice about going
to a mostly White park. The cumulative effects of racial prejudice in day-to-
day existence may be sufficient to cause many African Americans to with-
drawal from possible hostile encounters in leisure places (Fulwood, 1996).

In research spanning 20 years, Dovidio (1997) found that "aversive"
racism was common in the United States; aversive racism is not based upon
"overt dislike or hostility, but rather one of *anxiety* or *discomfort* (emphasis
added)" (p. 60). "Aversive racists are unaware of their own prejudice and
discriminate only when they can justify their behavior on grounds other than
race . . . they think blacks or members of other minority groups see prejudice
where it doesn't really exist" (Dovidio, 1997, p. 60). Because aversive racists
deny their own bias and yet act in a biased manner, "it is not surprising that
members of minority groups suspect that prejudice exists everywhere" (Do-
vidio, 1997, p. 60). It is not unreasonable to believe that African Americans
have been affected by these perceptions of prejudice in making leisure
choices, and that their children have recognized and internalized, at some
level, these same feelings and behavior.

*African Americans, Parental Beliefs, and Leisure*

Lytton (1980) stated that "the family can be viewed as a system in which
each member influences, and is influenced by, every other member, such
influences operating in a direct and indirect manner" (p. 270). Given this
situation, parents and children exchange much information which may not
be directly discussed, much less analyzed, yet this information has important
consequences for the attitudes and behavior of both parents and children
(Sigel, 1985). A large part of this exchanged information is based upon "be-
liefs," which have been defined by Sigel (1985) as "knowledge in the sense
that the individual knows that what he (or she) espouses is true or probably
true, and evidence may or may not be deemed necessary; or if evidence is
used, it forms a basis for the belief but is not the belief itself" (p. 348). From
this perspective, African American parents probably have both discussed and
undiscussed beliefs concerning the racial acceptance associated with leisure
activities and places, which may not be based upon evidence, yet most likely
has an important impact upon their children's leisure attitudes and behavior.

If African American parents place a low value upon certain leisure ac-
tivities and places, based upon beliefs that African Americans are not wel-
come in these activities and places, then their children are likely to under-
stand the low value which has been assigned to these activities and places.
These children are also likely to assign a low value to their own involvement
in these same activities and places which has important consequences for
the child.

The literature strongly suggests that healthy psychological development is not based upon parental affection per se, but rather upon the child's perceptions of whether their actions are valued by the parents (Kagan, Kearsley, and Zelazo, 1978). Staples and Johnson (1993) found that "if Black children have healthy self-esteem, it is because they perceive that they are well-regarded by parents, relatives, peers and church members, or are skilled at highly valued activities" (p. 190). In this context, African American children may seek leisure activities and places that are highly valued by their parents and peers, and avoid those activities and places which are not highly valued. In addition, Broman, Neighbors, and Jackson (1988) found that highly educated African Americans in many regions of the United States have strong levels of racial group identification, and seek to impart that information to their children. Therefore, if race is an important part of parental valuations of leisure activities and places, then children's leisure behavior should also reflect to some extent the racial beliefs of their parents.

Coner-Edwards and Edwards (1988) stated that most African American middle-class families "remain acutely aware of the social ills of racial discrimination in society" (p. 5). This sense of racial discrimination makes African Americans families particularly vulnerable to stress as "economic status does not guarantee immunity from stress in general and race-related stresses in particular" (Spurlock & Booth, 1988). In addition, a large number of African American middle-class parents "have expressed concern about their children's confusion or absence of Black identity" when their children's experiences are limited to White majority schools and leisure places (Spurlock & Booth, 1988, p. 85). Spencer (1990) found that this situation often created "discontinuities" between what is expected of the African American child by the European American majority culture and what was recognized as important in the African American home and community. From this vantage point, an African American child's selection of a "White" identified leisure activity, might cause discontinuities for the child in a household where such an activity is not highly valued or simply regarded as not an acceptable "Black" activity. Moreover, Sudarkasa (1988) argued that the preferences and choices of African American children could not be well-understood without an appreciation for the interaction of African American family members, and the power of those family members in influencing children's behavior.

