Urban Parks, Critical Race Theory, and Race Equity in the U.S.

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Introduction

Leisure studies scholars have established that racial and ethnic minorities tend to visit parks in proportionately smaller numbers than do White Americans (Krymkowski, Manning, & Valliere, 2014). Leisure studies scholars often cite marginality, subculture, or discrimination hypotheses to explain racial minorities' park usage patterns and preferences. These scholars have increasingly evoked intersectional approaches by adding sociodemographic variables to develop a richer understanding of differences in park usage among minority park users. Despite the evolving contributions of such studies, scholars have neglected to address why differences matter, and how discourse about race operates within leisure research (Gómez, 2008). I contend that current explanations used by leisure studies scholars conceal the effects of social inequalities on minority park usage. Usage disparities may be symptomatic of broader political struggles regarding social positions on a racial hierarchy (Byrne, 2012). I argue for a shift from individual level cultural explanations to perspectives that consider the role of structural factors in producing inequitable park usage among minorities, specifically among African Americans. Edwin Gómez, a leisure scholar, identifies the need to "deconstruct" the historical role of "whiteness" and its impact on recreation (2008). Per his suggestion, I apply Critical Race Theory concepts to begin exploring history and whiteness in public parks (Gómez, 2008). Critical Race Theory is broadly concerned with investigating the "relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado, Stefancic, & Harris, 2017, p. 2). In this paper, I highlight the evolution of leisure studies race and racism research and the shortcomings of the literature. Then I build on this literature by suggesting potential lines of further inquiry regarding how structural, intentional, and temporal forms of racism within the park system shapes park usage. I conclude with a reflection on urban parks potential to connect people from different backgrounds.

The term "park" is typically defined as a publicly owned and operated green spaces devoted to recreation (Harnik, Martin, & Treat, 2016). While my study focuses on urban parks, it is difficult to get data on just urban parks. This difficulty may result from the leisure studies field conventions, which

combine and apply data from both urban and wild parks in a single analysis. Perhaps this convention evolved because government agencies often manage sites in both urban and wild areas and collect data from all sites simultaneously. For example, the National Park Service operates parks in wild areas, such as Glacier National Park in Montana, and in urban regions, such as Roger Williams National Memorial in Providence, Rhode Island. Consequently, the National Park Service data combine urban and rural parks. Contrary to what people may assume, just because a park is in a metropolitan area does not mean that it is not wild; it means that it is not remote. For example, Mississippi Gorge Regional Park in south Minneapolis, an urban area, offers hiking in a wild wooded river gorge.

Public parks are more than publicly owned green spaces; they are products of our society, democratic ideals, and identities. Shrinagesh & Markandey, in a study on public parks in Hyderabad, India, elaborate on the notion of parks as reflective of societal norms by defining characteristics of public spaces (Shrinagesh & Markandey, 2016). They say, a park "[promotes] human contact and social activities, is safe, welcoming, and accommodating to all users, has design and architectural features that are visually interesting, promotes community involvement, reflects the local culture or history, relates well to bordering uses, is well maintained, has a unique or special character" (Shrinagesh & Markandey, 2016, p. 2). The essence of the Shrinagesh & Markandey (2016) definition is that since parks have a public dimension, they must be a product of the place where they are located. If the culture and the history of that place actively excludes a certain portion of the population, through legal or extralegal means, the public space may also reflect that exclusion. Therefore, parks could also contradict this "public" notion in their design, administration, and function. Due to these factors, we should not consider parks to be neutral. An objective of this paper is to discuss in greater detail why parks are not neutral.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

My research is grounded in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I began researching leisure studies literature to better understand how city minority residents experience the Minneapolis park system. In many ways, Minnesota calls attention to the best and worst of the United States. On the one hand, Minnesota is a place of opportunity. The state has had a strong economy driven by innovation that attracts and retains an educated workforce. Forbes ranked Minnesota first in the nation for quality of life and thirteenth for the "Best States to do Business" (Forbes, 2018). Jobs are abundant in the urban economic center of the state; Target, U.S. Bancorp, General Mills, 3M, and Medtronic are headquartered in the Twin Cities (Minnesota Compass, 2018). 92.6 % of adults in Minnesota have completed at least a high school education (QuickFacts, 2018), ranking the state 3rd in highest educational attainment (Forbes, 2018).

Although the metro area is known for its bitter winters, leisure options are plentiful. The Minneapolis park system has been ranked the best in the nation by The Trust for Public Land's ParkScore Index every year from 2013 to 2017. Also known as the City of Lakes, 14.9% of Minneapolis' 34,543 acres of land is parkland (Harnik et al., 2016, p. 5) that encircle the city's thirteen lakes, adjoin the river's edge, and preserves historically or ecologically significant areas. The city includes a portion of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, a 72-mile National Park along the river. Parks are abundant; there are 189 parks in Minneapolis. This amounts to 4.6 parks per 10,000 residents (Harnik et al., 2016, p. 12). The parks are accessible; 95% of Minneapolis' population has walkable park access -- defined as the ability to reach a publicly owned park within a half-mile walk (Harnik et al., 2016, p. 13). The parks are highly visited. One of the city's 37 regional parks, the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park, is among one of the most visited city parks in the nation, with 5,476,400 visitors annually (Harnik et al., 2016, p. 30).

