



Conducting Research With Communities of Color

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This article presents the major challenges facing those who want to address the issues of race and ethnicity through research with communities of color; general methodological recommendations appropriate to many communities of color; and, specific research method recommendations for African American, American Indian, and Hispanic American communities.

Keywords African Americans, American Indians, diversity, ethnicity, Hispanic Americans, race, research methods

One of the growing and important areas of research in leisure studies and in resource management is the study of race and ethnicity in leisure and outdoor recreation. In a recent article, Floyd (1998) reviewed the reasons for this emphasis, as

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well as recommendations on where race and ethnicity research should be headed. A major reason for this increased emphasis on race and ethnicity is the continuing demographic change in the United States (Crispell 1992), change that indicates that future growth in numbers of participants in several leisure activities will be accounted for by increases in non-White populations (Dwyer 1994; Johnson 1999; Murdock et al. 1991). Another major reason fueling research on race and ethnicity in leisure and resource management is the increased attention paid to environmental justice issues (Bullard 1994), and the increased demand by people of color to participate in resource decisions that affect their communities (Jones 1998; Salazar 1996). A number of authors have emphasized the importance of addressing ethnic and cultural differences in the practice of land management (Baas et al. 1993; Jostad et al. 1996; Salazar 1996).

A confusing element of studying "race" and "ethnicity" is that they are often misunderstood terms. Floyd (1998, 11) states that this makes "it difficult to attribute inter group variation to race or ethnicity (or both) or socioeconomic factors." Floyd quotes Huchinson's (1988) distinctions between race and ethnicity: "Ethnicity is usually defined as membership in a subcultural group on the basis of country of origin, language, religion, or cultural traditions. . . . Race, on the other hand, is based on socially constructed definitions of physical appearances" (Floyd 1998, 11).

A greater demand for research focused on race and ethnicity is predicted. But there are major challenges to social science researchers regarding race and ethnicity (Floyd 1998). One challenge concerns a lack of appropriate theoretical structures to frame questions and the inability of researchers to operationalize race and ethnicity. Floyd's recent article (1998) gives an excellent discussion of alternative theoretical approaches. Floyd asserts that the fundamental question in the study of race, ethnicity and leisure is, "How do race and ethnicity affect the leisure choices and constraints of individuals and groups" (1998, 10). Two other major issues have plagued research with racial and ethnic minorities in recreation and natural resources. Researchers have often regarded racial or ethnic minorities as homogenous groups and then made generalizations to entire groups based on results from small, limited samples (Floyd 1998; Huchinson 1988). Another major issue is the fact that many past studies have considered minority participation as deficient when compared to the participation "norm" of White Americans (Floyd 1998).

The other major challenge to researchers is finding and using appropriate methodology. Floyd (1998) provided some insights and recommendations on how to do research on race and ethnicity, but there is still a need to explore methodological issues more fully. The purpose of this article is to present some of the major methodological challenges that face researchers who attempt to conduct research in and with communities of color and to provide recommendations applicable to research focused on communities of color, especially Hispanic Americans, African Americans, and American Indians.

Two major questions facing the leisure and natural resources research community are, "Who should be conducting research in and with communities of color?" and "Should only researchers of color be doing research in and with communities of color?" Cox (1990) and Stanfield (1994) have stated that many White researchers see this as a nonissue and believe that the research should be done by good researchers, regardless of color. Other researchers feel it is inappropriate for Whites to conduct research in communities of color because of the difficulty in understanding world views of communities different from one's own. The reality is that there are very few researchers of color active in leisure or natural resource

management research. Also, some researchers of color are hesitant to become involved in research with communities of color because they fear being labeled as a "minority researcher," accused of being biased, or accused by their community of "selling out" to the dominant White culture (Cox 1990).

There are advantages and disadvantages to both White and minority scholars conducting research on and within communities of color (Cox 1990). The advantages of White scholars doing such research include the ability to see things that may be taken for granted by members of the minority community (Anderson 1997). The disadvantages of Whites doing this research are their social distance from the culture being studied (language, social mores, histories, and traditions) and the strong distrust often felt by participants (Anderson 1997; Stanfield and Dennis 1993). The advantages of having a minority scholar conduct research with communities of color can include an enhanced ability to establish trust within the community (Anderson 1997). Minority scholars may also be able to generate different questions because of a deeper understanding of cultural issues at work (Collins 1991; Stanfield and Dennis 1993). But, minority researchers may still be viewed as part of the mainstream, and excluded in the same manner as White researchers (Collins 1991). Scholars must understand not only their own personal assumptions and biases that they bring into the setting, but also that of agencies and other social or political forces (McCracken 1988). Everything must be grounded in context. As an example, it would be naive to believe that some African Americans would have a positive or benign attitude toward White researchers in light of the revelations about the Tuskegee Studies of 50 years ago when African American men infected with the syphilis virus were left untreated as part of a government study (Centers for Disease Control 1997; Jones 1993).