Recent investigations concerning the importance of parental influence on a child's leisure decisions has been rather limited in the literature, but a few of the more salient studies suggest that parental leisure values, attitudes, and behavior are very important in shaping children's leisure decisions. For example, Barnett and Chick (1986) found that parental leisure attitudes, satisfaction, and participation could be associated with a child's playful style and predisposition. Dargitz (1988) concluded that African American children do not have the same likelihood as European American children of being introduced to some leisure activities in the context of the child's household. In addressing the problem of family cohesiveness, Freysinger

(1994) suggested that while it may be a popular belief that the family that "plays together stays together," this outcome is far from certain. Yet, this adage "underlies much of the writing on family and leisure" (Freysinger, 1994, p. 215). Hultsman (1993) found that for young adolescents "parental influence was perceived to be greater than that of other agents in the decision not to join an activity" (p. 150). In addition, Howard and Madrigal (1990) found that parents, particularly mothers, screen leisure opportunities before allowing their children to participate in any activity. Barnett and Chick (1986) explored the antecedents of young children's playful behavior and found "the most salient force in the young child's environment is the presence and influence of parental models" (p. 267). From this perspective, an understanding of parental beliefs concerning the racial acceptance associated with leisure activities becomes essential and necessary for a clearer understanding of child and adult leisure preferences and participation patterns.

## Method

### Subjects

A random sample of 45 blocks, containing 421 single-family residences, was drawn from a southern U.S.A. metropolitan census tract (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). The study census tract was selected to secure a population of African Americans who were part of higher income households and of higher education levels who resided in detached single family homes on large lots in racially "integrated" neighborhoods. Social class was then measured using both income and education in the present study. The intent of selecting this census tract was to control for differences which might exist between middle-class African Americans and middle-class European Americans who resided in different neighborhoods and city areas. African Americans and European Americans resided in a majority of the same blocks in this census tract. This census tract was also associated with the highest mean African American household income for any census tract in this metropolitan area and was composed of detached, single family dwellings on large lots. Both African Americans and European Americans were middle-class neighbors in this census tract with very similar economic and physical access to leisure opportunities.

All the street blocks in this selected census tract were numbered, then street blocks were randomly selected (by number). All residences in each randomly selected block were included in the survey. The 421 residences sampled in this investigation yielded 299 completed questionnaires; 124 African Americans (41%), 170 European Americans (57%), 3 Hispanic Americans (1%), and 2 Asian Americans (1%) self-identified themselves according to race, resulting in an overall response rate of 71 percent. The Hispanic American and Asian American identified households were removed from this investigation, leaving 294 African American and European American house-

holds for analysis. Fifty-four households (13%) refused to participate in the survey, and sixty-eight households (16%) were "not-at-home" on the two occasions interviewers attempted to secure questionnaires.

*Measures*

A panel of 18 graduate students compiled a list of 191 often-studied leisure activities from a review of the literature. The panel selected twenty activities from this list using a voting system to provide a balance of outdoor and indoor activities frequently done by adults in the study area. All the panel experts were long-term residents of the area, present during the decision-making process, and instructed to select activities which might appeal to both African American and European American adults. This list of activities was then field tested by members of the panel with African American and European American adults in the study area and showed good face validity in the identification of leisure activities which both racial groups might consider doing if given the opportunity.

A three-page questionnaire format was then developed for the present investigation. The first part of this questionnaire asked respondents to rate 20 leisure activities on "how welcome do you think most Blacks feel at the following activities." Each leisure activity in this section was followed by a 6-point Likert-type scale: 1 = *very welcome,* 2 = *welcome,* 3 = *somewhat welcome,* 4 = *somewhat unwelcome,* 5 = *unwelcome,* 6 = *very unwelcome.* Respondents were instructed to "circle the number which most closely matches your feelings." This perception of "welcomeness" was used as a measure of racial discrimination in the present study, and is based upon the findings of West (1989) who reported that many African American respondents felt "unwelcome" in some leisure activities and places identified with European Americans. In addition, Philipp (1998) recently found that 46% of southern African American adults reported recent incidents of racial discrimination in leisure places. While racial discrimination might be more easily observed by using overt measures, such as leisure clubs which actually forbid African American members or negative comments which are directed to African Americans in some leisure places, perceptions of where one is likely to be racially accepted or "welcome" (i.e, where people feel they belong), are also likely to be the result of historical patterns of discrimination and institutionalized racism.