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board is a democratically elected governing body over the city's park system. Every four years Minneapolis voters elect nine commissioners: one from each of the six park districts, and three that serve at-large. The Board divides the parks into two categories: regional parks and neighborhood parks. Regional parks draw visitors from outside of Minneapolis and receive funding from the state and public agencies to develop and maintain park amenities. Minneapolis' 160 smaller neighborhood parks are scattered across the city; serve mostly neighborhood residents; and rely on local tax dollars (Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board: Parks & Lakes, 2018). Minneapolis ranks third in spending on parks and recreation per resident; Seattle, WA, ranks first and San Francisco, CA, is second. In 2016 Minneapolis spent $90,488,104 on parks and recreation, $186 operating spending per resident, $36 in capital spending per resident, for a total of $222 per resident (Harnik et al., 2016, p. 16).

On the other hand, Minnesota is a land of exclusion. Despite never having anti-miscegenation or Jim Crow laws on the books, the state is ranked second worst in racial disparities nationally according to a study done by 24/7 Wallstreet (Sauter, 2018). Black Minnesotans makeups 6.2% and Whites make up 85.0% of the 5.5 million total Minnesotans according to the U.S. Census Bureau 2016 population estimates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The median income of a Black household is $30,306 compared to $66,979 of a White household (Sauter, 2018). The unemployment rate for Black Minnesotans (8.8%) is more than twice the rate of White Minnesotans (3.0%). Black Minnesotans' homeownership rate (21.7%) is over three times lower than White Minnesotans' rate (76.5%) (Minnesota Compass (2), 2018). Worse yet, Black Minnesotans are more likely to die from premature death than any other racial or ethnic group in the state besides American Indians (Minnesota Department of Health, 2015). Although Blacks account for 6.2% of the Twin Cities metropolitan area population; they only make up less than 3 percent of the regional park and trail users (Peterson, 2016). Minnesota may seem full of opportunity, but racial disparities are significant and permeate in our state's major institutions, disadvantaging our state's fastest growing population, racial and ethnic minorities (Minnesota Compass (2), 2018).

Unaddressed and persistent historical experiences of oppression and exclusion, known as structural racism, are the source of these disparities.

African American Park Users

In this paper, I focus on the African American park user, because the leisure studies research has established that this group has the lowest usage rates nationally and overtime (Byrne, 2012; Erickson, Johnson, & Kivel, 2009; Floyd, Shinew, Mcguire, & Noe, 1994; Gobster, 2002; Gómez, 2008; Ho, Sasidharan, Elmendorf, Willits, Graefe, & Godbey, 2005; Krymkowski et al., 2014; Sasidharan, Willits & Godbey, 2005; Taylor, Grandjean, & Gramann, 2011; and Washburne, 1978). Today's structural racism evolved from dynamic systems in which Whites targeted minority groups uniquely at different points in time to serve a purpose (Delgado et al., 2017). Patterns established from 300 years of racism, beginning with African slavery to Jim Crow to mass incarceration, are well documented, widespread, and formative in the design of urban spaces. Although Minnesota never adopted Jim Crow laws, African Americans were targets of segregation through extralegal customs, such as exclusionary housing practices (Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, 2015). Focusing on the Black community also allows me to isolate the complex ways that structural racism impacts one minority group within a specific government agency over time.

Scholars of U.S. racial politics and Critical Race Theory may be skeptical of my focus on African American park usage; they may argue that it reinforces an oversimplified version of racism, known as the Black-White binary. According to Delgado, Stefancic, and Harris (2017), people in the U.S. sometimes use "race" to mean African American and "racism" to suggest Whites subordinating Blacks (p. 67). Racism uniquely impacts every racial and ethnic group and intersects with sociodemographic dimensions, such as gender, class, and education. The work by Solórzano & Yosso (2002), education and Critical Race Theory scholars, encourage shifting discussions of "race and racism from a Black-White discourse to one that includes multiple faces, voices, and experiences" (p. 24). Delgado et al. add that

because of the U.S. Black-White racial paradigm, non-Black minority groups must continuously compare their treatment to African Americans to validate their experiences with racism (2017). It is true that the Black-White binary obscures the breadth of people affected by systemic racism, which is not my intention. The literature has found that most minority groups have been impacted by systemic racism in parks nationally and locally. Although my focus is on one group, the concepts explored have implications for the broader domain of eliminating systemic racism in public institutions.

The focus on the Black population in Minneapolis is appropriate considering that public awareness of racial bias against African Americans in government agencies was heightened in the wake of the Jamar Clark and Philando Castile shootings in 2015 and 2016 respectively. In addition, local activist groups, such as Parks and Power and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), have become powerful forces for social change regarding the resistance of dominant constructions of minority groups, in particular of African Americans. These groups have been critical in creating a platform for fundamental policy changes at the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. A controversial event at the Park Board meeting on May 11, 2016, brought racial disparities within the agency into the public arena and created pressure for the board to work on a resolution. At the meeting, Nekima Levy-Pounds, the then president of the Minneapolis chapter of the NAACP requested to speak outside of the public comment period. Liz Wielinski, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board President at the moment, had an angry outburst and referred to Levy-Pounds as a "rude, interrupting adult" (Brandt, 2016). Levy-Pounds responded by asking Wielinski to not talk to her "like a slave" (Brandt, 2016). Meeting attendees caught this exchange on video that went viral on social media and became a feature story on the local news. Wielinski resigned from her position as board chair several weeks later.