Research with Hispanic American Communities

Research on Hispanic Americans is timely, and particularly critical in the areas of recreation, leisure, and natural resource management. Hispanics are expected to account for the largest share of population increases in the United States, particularly in the Southwest region, with heaviest concentrations in urban areas (Allen and Turner 1992). As this community of color increases, demonstrated mismatches between designed spaces for a majority Anglo population and preferences and uses of Hispanic communities come to the forefront. Some studies have demonstrated distinct differences between Anglos and Hispanic Americans in natural resource settings (Chavez et al. 1993). In one case (Chavez et al. 1995) these documented differences assisted in renovation guidelines for a picnic area used primarily by Hispanic Americans, with a fair degree of success evaluated in a postoccupancy evaluation (Chavez 1998). Such a change offers hope that studies on ethnic and racial differences will translate into a better informed resource management approach, along with an improved appreciation of why diversity is of value.

Research on Hispanic Americans requires familiarity with the distinct subcultures among Hispanic Americans, and the influence that interpersonal style has upon methodological choices. There are a number of distinct subcultures among Hispanic Americans, and because of this Hispanics cannot be viewed as a homogeneous group. Subcultures are reflected in part through birthplace differences. For example, research by Baas et al. (1993) found statistically significant differences in indicated importance of recreation setting attributes between survey respondents

born in the United States and those born in Mexico. Many of the differences between ethnic groups in reported environmental concerns were explained by length of residence in the United States and age of arrival in the United States (Caro and Ewert 1995). Lynch (1993) points out the importance of degree of acculturation in understanding the link between ethnicity and views of the land.

Successful queries into the Hispanic American community should include the opportunity for participants to select their own ethnic identity from a diverse range of listings, such as Hispanic American, Central American, Mexican American, Latino, or Chicano, or to make such inquiries in an open-ended response form. It is important to understand languages read and understood within a population of interest, given the dramatic impact that language choices have upon interaction and quality of research outcomes. Here again, place of birth and degree of acculturation are important considerations, as well as geographic variation within the United States, including urban and rural distinctions. Fortunately, repeated on-site surveys used in recreation settings (Chavez et al. 1995) have shown that having Spanish and English versions available is sufficient, presuming that the Spanish translation is a good one. In defining "good," Marin and Marin (1991) recommend that survey instruments are checked for cultural equivalence through double translation or back-translation while checking for context and meanings. Some caution must be exercised, however, since literacy in a spoken language may not be paired with literacy of the written language. In such cases, allowing children, who have perhaps had more exposure to the written language, to translate may assist with administration of written surveys. The use of bilingual or multilingual field researchers is also of great assistance toward this end. Finally, growing inquiries into identity suggest the adoption of a measure of degree of identification with the ethnic group of choice, in order to avoid assigning too much emphasis on ethnicity for individuals who would not place their own ethnicity as key in their sense of self (Tierney 1995).

Allocentrism (or collectivism) and "simpatia" are central values of the Hispanic culture. Both of these values reflect the importance of friendly interpersonal interactions, imbedded with dignity and respect for the other (Marin and Marin 1991). Such preferences can be played out in pleasant interpersonal exchanges in the field, including greetings, introductions, and handshakes. These exchanges may run counter to a researcher's training focused on maintaining objectivity and professionalism. Studies where these interpersonal face-to-face exchanges have been successful are numerous (Chavez et al. 1993, 1995; Caro and Ewert 1995). While face-to-face surveys and interviews have demonstrated satisfactory response rates among the recreating Hispanic population (Chavez et al. 1995; Absher and Winter 1997), mailed surveys have been met with less than satisfactory results (Taylor and Winter 1995). Focus groups are an alternative research method that has been successful among this population (Winter et al. 1998).