The second part of this questionnaire asked respondents to rate the same 20 leisure activities on "as a parent or future parent, how much importance would you place on your child's participation in the following activities." Likewise, each leisure activity in this section was followed by a 6-point Likert-type scale: 1 = *very important,* 2 = *important,* 3 = *somewhat important,* 4 = *somewhat unimportant,* 5 = *unimportant,* 6 = *very unimportant.* Respondents were also instructed to "circle the number which most closely matches your feelings." The final part of the questionnaire asked respondents to provide self-identified socioeconomic information about themselves or their household such as race, education, age, and income.

## Procedures

All residences in each randomly selected block were included in the survey and interviewers visited each. After making contact at the door, an adult member of each household, 18 years and older, was asked to participate in the study, and given a three page questionnaire. The interviewer asked the respondent to complete the questionnaire and to expect the interviewer to return in about 30 minutes to secure the completed questionnaire. A follow-up visit was made by the interviewer if the initial interview time was inconvenient or other reasons prevented the respondent from completing the interview. The survey was conducted in March and April 1996 between the hours 9:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. seven days a week. Eighteen graduate student interviewers were individually and group trained prior to data collection to help control interviewer bias.

## Results

The socioeconomic characteristics of African Americans and European Americans were statistically similar: median age category was 35-44 for both groups (range= 18-75), $X^2$ (6,N = 290) = 6.36, $p$ =.49; mean household size was 3.22 and 3.03 for African Americans and European Americans respectively (range 1-9), $F$ (119, 169) = 1.29, $p$ =.19; median household income category was \$30,000-\$39,000 for both groups (range \$10,000-19,999 to over \$100,000), $X^2$ (6,N = 270) = 7.01, $p$ = .43; median education category was *college incomplete* for both groups (range high school incomplete to graduate degree) $X^2$ (5,N = 286) = 6.72, $p$ = .24; 51% of African Americans were male, 49% female, and 45% of European Americans were male, 55% were female, $X^2$ ($N$ = 1,287) = 1.51, $p$ = .22.

Table 1 presents mean scores and t-tests for racial differences on perceived African American "welcomeness" or acceptability in selected leisure activities. The findings showed that 16 of 20 leisure activities (80%) were rated very significantly ($p$ < .001) different between the racial groups. African Americans felt Blacks would be less welcome in all of these 16 leisure activities than European Americans did. African American mean scores showed a rating between "very welcome" and "welcome" in only one activity (playing basketball), while European Americans rated African Americans between "very welcome" and "welcome" in seven activities (playing basketball, going to a festival/fair, going dancing, going to the mall, fishing, jogging, going to the zoo). In addition, African Americans rated 11 activities between "welcome" and "somewhat welcome" (going to the mall, going dancing, fishing, going to the zoo, going to a festival/fair, jogging, bowling, martial arts/karate, joining the boy/girl scouts, picnicking in a park, going to a museum), and 7 activities between "somewhat welcome" and "somewhat unwelcome" (going to the beach, playing tennis, playing soccer, boating/sailing, going to a symphony, hunting, camping in the mountains). African Americans rated one activity between "somewhat unwelcome" and "unwelcome" (going to a country club).