One of the critical challenges for Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board has been how to create an equitable organization. In 2016 Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board responded to local advocate groups' protests and adopted racial equity policies. Key issues surrounded how Minneapolis parks

serving minority residents received unequal infrastructure investments. The Park Board, having recognized an upcoming budget gap to maintain infrastructure, completed an evaluation of park infrastructure titled, "Closing the Gap." In this study, the agency discovered that the budget gap was notably greater in lower income minority neighborhoods than in higher income White neighborhoods, which demonstrated the need to undertake extensive systematic changes. Additionally, the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council, a regional planning agency, concerned over low park usage by communities of color, has dictated that funding recipients, including Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, dedicate 5 percent of funds on outreach to minority communities. The Park Board has drafted a Racial Equity Action Plan ("2017-2018 Racial Equity Action Plan," 2016), an agency-wide strategy to address equity issues, to confront organizational bias. After the Board released the plan in 2017, the NAACP called for a boycott of Minneapolis Park and Recreation stating concerns regarding equitable treatment of employees of color in hiring, promotions, and discipline. Park Board claims to have made great advancements. Jason Sole, Minneapolis NAACP President and criminal justice professor, insisted "We want them to repair the harm they've done and have a true racial equity plan" (Mahamud, 2017).

Literature Review

Leisure studies researchers have been interested in how race affects park usage for over 50 years. In 1962, the Outdoor Recreation Resources and Review Commission (ORRRC) completed their first studies on the topic. These studies identified and cataloged differences in outdoor recreation activities and participation between White and Black park users (Shinew, Stodolska, Floyd, Hibbler, Allison, Johnson, & Santos, 2006). During the civil rights movement, research on race and parks expanded along with racial turmoil over segregated recreation spaces and inequities in recreation options (Krymkowski et al., 2014). Washburne's (1978) seminal article on Black "under-participation" in wildland recreation initiated the search for explanations for park usage disparities by introducing the Marginality hypothesis (Gómez, 2008). During the 1990s, leisure studies scholars explored alternative explanations and

expanded project scopes to include ethnically diverse samples, mostly focused on the growing Latino population (Gómez, 2008). Studies focused on intra- and inter-group differences (Gómez, 2008). By the 2000s, leisure studies scholars increasingly expanded to intersectional approaches by adding sociodemographic variables to develop a richer understanding of differences in patterns and preferences among minority park users. The most common justification in recent studies on this topic is the U.S. demographic shift; racial and ethnic minorities are growing at a faster rate than the current White majority (Chavez & Olson, 2008; Gómez, 2008; Ho et al., 2005; Sasidharan et al. 2005; Shinew et al. 2006).

The debate around why these differences occur continues in the literature today. Leisure studies researchers broadly document racial and ethnic differences in recreation preferences and participation patterns (Shinew et al., 2006) and seek to explain these differences using various hypotheses (Gómez, 2008). From 1962 when the ORRRC first published on this topic until today, one pattern remains consistent: racial and ethnic minorities use parks at lower rates than Whites (Krymkowski et al., 2014). Black park users have the lowest usage rates among all U.S. park visitors (Floyd et al., 1994; Ho et al., 2005; Krymkowski et al., 2014; Taylor et al. 2011; Washburne, 1978). Most of the leisure studies investigations that I reviewed corroborated this pattern consistently over time and in multiple contexts including different regions in the U.S. and rural and urban parks (Byrne, 2012; Floyd et al., 1994; Gobster, 2002; Gómez, 2008; Ho et al., 2005; Sasidharan et al., 2005; Taylor et al., 2011; Washburne, 1978). The Comprehensive Survey of the American Public, a national survey conducted for the National Park Service in 2000 by Northern Arizona University and then repeated in 2008 and 2009 by Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center, revealed that usage differences by racial and ethnic minority populations did not change in almost a decade on the national level; see Table 1 (Taylor et al. 2011). White Americans constituted 83% of park users in the survey of 2000 and 78% of park users in the survey of 2008-2009. In these surveys, white respondents accounted for 74% and 70% of the sample,

respectively. African Americans park users were the most "under-represented" user group in both

surveys. Black respondents accounted for 11% of the sample in 2000 and 12% in 2008-2009, but only 4%

and 7% of the park users respectively (Taylor et al., 2011). Covering urban areas in the north and south

of the U.S., Sasidharan et al. (2005) reaffirm lower participation rates in an investigation on similarities

and differences in outdoor recreation characteristics among six population subgroups (Hispanics,

Chinese, Japanese, Korean, African American, and White) in Philadelphia and Atlanta. The study found

that 70% of respondents from every ethnic group except African Americans, visited an urban park on at

least one occasion in the last 12 months (Sasidharan et al., 2005). Only 61% of African American

respondents visited urban parks at the same frequency (Sasidharan et al., 2005). In the Midwest,

Metropolitan Council, the Twin Cities' regional planning agency, surveyed 5459 respondents for the

2016 Regional Parks System Visitor Study Report to create reference points for the regional park and

trail visitor experiences. The Metropolitan Council found that Whites visit parks almost two times more

often than minority respondents, 60 visits per year for Whites and 36 visits for minorities (ISG, 2016).