At this point a cautionary note is in order. Marin and Marin (1991) point out that because of the values of allocentrism and "simpatia," social desirability response bias may increase. Included in this would be an avoidance of the downside or negative experiences being reported, as well as an avoidance of reporting of conflict and other unpleasant issues. Nevertheless, with care and awareness of this potential pitfall, candor and an honest appraisal of visitor experiences and opinions can be obtained. Overall, it is important to adopt an understanding, appreciation, and respect for the Hispanic community into one's research choices and approaches. Methods may have to be adapted to fit the Hispanic community, and in some cases

may be improved by including community members in the planning, collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data (Sieber and Sorenson 1992).

Conducting Research with African American Communities

Researchers in the African American community often face even more challenges than those working in other communities of color. Historically, African Americans have often been the subjects of research studies without their consent, yet few of these studies yielded benefits to this racial group (Centers for Disease Control 1997; Jones 1993). Some African American communities and community members believe they will continue to be exploited by researchers. Although the Tuskegee experiment serves as a constant reminder of experimentation without consent, there are other examples of other research-related atrocities (Centers for Disease Control 1997; Dula 1997; Gamble 1993; Jones 1993). Even if the research is reasonable, it may be met with significant distrust because of the past relationship between this minority group and the research profession (Gamble 1993).

Context is very important. Researchers need to be aware of their own personal biases, assumptions, and their personal understanding of the topic of research, as well as a history of institutional racism that is perceived by many members of the African American community. An example of how this perceived institutional racism issue may play out in research is the low return rate often obtained in mailed questionnaires in the African American community (Pottick and Lerman 1991). Pottick and Lerman state that official mail that asks for information about the personal life of a member of the African American community is viewed with skepticism because of a history of that information being used to the detriment of the quality of life of community members. Research techniques such as telephone surveys and face-to-face interviews may be met with the same level of skepticism and suspicion. Stanfield and Dennis (1993) assert that due to the many constraints imposed when researching racial groups, the use of qualitative methods can best provide an in-depth understanding of the social phenomena in question. Through the use of symbolic interactionism or ethnographic approaches, the researcher can often obtain more depth in understanding this racial group.

The second major step is establishing credibility and rapport within the community (Vaz 1997). This is especially true for a White scholar, but is also true for researchers of color. The participants, and others in the community (e.g., community leaders), must be informed of why the research is being done and how the data will be used. Credibility can be enhanced by giving meaningful roles to participants during the research process and by establishing a climate of openness, respect, and shared information. The researcher can establish legitimacy by working through traditional gatekeepers in the community, the church, education, and business leaders (Vaz 1997). If these gatekeepers accept the legitimacy of the research (and the scholar), they can make the introductions necessary for the researcher to make the contacts for collecting data.

Some research approaches that have been successful in the African American community are those whose foundations are within the oral tradition (Stanfield 1994). These include participant observation, personal interviews, historical reviews, and focus groups (Collins 1991; Stanfield 1994). Participant observation provides an opportunity for the researcher to hear, see, and experience reality as the participants do by spending time in the setting. One of the authors of this paper has combined

the efforts of participant observation with establishing credibility within the community by volunteering at a local community school, a nature center, and a park. Personal interviews can also be an effective approach because they help the researcher establish a rapport with the community and community members. These in-depth interviews can allow the researcher to more fully understand motives and values along with behavior (Hertz 1997; McCracken 1988). For example, Vaz (1997) asserts that during this exchange it is the "side-chats" that take place outside the parameters of the "official interview questions" that provide the most insight. Consequently, the researcher has to be flexible enough in the research protocol to allow this data to be considered part of the study. In addition, focus groups have been successfully applied with groups of African American college students (Blahna and Black 1993) and with members of an African American church group (Winter et al. 1998).

Conducting Research with American Indian Communities

American Indian nations vary considerably both culturally and in situation, as do the individual communities within each nation. No one research strategy will consistently produce results. However, there are a number of research strategies that have been recommended in the literature (McDonald and McAvoy 1997; Mihesuah 1993). The researcher will have to gain approval from both the legal tribal authority (tribal council) and from the local cultural committees and authorities (e.g., the elders council). Many American Indian communities have now adopted formal research application processes, and some may require permits to conduct social science research in that community or reservation (Nason 1997).