*TABLE 1*
*Mean Scores and t-Tests for Racial Differences on Perceived African American*
*Acceptability in Leisure Activities*

| | African American Welcome Ratings | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | African Americans (*n* = 124) | | European Americans (*n* = 170) | | *t*-test |
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *p <* |
| Going to the beach | 3.19 | (1.48) | 2.92 | (1.28) | ns |
| Playing soccer | 3.26 | (1.42) | 2.40 | (1.01) | .001* |
| Going to a museum | 2.88 | (1.29) | 2.28 | (0.99) | .001* |
| Going to a festival/fair | 2.55 | (1.36) | 1.95 | (0.85) | .001* |
| Hunting | 3.62 | (1.48) | 3.02 | (1.38) | .001* |
| Playing basketball | 1.52 | (1.10) | 1.37 | (0.71) | ns |
| Camping in the mountains | 3.67 | (1.41) | 2.74 | (1.29) | .001* |
| Picnicking in a park | 2.78 | (1.34) | 2.20 | (0.95) | .001* |
| Going dancing | 2.20 | (1.36) | 1.86 | (0.89) | .01 |
| Going to the mall | 2.17 | (1.22) | 1.76 | (0.72) | .001* |
| Boating/sailing | 3.44 | (1.38) | 2.75 | (1.15) | .001* |
| Going to a symphony | 3.51 | (1.44) | 2.76 | (1.20) | .001* |
| Fishing | 2.29 | (1.33) | 1.89 | (0.99) | .001* |
| Going to a country club | 4.25 | (1.50) | 3.61 | (1.52) | .001* |
| Jogging | 2.56 | (1.27) | 1.96 | (0.94) | .001* |
| Joining boy/girl scouts | 2.70 | (1.31) | 2.17 | (0.99) | .001* |
| Playing tennis | 3.20 | (1.32) | 2.52 | (1.13) | .001* |
| Going to the zoo | 2.52 | (1.22) | 1.99 | (0.81) | .001* |
| Martial arts/karate | 2.66 | (1.26) | 2.08 | (0.91) | .001* |
| Bowling | 2.57 | (1.24) | 2.27 | (1.05) | .05 |

*Note.* Mean scores are based on a Likert-type scales of 1 (*very welcome*) to 6 (*very unwelcome*); higher scores indicate less welcome.
*denotes significance at the .0025 level, Bonferroni correction for multiple comparison tests.

Table 2 presents the mean welcome scores of leisure activities ranked from most welcome to least welcome by racial group. The ranking of welcome scores by African American and European American study participants show very strong positive association ($R = .95$, $p < .001$). Both African Americans and European Americans gave the same four activities (playing basketball, going to the mall, going dancing, fishing) their highest African American welcome ratings, while also giving their lowest welcome ratings to one activity (going to a country club). Only a few activities showed much difference between the racial groups when ranked in this fashion (e.g., bowling, going to the beach, camping in the mountains).

Mean scores and *t*-tests for racial differences on the perceived importance of a child's participation in leisure activities are shown in Table 3. The

TABLE 2
Ranked Mean African American Welcome Scores for Leisure
Activities as Perceived by African Americans and
European Americans

| African Americans (n = 124) | | | European Americans (n = 170) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rank | Activity | M | Rank | Activity | M |
| 1 | Playing basketball | 1.52 | 1 | Playing Basketball | 1.37 |
| 2 | Going to the mall | 2.17 | 2 | Going to the mall | 1.76 |
| 3 | Going dancing | 2.20 | 3 | Going dancing | 1.86 |
| 4 | Fishing | 2.29 | 4 | Fishing | 1.89 |
| 5 | Going to the zoo | 2.52 | 5 | Going to festival/fair | 1.95 |
| 6 | Going to festival/fair | 2.55 | 6 | Jogging | 1.96 |
| 7 | Jogging | 2.56 | 7 | Going to the zoo | 1.99 |
| 8 | Bowling | 2.57 | 8 | Martial arts/karate | 2.08 |
| 9 | Martial arts/karate | 2.66 | 9 | Joining boy/girl scouts | 2.17 |
| 10 | Joining boy/girl scouts | 2.70 | 10 | Picnicking in a park | 2.20 |
| 11 | Picnicking in a park | 2.78 | 11 | Bowling | 2.27 |
| 12 | Going to a museum | 2.88 | 12 | Going to a museum | 2.28 |
| 13 | Going to the beach | 3.19 | 13 | Playing soccer | 2.40 |
| 14 | Playing tennis | 3.20 | 14 | Playing tennis | 2.52 |
| 15 | Playing soccer | 3.26 | 15 | Camping in mountains | 2.74 |
| 16 | Boating/sailing | 3.44 | 16 | Boating/sailing | 2.75 |
| 17 | Going to a symphony | 3.51 | 17 | Going to a symphony | 2.76 |
| 18 | Hunting | 3.62 | 18 | Going to the beach | 2.92 |
| 19 | Camping in mountains | 3.67 | 19 | Hunting | 3.02 |
| 20 | Going to country clubs | 4.25 | 20 | Going to country clubs | 3.61 |