Race/Ethnicity	2000 All	2000 Visitors	Diff.	2008-2009 All	2008-2009 Visitors	Diff.
White, non-Hispanic	74%	83%	+9	70%	78%	+8
Hispanic, any race	12%	10%	-2	13%	9%	-4
African American	11%	4%	-7	12%	7%	-5
Asian	2%	2%	0	3%	3%	0
American Indian /Alaskan	<1%	<1%	0	2%	1%	-1
Weighted N	3,284	1,058	--	2,582	1,205	--

Table 1: Percent Distribution across Race/Ethnicity, All Respondents vs. Visitors, by Year (Taylor et al., 2011, p. 9)

One of the most-studied aspects of leisure and recreation patterns among racial and ethnic

groups is park activity preferences. Studies aim at supporting policies and programs that meet the needs

of individual racial and ethnic groups; thereby developing a more equitable strategy to invest in park

infrastructure and programs. Washburne (1978) analyzed data collected in 1969 by the California

Department of Parks and Recreation, which included 1193 Black respondents and 838 White respondents living in urban areas. He found that Black respondents reported participating more frequently than White respondents in the following activities: fishing, hunting, and crabbing; playing basketball; attending spectator sports events; going to organizations, community, and neighborhood activities. Whites more frequently visited regional or remote parks; camped; walked, hiked, and went climbing (Washburne, 1978). Gobster's (2002) study based on survey data in Chicago's Lincoln Park, like many studies in the 2000s, expanded from focusing on Black-White comparisons to include multiple racial and ethnic groups. Although his Lincoln Park study mostly confirmed that group variation existed in activity patterns, he also noted that common activities took place in the park regardless of race or ethnicity. Those activities included: walking; swimming or sunning at the beaches; picnicking and barbecuing; going to the zoo; sitting and relaxing; and bicycling (Gobster, 2002). Variation among the groups revealed that Whites participated more in active-individual activities, such as walking, bicycling, jogging, and walking their dog (Gobster, 2002). Racial and ethnic minorities favored passive activities, such as picnicking, sightseeing, socializing, and attending festivals and parties (Gobster, 2002). Per the Metropolitan Council's 2016 visitor study, walking, hiking, and biking were the most popular activities at the parks. However, minority respondents were significantly more likely to participate in fishing, special events and picnicking activities than Whites (ISG, 2016). Minority preferred activities constituted a small percentage of the overall activities in the parks. Fishing accounted for 4% of the park activity, special events 3%, and picnicking 6%, while hiking accounted for 37% of park activity.

In explaining differences in park usage patterns and preferences by race and ethnicity, leisure studies scholars have considered three main hypotheses: Marginality, Subcultural, and Discrimination. I illustrate these different hypotheses through an example using the following established pattern: Black park users are more likely to visit parks in groups and Whites are more likely to visit parks alone or with one other person (Gobster, 2002; Ho et al., 2005; Sasidharan et al., 2005). In Washburne's (1978)

influential study exploring Black "non-participation" in wildland recreation, first established marginality

explanations for Black low park usage rates (Gómez, 2008). Per the marginality hypothesis Blacks do not

use parks because of poverty and other economic barriers associated with race (Washburne, 1978).

Leisure studies scholars using this hypothesis to explain the example may argue that Blacks' are less

likely to have backyards due to a lower socioeconomic status. Therefore, the Black population host

picnics and larger family events in parks resulting in Blacks visiting parks in groups (Sasidharan et al.,

2005). Proponents of the subcultural hypothesis claim that outdoor recreation behaviors are based on

an individual's cultural values. Differences in pattern and preferences for certain activities are because

Blacks and ethnic minorities have cultural values different from the majority White population

(Krymkowski et al., 2014). According to the Subculture hypothesis, another plausible explanation for the

Black population's preference could be that group food-related activities outwardly reinforce ethnic

identity (Sasidharan et al., 2005). Finally, discrimination hypothesis focuses on racism and interracial

relations as the main factors for obstructing minority groups participation. West (1989) introduced

discrimination theory in a 1989 article on urban regional parks and Black population that examined

subculture, marginality, and interracial relations in park use in the Detroit metropolitan area. Scholars

applying the discrimination theory would explain that Black park users tend to travel in groups because

they associate safety to being with others (Sasidharan et al., 2005).

Over the 50 years of research, studies, and countless data points collected, park usage

disparities by race and ethnicity remain consistent. These studies continue to evolve and deepen our

understanding of disparities in usage patterns and preferences. But does better knowledge lead to

better management in parks, as proposed by Sasidharan (2005)? It is not clear why differences matter,

as pointed out by Gómez (2008), or if knowing them has made a difference. The National Park Service

comprehensive visitor survey reveals that park usage patterns have not changed even considering a

decade of research and equity initiatives (Taylor et al., 2011). In the next section, I discuss three

shortcomings of the leisure studies literature on outdoor recreation by race and ethnicity that I have identified as critical to better understand the problem of park usage disparities.

Key Shortcomings

How a public problem is constructed has real consequences, as the construction process defines how decision-makers assign responsibility and conceive strategies to solve the problem or overlook it (Gusfield, 1981). Therefore, how race and ethnicity are characterized and operate within leisure research could influence how park managers resolve park usage disparities among residents. In this section, I highlight key shortcomings regarding the construction of the park usage disparities issue as currently employed in much of the leisure studies literature. These shortcomings include: being uncritical about racial and ethnic formations; assuming parks function democratically; and de-historicizing the analysis of processes that produce racialized spaces.

Uncritical about racial and ethnic formations

A core shortcoming highlighted by Gómez, leisure scholar, and Byrne, Geography researcher, is that leisure studies researchers tend to be uncritical about racial and ethnic formations, especially regarding whiteness (Byrne, 2012 & Gómez, 2008). Leisure studies research that treats race as a static or objective category lends to the conclusion that race causes "particular behaviors" (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010, p. S33). For example, Gobster (2002) concluded that Whites prefer isolated natural areas, Blacks prefer to play sports. Byrne explains that leisure studies treatment of race and ethnicity as fixed is limiting in that it "uncritically naturalizes and essentializes ethno-racial formations" (Byrne, 2012, p. 596). Ford & Airhihenbuwa corroborates Byrne's criticism by asserting that a field's theoretical and methodological convention treating race as a population characteristic masks the complex underlying racial stratification at work when accessing services (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). Gobster's (2002) conclusion, which has support in the literature (Washburne, 1978), gives the impression that African

Americans have a "widespread aversion" to outdoor recreation (Krymkowski et al., 2014). Bryan

Stevenson, Founder and Director of the Equal Justice Initiative, implies that using static racial categories

in the research design is intentionally harmful to minority communities. He argues that racial difference

is often evoked to justify behaviors behind discriminatory policies that in our present

political/social/cultural climate would otherwise be unjustifiable (McWilliams, 2018).