Context is particularly important in American Indian communities. The researcher must be aware of the historical relationships the community has had with neighboring non-American Indian communities, with the state, provincial, and federal governments (particularly if an agency is funding the study), and with the university. The political climate, both on the reservation and off, is important. Many American Indians believe that previous researchers have virtually stolen knowledge, traditions, and artifacts, and then often misinterpreted cultural traditions (Wax 1991). There is often distrust for state and federal agencies and their representatives because of a history of perceived exploitation (Mihesuah 1993; Wax 1991). Finally, the researcher should expect resistance due to past negative experiences with hobbyists, "new agers," "wannabes," and other pseudo-researchers (Peacock 1997).

Reciprocity is expected in most American Indian communities (Wax 1991) and is based on lengthy traditions. Payment for knowledge, especially knowledge based on experience, has always been a part of the culture. Fair return can take the form of money, but may involve gifts, favors, or the inclusion of cooperating tribal members as coauthors of reports and articles resulting from the research.

Relationships are particularly important in American Indian communities (Deloria 1991). Kin relationships are often the way that position within a community is established. The researchers will often have to explain, or have a tribal sponsor explain, how they fit into the community, who they know, who trusts and sponsors the researchers. The researcher has to be introduced to the community by a community member, in reality a process of having a trusted community member vouch for the integrity of the researcher. The researcher has to be seen as someone who is interested and committed enough to spend the time in the community neces-

sary to be viewed as someone who actually cares about truly understanding that community. This is often done by spending time in the community, attending events, and being introduced to different social and family groups.

Methods used for the study will be best accepted if they reflect the traditional epistemology of American Indians. Traditionally, the transmission of knowledge in these cultures has occurred experientially and orally, usually through a series of stages based on the assessment of readiness by the teacher. Qualitative and participatory methods in the social sciences best mirror American Indian traditional means of communicating knowledge (Conti 1997). The few outdoor recreation studies that have been completed with American Indian communities offer some guidance on the specific research methods that have been successful. The studies that have achieved successful response rates all used personal, semistructured interviews (McDonald and McAvoy 1997). Focus groups have also been employed successfully in some studies. They seem to be most effective when respondents are brought together on a specific, tangible topic (Dunn and Feather 1998). Mailed surveys have usually not been a successful approach with this population. Zivot (1979) tried this approach in a study of native communities in northern Canada and received a zero response rate.

Analysis of data in studies focused on American Indians should be done with community members, and subsequent results should be reviewed by and shared with the local community. Some communities may require that any publication arising from research in that community be reviewed by a tribal cultural committee for accuracy. The issues of cultural misinterpretation and community harm are real concerns of American Indian communities, grounded more often than not in past experience (Deloria 1991; Wax 1991). The issue is not just of community harm, though it is paramount. But the issue is also that of missing the point because of the ethnocentric blinders of the researcher and the epistemological boundaries of Western science. A cooperative approach to data analysis, interpretation, and dissemination can help alleviate these problems.

Conclusion

Conducting research in and with communities of another culture can be challenging. Careful selection of methodological approaches is a critical step. Such research requires considerable time, both on-site and in preparation before the data collection begins. The prime focus of the time spent should be on the development of a trusting relationship with the community as a whole and on subsequent trusting relationships with the individuals being asked to share their knowledge and experiences. If the research is going to be conducted with persons of color, but at a natural resources site outside the community, the researcher still needs to develop working relationships with community members. People in the community need to know who the person is before they will trust them with information about their lives. This will take time, and real evidence of a wish to live in both worlds (Deloria 1991). Humility and generosity should be evident in all of the actions of the researcher while involved in research with communities of color.

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been successfully used by the authors of this paper when conducting research in ethnic/racial minority populations. These researchers have found that the qualitative approach has been quite successful in the African American, American Indian, and Hispanic communities,

and that modifications to a quantitative approach are needed for Hispanic communities when utilized. These approaches have been successful both in their applicability to these populations and in their ability to address specific research questions.

Where do we go from here? There is no simple answer on the best way of doing research that focuses on race, ethnicity, leisure, and natural resources. But there are issues that need to be addressed by the research community. These include more attention to the diversity of research team members, more researchers to address these issues, and the need for research and academic communities to move toward more culturally sensitive and inclusive forms of methodologies and strategies. The real issues concerning cross-cultural understanding, especially if multiple languages are involved, may be best resolved by using a coresearcher from the community being studied. This cooperative approach can often help solve the challenges inherent in studying a culture different from one's own, and may help reduce resistance stemming from negative histories of research.

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