Note. Mean scores are based on a Likert-type scale of 1 (very welcome) to 6 (very unwelcome); higher scores indicate less welcome. Spearman's $R = .950$, $p < .001$.

findings showed that 10 of the 20 leisure activities (50%) were rated significantly ($p < .001$) different between the racial groups. When thinking of themselves as parents, African American study participants rated children's participation as less important than European Americans in all of these 10 activities. Mean African American scores show no activity between the "very important" to "important" categories, and only 8 activities (40%) between "important" and "somewhat important" (picnicking in a park, going to festivals/fairs, going to the zoo, going dancing, jogging, playing basketball, joining boy/girl scouts, going to a museum). Whereas European American study participants, in thinking about themselves as parents, rated 14 activities (70%) between "very important" and "somewhat important" for children.

Table 4 presents the mean importance scores for children's leisure ranked from most important to least important by racial groups. African American and European American importance scores show a strong positive association when ranked in this manner ($R = .48$, $p < .05$). Both racial

## TABLE 3
### Mean Scores and t-Tests for Racial Differences on Perceived Importance of Child's Participation in Leisure Activities

| | Importance of Child's Participation | | | | |
| | African Americans (n = 124) | | European Americans (n = 170) | | t-test |
| | M | SD | M | SD | p < |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Going to the beach | 3.18 | (1.37) | 2.31 | (1.06) | .001* |
| Playing soccer | 3.23 | (1.40) | 2.70 | (1.11) | .001* |
| Going to a museum | 2.44 | (1.35) | 1.93 | (1.00) | .001* |
| Going to a festival/fair | 2.94 | (1.27) | 2.56 | (1.11) | .001* |
| Hunting | 4.20 | (1.44) | 4.40 | (1.48) | ns |
| Playing basketball | 2.52 | (1.29) | 2.79 | (1.07) | ns |
| Camping in the mountains | 3.55 | (1.42) | 2.37 | (1.09) | .001* |
| Picnicking in a park | 2.68 | (1.12) | 2.33 | (1.04) | .001* |
| Going dancing | 2.97 | (1.23) | 2.74 | (1.02) | ns |
| Going to the mall | 3.13 | (1.32) | 3.55 | (1.28) | .001* |
| Boating/sailing | 3.45 | (1.31) | 2.63 | (1.06) | .001* |
| Going to a symphony | 3.14 | (1.55) | 2.65 | (1.22) | .001* |
| Fishing | 3.23 | (1.32) | 3.03 | (1.28) | ns |
| Going to a country club | 4.14 | (1.45) | 4.26 | (1.31) | ns |
| Jogging | 2.66 | (1.26) | 2.52 | (1.08) | ns |
| Joining boy/girl scouts | 2.70 | (1.32) | 2.49 | (1.17) | ns |
| Playing tennis | 3.15 | (1.27) | 2.84 | (1.09) | .05 |
| Going to the zoo | 2.48 | (1.15) | 1.94 | (0.95) | .001* |
| Martial arts/karate | 3.03 | (1.35) | 3.13 | (1.27) | ns |
| Bowling | 3.11 | (1.36) | 3.28 | (1.15) | ns |

Note. Mean scores are based on a Likert-type scales of 1 (very important) to 6 (very unimportant); higher scores indicate less importance.
*denotes significance at the .0025 level, Bonferroni correction for multiple comparison tests.

groups gave two activities (going to a museum, going to the zoo) their highest importance ratings, and two activities (going to a country club, hunting) their lowest importance ratings. There were 6 activities (60%) which appeared in the top 10 importance ratings of both racial groups (going to a museum, going to the zoo, jogging, picnicking in a park, joining boy/girl scouts, going to festivals/fairs). However, there were many large differences between African American and European American ratings; 8 activities accounted for much of this difference (African Americans rated playing basketball, going to the mall, and bowling higher than European Americans, while European Americans rated martial arts/karate, going to the beach, playing soccer, going dancing, boating/sailing, and camping in the mountains higher than African Americans).