Criticisms of essentialized identities are relevant to question ideas of race leading to fixed and

static park patterns and to call attention to potential structural issues within the park system.

Associating behaviors to seemingly inherent racial categories may conceal the political struggles related

to accessing the park dependent on a user's position on the racial hierarchy. Per Loewen's (2005)

analysis about persistent residential segregation in his monograph *Sundown Towns*; it is possible that

African Americans happen to not like remote natural settings, "but it is more likely that formal or

informal policies of exclusion maintained the whiteness of the place" (423). Shifting from static concepts

of race to structural factors is needed because current explanations "place the onus of culture on the

individual…are likely to lead to individual-centered interventions at the expense of addressing the

structural contexts that reproduce social and economic inequities," according to Viruell-Fuentes,

Miranda, Abdulrahim (2012). In other words, implying that race leads to fixed park usage patterns places

the responsibility to change on the park user; not the park system. This implication could lead to

ineffective solutions. Take for example the following park usage pattern established in leisure studies

literature: Black park users tend to participate in festivals (Gobster, 2002). National Recreation and Park

Association launched an initiative called Parks for Inclusion to improve access to parks for vulnerable

individuals and families, including racial and ethnic minorities (Park and Recreation Inclusion Report,

2018). The guide suggests that park managers increase minority park access by hosting holiday

commemorations or heritage festivals for the respective racial or ethnic communities (Park and

Recreation Inclusion Report, 2018). The guide does not mention current park disparities or

discrimination and does not suggest addressing underlying structural issues that may be hindering everyday park usage.

In criticism of race formation in leisure studies literature, one controversial issue has been how Whiteness operates. In a gap analysis, Gómez contends that the "hegemonic leisure mindset is an Anglo male perspective" (Gómez, 2008). This suggests that researchers who take this perspective normalize White park usage. For example, in Washburne's (1978) article, he recounts park usage patterns by race; then the researcher establishes White participation as normal when he questions: "how many Blacks engaged in predominately White activities?" (p. 187). Notice that Washburne does not ask, how many Whites participated in predominately Black activities? Gómez argues for a need to focus on whiteness in addition to discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities as to not reproduce racist discourse in the literature on parks (Gómez 80). Following Gómez's advice would involve challenging categorical concepts of race and explicitly acknowledging issues of racism (Gómez 80).

Assumption that Parks Function Democratically

Leisure studies scholars often consider that park systems function democratically (Krymkowski et al., 2014; O'Brien & Ngarũiya Njambi, 2012; Sasidharan et al., 2005; Washburne, 1978; Young, 2009); however, few scholars have investigated this assumption (O'Brien, 2007; O'Brien & Ngarũiya Njambi, 2012). Some leisure researchers view parks as innately democratic. For instance, Krymkowski et al. (2014) question if racial and ethnic disparities in park usage "may violate the fundamental democratic character of these sites" (p. 35). Other researchers stress park experiences as cultural expressions of national belonging. As an illustration, O'Brien & Ngarũiya Njambi (2012) reflect on the field's claims that parks are "repositories and expressions of cultural ideals that illustrate U.S. Americans to be unified people…defined by democracy in the form of public ownership and collective wisdom" (p. 15). Young (2009) likens visiting a park to a deep cultural experience that reinforces a national sense of belonging. Others attribute the democratic nature to parks being publicly owned resources available to citizens

(Sasidharan et al., 2005). Washburne (1978) emphasizes parks as a democratic right when he states: "Like other important elements of American culture, access to wildland resources for outdoor recreation has always been regarded as one of the cherished rights of citizenship, available to all willing to take advantage of the opportunity" (p. 175).

Public affairs discussions of democracy and public institutions could shed light on why these assumptions regarding democracy in parks are problematic. In principle, parks are democratic because they are public spaces open and accessible to everyone and were established in a democracy. Public affairs scholars often reference Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* to assert that institutions developed alongside democratic values and are, therefore, democratic (Kallman & Clark, 2016). Where this argument becomes problematic, however, is on the democratic principle of universal equality (Dobkin Hall, 2010). Whereas some are convinced that the right to democracy signifies inclusion, others maintain that we've exaggerated the inclusivity of "we the people."