## TABLE 4
### Ranked Mean Importance Scores for Children's Leisure Activities by African Americans and European Americans

| African Americans (n = 124) | | | European Americans (n = 170) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rank | Activity | M | Rank | Activity | M |
| 1 | Going to a museum | 2.44 | 1 | Going to a museum | 1.93 |
| 2 | Going to the zoo | 2.48 | 2 | Going to the zoo | 1.94 |
| 3 | Playing basketball | 2.52 | 3 | Going to the beach | 2.31 |
| 4 | Jogging | 2.66 | 4 | Picnicking in a park | 2.33 |
| 5 | Picnicking in a park | 2.68 | 5 | Camping in mountains | 2.37 |
| 6 | Joining boy/girl scouts | 2.70 | 6 | Joining boy/girl scouts | 2.49 |
| 7 | Going to festivals/fair | 2.94 | 7 | Jogging | 2.52 |
| 8 | Going dancing | 2.97 | 8 | Going to festivals/fair | 2.56 |
| 9 | Martial arts/karate | 3.03 | 9 | Boating/sailing | 2.63 |
| 10 | Bowling | 3.11 | 10 | Going to a symphony | 2.65 |
| 11 | Going to the mall | 3.13 | 11 | Playing soccer | 2.70 |
| 12 | Going to a symphony | 3.14 | 12 | Going dancing | 2.74 |
| 13 | Playing tennis | 3.15 | 13 | Playing basketball | 2.79 |
| 14 | Going to the beach | 3.18 | 14 | Playing tennis | 2.84 |
| 15 | Fishing | 3.23 | 15 | Fishing | 3.03 |
| 16 | Playing soccer | 3.24 | 16 | Martial arts/karate | 3.12 |
| 17 | Boating/sailing | 3.45 | 17 | Bowling | 3.28 |
| 18 | Camping in mountains | 3.55 | 18 | Going to the mall | 3.55 |
| 19 | Going to a country club | 4.14 | 19 | Going to a country club | 4.26 |
| 20 | Hunting | 4.20 | 20 | Hunting | 4.40 |

Note. Mean scores are based on a Likert-type scale of 1 (*very important*) to 6 (*very unimportant*); higher scores indicate less importance. Spearman's $R = .498$, $p < .05$.

## Discussion

Middle-class African Americans and middle-class European Americans showed a very strong similarity when their mean "welcome" scores for African American acceptance in leisure activities were ranked and compared; indicating that both racial groups understood where African Americans would be welcome and "fit," and where they would be less welcome and not "fit." One should not underestimate the importance of this finding, because it suggests that both racial groups share a very similar basic understanding of where African Americans will find the most racial acceptance during their leisure time. This finding seems to suggest that many, if not most, leisure activities have embedded racial "information" associated with them in some way (i.e., Blacks are likely to "fit" these activities, and not likely to "fit" other activities). This kind of racial information appeared to be readily known and understood by most people in the present study. This finding stands in stark contrast to recent research which has found few differences between middle-

class African Americans and middle-class European Americans on leisure preferences (e.g., Floyd, Shinew, McGuire, & Noe, 1994; Shinew, Floyd, McGuire, & Noe, 1995; Shinew, Floyd, McGuire, & Noe, 1996). Indeed, this same research has appeared to suggest that significant racial differences in leisure preferences and participation only occur between members of the lower classes. The present findings, however, suggest that important racial discrimination issues concerning leisure extend into the middle classes. Hence, it appears that racial discrimination needs to be addressed with the same interest as social class and ethnicity in the leisure literature.