Historically, institutions within the U.S. have been involved in the exclusion of African Americans at various levels (Dobkin Hall, 2010). Previous policies and institutional bias in government agencies have segregated and often devastated diverse communities. The City of Minneapolis, like most major US cities established in the twentieth century, have seen "political decisions, economic interests, and patterns of investment that promoted segregation" by class and race per Izenberg and Fullilove (2016, p. 294). For example, from 1910 to 1968, Penny Peterson and her research team at Augsburg College found over 30,000 racially restrictive deeds -- racial covenants – in Minneapolis (Delegard & Ehrman-Solberg, 2017). These covenants prevented racial and ethnic minorities from purchasing homes in certain neighborhoods. When Peterson et al. mapped the restrictive deeds, they revealed how covenants barred minority populations from living by the "most desirable green spaces in Minneapolis;" including in the neighborhoods encircling Minnehaha Creek, Lake Nokomis, Diamond Lake, and the Grands Rounds (Delegard & Ehrman-Solberg, 2017). "Whites only" signs in these neighborhoods may

have made these prime green spaces unwelcoming to Minneapolis' Black population, concluded

Peterson (Delegard & Ehrman-Solberg, 2017). Inconsistencies in our democracy may have influenced

disparities in park usage in other ways throughout the city. Contradictions in our democracy are worth

emphasizing, as legal scholar James Q. Whitman has recently done. Whitman (2017) writes: we are a

democracy with a highly developed body of law that historically targeted minority groups and aimed to

reduce African American to second-class citizens.

Detachment from historical processes

Leisure studies research on disparities seldom examine the historical contexts in which disparate

parks and surrounding communities develop, and instead provide de-historicized analysis on low park

usage by minority populations. On the topic of patterns and preferences by race and ethnicity, most

leisure studies scholars find that activities are racially segregated within the parks. However, they

position patterns and preferences as innate population characteristics, which mutes the topic of racism

and disregards the potential effects of historical conditions, such as racial segregation in public spaces.

For example, Floyd et al. (1994) employ the marginality theory to explain that African American use

parks less because the population characteristically has a lower income. Floyd et al. therefore argue that

current market forces keep African Americans away from parks (1994). Even if the Black population is

willing to trade more income for less leisure time --Krymkowski et al. find that market forces do not

explain low park usage of the Black population (2014) -- scholars who employ the marginality theory

detach from historical processes that caused income disparities and minimize potential effects of past

racism.

Neglecting historical racism likely compromises strategies proposed by scholars to solve the

problem of park usage disparity (Gusfield, 1981). For instance, if we are not able to perceive how park

systems discriminated against racial minorities in the past, we cannot identify and support policies that

reduce that discrimination (Loewen, 2005). Gómez explains that when parks lack historical context, they

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may "operate to reproduce and reinforce racist discourses and discriminatory practices or how they serve as contexts in which people resist racism" (Gómez, 2008, p. 80). In Gobster's (2002) study on race and ethnicity usage patterns in Chicago's Lincoln Park, he debates whether segregation within parks is beneficial or problematic (Gobster, 2002, p. 155). He suggests that segregation "allow[s] users with different cultural and ethnic lifestyles to co-exist with a minimum conflict" (Gobster, 2002, p. 155). Without much discussion, Gobster (2002) claims the downside of segregated areas in parks could signify "perceived ownership" of areas that inhibit others from using certain facilities. Considering Gobster's debate and that Whites have historically been and currently are the majority park users, one can argue that historical discriminatory practices of segregation may reinforce a racial hierarchy that advantages Whites in the park system.

For Carolyn Finney, a cultural geographer, history, and race are inseparable from how the Black population experiences green spaces, like parks. In her research, Finney interviewed African Americans who consistently reported that the history of race in the United States influences how they perceive the environment. While history may contribute to disparities in park usage, Finney argues that contemporary academics can help resolve this issue (Brown, 2016). She says, "institutions play a role in constructing knowledge about who we are in the world and how we might move forward and meet the challenges before us" (Brown, 2016). Critical Race Theory's analytical framework can help identify historical and contemporary forms of racism and once identified; scholars may be able to devise new strategies to solve persistent park usage disparities.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory investigates the "relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado et al., 2017, p. 2). As an analytical framework, Critical Race Theory explicitly acknowledges the workings of race and racism at an institution's foundation. The fundamental concepts of Critical Race Theory could

promote a paradigm shift in leisure studies research by challenging common assumptions about minority's low park usage and could also help address the aforementioned shortcomings of leisure studies literature.

Progressive lawyers and legal scholars of color in the 1970s developed Critical Race Theory as a transdisciplinary methodology when they realized that the U.S. Civil Rights Movement advancements of the 1960s had stalled (Delgado et al., 2017). Although advancing Civil Rights are celebrated, Critical Race theorists see rights, like the end of legal segregation, to lack foundational changes that would produce tangible results, like residential integration. Rights granted only address blatant forms of racism – letting subtle, customary, or extralegal forms of racism to continue. This point needs emphasizing since many people still believe that once a right is 'won' that corresponding forms of discrimination would be eliminated. However, this is not always the case. This differentiation is useful in analyzing structural racism in parks because it elucidates how even though the most visible forms of racial segregation are prohibited, foundational elements persist in unregulated and hard to detect forms. Historical geographer, William O'Brien, gives an account of the strange "tale of two beaches" in Florida State parks to illustrate segregation's impact on and invisibility in the park system (O'Brien, 2007). After Brown v. Board of Education determined that separate public spaces are inherently unequal. Florida State Park States, as well as parks nationally, sought to avoid full integration by emphasizing that their facilities were separate but "very equal" (O'Brien, 2007, p. 172). Thus, creating two sets of amenities, one beach for Blacks and one for Whites. Other parks threatened to close or privatize to avoid forced segregation (O'Brien, 2007). While other parks unofficially segregated by actively discouraging Black people from visiting them. It took more than a policy change – rights won -- to desegregate parks (O'Brien, 2007).