The present findings also strongly suggest that a large gap exists between the perceptions of middle-class European Americans and middle-class African Americans concerning the degree of "welcomeness" or acceptance African Americans might expect to feel in numerous leisure activities. African Americans, when compared to European Americans, felt they would be significantly less welcome in 80% of the leisure activities examined in the present investigation ($p < .001$). The importance of this finding should also not be underestimated, because it suggests African Americans do not feel as welcome in most leisure activities as European Americans might like to believe. This feeling of being less welcome in leisure activities probably has a considerable impact on many African American leisure choices, and might also be considered an important leisure constraint. This finding supports Philipp's (1995) arguments suggesting racial discrimination may serve as a major constraint for middle-class African Americans in many leisure activities. Also, this finding is striking because it shows a generalized middle-class European American "reluctance" to fully acknowledge the racial discrimination most African Americans might expect to experience in many leisure activities. Dovidio (1997) stated that aversive racists "think blacks or members of other minority groups see prejudice where it doesn't really exist" (p. 60), and then they deny their own bias and yet act in a biased manner. Seen in this light, the present findings also suggest that many middle-class European Americans greatly discount the presence of racial discrimination or prejudice in leisure activities, and so probably also fail to understand their own racial biases in making some leisure choices. In other words, middle-class European Americans are generally less likely to acknowledge and understand the effects of racial discrimination associated with many leisure activities.

Middle-class African Americans and European Americans, when thinking of themselves as parents, showed good overall agreement when the mean importance scores for children's leisure were ranked and compared, suggesting that individuals of both racial groups were likely to find many leisure activities to be of importance for children. It appears both African Americans and European Americans place a high value on a large number of similar leisure activities for their children. However, a good number of leisure activities also showed a large ranking difference between African Americans and European Americans. For example, the 10 highest ranked European American activities included four activities which were not included in the 10 highest ranked African American activities (going to the beach, camping in

the mountains, boating/sailing, going to a symphony). Interestingly, these four activities were also activities where African Americans reported feeling much less welcome. While it appears African Americans value many of the same activities for children as European Americans, it also seems activities may not be as highly valued because they are associated with leisure places where African Americans will find less acceptance. However, African Americans appear to be able to transcend these feelings of racial comfort and acceptance for some leisure activities. For example, going to a museum was the highest rated activity by African Americans for children, yet African Americans rated their racial acceptance fairly low at museums. It seems a few leisure activities are regarded as important for African American children regardless of the racial acceptance associated with those activities by adults. It would be valuable in future research to explore the reasons African Americans value these leisure activities for African American children.

Another important finding from the present investigation was the large difference in the degree of importance African Americans and European Americans placed on leisure activities. Overall, middle-class African Americans rated 10 activities (50%) significantly less important for children than did middle-class European Americans. Why did African Americans rate leisure participation for children as less important than European Americans for so many activities? One possible answer to this question, based on marginality arguments, is that leisure is less highly valued by African Americans because they have only recently attained middle-class status after a long history of economic marginalization. In other words, middle-class African Americans may feel less economically secure than middle-class European Americans. From this vantage point, African Americans will place more value on children's leisure as they begin to feel more economically secure and comfortable in their new social class roles.

Another theoretical interpretation, based on ethnicity arguments, suggests that strongly embedded African American sub-cultural traditions or values have formed a distinctive set of "authentic" or acceptable African American leisure activities. This set of African American identified leisure activities might be smaller in number than those perceived as acceptable by European Americans and account for the significant racial differences found in the present investigation. In addition, the activities examined in the present investigation may not well represent this culturally distinctive set of African American leisure activities.

Still another interpretation of these findings, based upon discrimination arguments, suggests that feelings of being unwelcome in many leisure places have led African Americans to devalue many leisure experiences for their children. If this interpretation is correct, then racial discrimination is also constraining African American leisure opportunities. In addition, the "messages" African American adults send to children might have a considerable impact on children's leisure behavior. Parents, however, are not the only people who might send important "messages" to children about leisure; peers, coaches, relatives, and church members, among others, may all have

an important impact on children's leisure preferences and behavior, and need to be examined in future research.