Counternarratives, like O'Brien's revisionist history, call attention to the construction of a problem. Critical Race Theory counternarratives method comes out of the legal movement and function in the same way as lawyers build a case (Delgado et al., 2017). The lawyer (counternarrative writer)

relates to the jury (the reader) a narrative that dialogically opposes the dominant narrative by challenging historical inaccuracies and offering previously suppressed evidence. The jury then decides to endorse the lawyer's interpretation and reject the other side or not (Delgado et al., 2017). Critical Race theorists claim that this method exposes "race-neutral discourse to reveal how White privilege operates within an ideological framework to reinforce and support unequal societal relations between whites and people of color" (Merriweather Hunn, Guy, & Mangliitz, 2006, p. 244). Like counternarratives, personal stories that aim to expose race-neutral discourse have a "valid destructive function" (Delgado et al., 2017, p. 42), according to Critical Race Theory. Critical Race theorists assert that "Personal stories comprise direct reports of experiences of persons of color and how they experience racial discrimination, insult, injury or disadvantage" (Merriweather Hunn et al., 2006, p. 245).

Racism is more than an "unfavorable impression of members of other groups" (Delgado et al., 2017, p. 24). Critical Race theorists would add that racism "allocates privilege and status," thereby producing tangible benefits to the dominant group. These benefits are referred to as White privilege. Critical Race theorists define race and racism as having structural, temporal, and intentional elements. Racism is structural. Structural racism is "a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with "whiteness" and disadvantages associated with "color" to endure and adapt over time" per Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change 2004 (Simms & Waxman, 2016). Per Critical Race Theory, structural elements mean that racism is not limited to individual interactions or blatant forms of racism that are easier to identify (García, Gee, & Jones, 2016). Structural racism, Critical Race theorists argue, is not a deviation from the norm, but a typical everyday experience for minorities in the U.S. (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). In the book, A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota, Sun Yung Shin (2016) explains that due to the normalcy of racism, it may seem invisible to those who benefit from it,

while it is entirely visible to those who do not benefit. For instance, in reference to the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's infrastructure investments, former Commissioner Wielinski explained to Minnesota Public Radio that since the board equally distributes funds that they are compliant with their political responsibility (Nelson, 2016). However, community advocates pointed out, despite equally allocating funds, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board perpetuates the underlying structural inequities in the park system by maintaining high-end amenities, such as golf courses, in parks in affluent White neighborhoods and allowing basic amenities, such as highly used soccer fields, to deteriorate in low-income minority communities (Boarini, 2016).

Racism is intentional. Critical Race theorists emphasize material determinism, which means that our system's racial hierarchy serves a mental and material purpose (Delgado et al., 2017). Depending on the current context, society's elites cultivate an image of groups of people to serve a purpose and to maintain their power (Delgado et al., 2017). With no incentives to address a system that privileges them, elite Whites only commit to changes out of self-interest and not for social justice (Delgado et al., 2017). Since racism has physical consequences, advancements on racial issues should produce measurable outcomes, per Critical Race Theory. For example, if park were truly equitable then minority park usage would increase.

Racism is temporal. Race, in the U.S. research, is frequently considered a "population characteristic that predisposes one toward particular behaviors" (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010, p. S33). Critical Race theorists, Delgado et al. (2017), assert that race is not inherent, static, or objective and has no biological reality as science has long proven. Race is meaning placed on skin color. Racial identities shift to reflect racial constructions over time that serve a purpose for dominant members of society. Critical Race Theory scholars refer to these changes as differential racialization (Delgado et al., 2017). Per Critical Race Theory, dominant members of U.S. society construct and destruct the racial identities of minority groups differently at different times to accommodate their needs (Delgado et al., 2017).

A Minneapolis example illustrates how the structural, intentional, and temporal elements interconnect to reproduce racism in a park system. Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board have shifted Black park users' identities to construct a target population that serves their political purpose at different times (Ingram & Schneider 2005, p. 18). In 2016, the Black residents in North Minneapolis showed up to Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board meeting to oppose the privatization of Theodore Wirth Park. Evoking the identity of Civil Rights activists, protestors held "Hell No! To Jim Crow" signs and argued that the privatization would take away union jobs from North Minneapolis residents. The Park Board stressed Wirth Park serves the park users who are "health conscious outdoor enthusiasts" ("Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Loppet Foundation celebrate beginning of a new era of outdoor recreation and programming at Theodore Wirth Regional Park," 2016). Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board could justify that the minority protesters were not park users considering that only 3 percent of park-user are minorities while constituting nearly 40 percent of the city (Nelson, 2016). The board did not consider the community's priorities for Wirth Park, because minority residents were constructed as non-park-users and, therefore, not key stakeholders. Instead, the Board moved to have ten advocates removed from the meeting before voting in favor for the privatization of Wirth Park for the health-conscious outdoor enthusiasts (Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, 2016). Contrary to the previous construction, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board shift minority populations' identities to be a key stakeholders and partners on their webpage about their commitment to racial equity. They state: "We are committed to working *with communities*, the City of Minneapolis and other government agencies to eliminate inequities between white people and people of color — and increase everyone's ability to succeed" (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, 2018).

Discussion

Applying Critical Race Theory concepts to the leisure studies literature on the effects of race and ethnicity on park usage could lead to new discussions regarding how structural racism within the park system shapes park usage and reformulate issue to find innovative solutions. This section explores applications of Critical Race Theory to each the key shortcoming identified earlier. First, I'll explore how introducing Critical Race Theory concepts of race and racism to the current literature could compel us to be critical about racial formations, especially whiteness. Next, I examine how adding a historical dimension to the previous research could shift the current literature's approach to race and challenge parks at the foundation.