Another important question is raised by the findings of this study: do middle-class African Americans believe the rewards or benefits of leisure are equally available to all in the United States, or do they believe racial discrimination causes them enough discomfort and racial self-awareness to prevent full happiness, spontaneity, and well-being in many leisure activities and places? Following this line of reasoning, do African Americans then believe that economic success is the only real determinant of "success" in United States society; hence, leisure becomes devalued as an important life goal? Unfortunately, the present investigation does not provide empirical answers to these important questions but raises them for future research.

Philipp (1995) stated that "marginality and ethnicity theories have dominated the discussion of racial differences in leisure research" (p. 118). West (1989) viewed this situation as the "cognitive tyranny of the dominant paradigms in leisure research" (p. 12). While it is possible to interpret the present findings from the dominant marginality or ethnicity perspective, such an analysis would probably add little to our understanding of African American leisure behavior beyond what is already offered in the literature. Indeed, Floyd, Shinew, McGuire, and Noe (1994) felt marginality and ethnicity interpretations of African American leisure behavior have shown only limited explanative power "since a consistent body of evidence in support of either has not emerged over several decades" (p. 159). Viewing the present findings from a discrimination perspective, however, has the potential to greatly expand our understanding of African American leisure behavior. Future research should acknowledge the power of racial discrimination in the formation of African American attitudes and behavior, and provide empirical answers to how racial discrimination has affected leisure choices, satisfactions, and participation. This information could then be combined with marginality and ethnicity explanations to form a more complete and useful understanding of African American leisure behavior.

The present investigation has some limitations which should be considered in any evaluation of the findings. First, the survey area was limited to one integrated, middle-class southern U.S.A. metropolitan census tract, which most likely reflected regional cultural norms relating to race. While the findings may reveal much about southern cultural norms, other regions in the United States should be examined to explore potential regional differences. Second, although a strong effort was made by a panel of experts using a systematic, well-developed decision making process to select leisure activities which were easily available to middle-class residents of the study area, the selection of different activities might alter the findings of this investigation. Finally, racial discrimination is a very complex area of discussion among academics, intellectuals, and the public. Unfortunately, this complexity, and the difficulty in constructing valid measures of racial discrimination, may function to keep many investigators away from this important area of research. Certainly, an argument could be made by some to suggest that the present investigation has not measured racial discrimination in observable

terms (e.g., how many actual negative racial comments were made to respondents in each leisure activity). Yet, feeling uncomfortable, not accepted, or "unwelcome," can likely be associated with historic patterns of discrimination in some important way. These perceptions, when shared by large numbers of individuals within a society, probably point to the institutionalization of discrimination within that culture. In addition, the societal perspective offered by Foucault (1972) suggests that "imagined" or "misperceived" racism can only exist in a society where there is racism to begin with; where the individual has internalized the "gaze of others" and keeps self in line, and becomes his/her own "jailor."

In summary, the present study suggests three major conclusions: (a) middle-class African Americans and middle-class European Americans strongly agree on where African Americans are most likely to be welcomed and find acceptance during leisure and where they will not be welcomed or find acceptance, (b) middle-class African Americans feel much less welcome in most leisure activities than middle-class European Americans believe, and (c) middle-class African Americans and middle-class European Americans, when thinking of themselves as parents, believe many of the same leisure activities are important for children; however, European Americans rated many more leisure activities as very important when compared to African Americans.

Few would argue that racial discrimination continues to exist in the United States of America. Little is known, however, about how this racial discrimination has affected African American leisure behavior. The present investigation suggests that an understanding of the perceived racial discrimination associated with leisure activities and places may be important for explaining much African American leisure behavior. Since it is likely that adult leisure behavior is influenced by childhood leisure in many different ways, and parents are important in shaping their children's leisure choices and expectations, the information African American parents convey to their children about leisure activities becomes an area where there is much to be learned and gained from future research. If African American parents feel unwelcome in many leisure places and transfer this information to their children, it may be difficult to "break through this cycle" and influence children to choose leisure activities where little parental support has been shown. Race relations in the United States might be greatly benefited by first acknowledging the importance of racial discrimination in African American and European American leisure choices, and then seeking to address perceptions which have limited leisure participation in numerous activities. Hopefully, this investigation will stimulate future research to address the many leisure issues and concerns facing the United States in the 21st century.

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