Racial formations in Parks

In this Section, I attempt to use Critical Race Theory's concepts of race and racism to illustrate how identity formation processes could produce and reproduce social exclusion of racial and ethnic minority park users in park systems. As the leisure studies scholars have pointed as justification for studies, the racial and ethnic minorities are growing at a faster rate than the current White majority (Shinew et al. 2006; Gómez, 2008; Sasidharan et al. 2005; Chavez & Olson, 2008; Ho et al., 2005). Parks need to adjust and appeal to the future majority residents; this could mean acknowledging how race and racism disadvantages the minority park user in parks systems as well as in the literature. Understanding how identity formation develops in parks will by extension necessitate that we question the role of structural and intentional racism in public spaces.
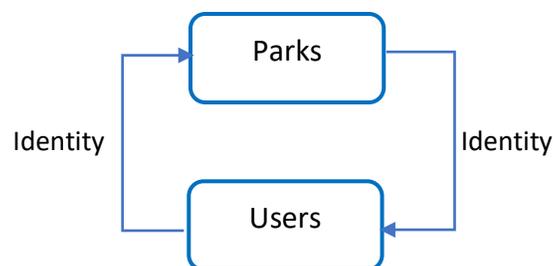
Figure 1. Park identity feedback loop

Parks are political, meaning that government agencies strategically decide on park locations, features, and programming that reflect societal norms. Due to their political nature and their integration in the culture of a society, parks may be susceptible to structural and intentional racism within the society. The public characteristics of parks influence how social groups, such as racial and ethnic communities, express their individual and social identities and interact with others and a space. Karin Peters, a cultural geographer, in her case study in the Netherlands establishes that parks are "spaces in which complex negotiations of spatial and identity formations occur" (Peters, 2010, p. 418). These complex negotiations involve a feedback loop (See figure 1) in which park users influence the identity of a space and the space itself attracts users with a specific identity. Overtime places like parks become "repositories of long histories of visitor interactions with, and the creation of place," according to sociologist Richard C. Stedman (Peters, 2010, p. 420). Parks become infused with behavioral codes, cultural tendencies, and historical meanings; parks can encourage or discourage a sense of belonging for social groups in the space. Over time park's decisionmakers, make choices that optimize the space for majority users. As demonstrated earlier, since their inception the majority user of parks has been the White population. Therefore, parks could be White spaces that allocate privileges associated with "whiteness" and disadvantages associated with "color" (Simms & Waxman, 2016), which aligns with the earlier definition of structural racism. Critical Race Theorists refer to these structure advantages and benefits as "White privilege" (Delgado 78).

While Critical Race Theorists argue that decision-makers should consider race and racism, leisure studies scholars, studying the effects of race and ethnicity on park usage, assume park systems are neutral. In Critical Race Theory neutrality is referred to as "colorblindness," which, they argue mask how race and racism functions within a system. If decision-makers assume that park systems are neutral -- free of structural and intentional racism – racism maybe allowed to persist in subtle ways. According

Amy Bergerson, education policy scholar, "The result [neutrality] is that the more "white" a person of color appears and acts, the better… in reality colorblindness amounts to a requirement that people of color become more white" (Aldous Bergerson, 2003, p. 53). Sun Yung Shin, writing on race in Minnesota, corroborates Bergerson's claim when she explains who racial and ethnic minorities experience apparent neutrality. She says, "We are constantly negotiating our bodies and ourselves, our identities, in a racialized society. How we look, and who our people are or are assumed to be, are relentlessly measured against a White ideal, and mostly found inferior" (Shin, 2016, p. 6). In a sociological study, Krymkowski et al. (2014) illustrates how assumed neutrality has impacted leisure studies conclusions about park usage by race. The researchers use National Park Service data to test the main explanations for low park usage by minority populations including marginality, discrimination, and subcultures. Although the results show that the subcultural hypothesis best explains the racial disparity in park usage, the authors find these principle explanations as problematic. They assert that these explanations that focus on the individual characteristics, not the systemic issues imply that African Americans have an inherent "widespread aversion to national park-related outdoor recreation" (Krymkowski et al., 2014, p. 40). Instead, Krymkowski et al. attribute "aversions" to outdoor parks association as White space and, therefore, restricted access to the Black population (Krymkowski et al., 2014). Krymkowski et al. name several elements that communicate including that parks were designed following White preferences (Krymkowski et al., 2014, p. 40).

Park designs may attract White park users, but the inability to attract the United States minority populations could put parks as they are in danger of extinction. Per Peters (2010), since recreation is about choice, unlike a school with formalized rules, people are more likely to use a recreation space if doing so supports the identity that they want to display. Conversely, people will not choose a recreation activity if they feel it does not match their identity, directly conflicts with it, or is disparaging. For instance, Rashad Shabazz, Cultural Geographer, asserts that structural racism is built into public spaces

in Spatializing Blackness (2015). Shabazz explains that policing in urban areas, designed to keep the

Black population contained, has been normalized over time (Shabazz, 2015). Control systems based on

fear, intimidation and spatial isolation are meant to teach Black their "spatial limitations" (Shabazz,

2015, p. 6). In essence, policing is used to discourage Black populations, who are viewed as criminals,

from entering White spaces. Similarly, in recent studies by the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council coupled

with Shabazz's conclusion, could shed light on how structural racism by criminalizing the Black

population may impact regional parks and visitation rates. Black park goers averaged 36 park visits

annually (ISG, 9) and named "getting jumped or shot" as a prominent barrier to park usage (Salk, 2014,

p. 7). While White respondents reported that they had no safety concerns during their park visits in a

2016 visitor study; on average they visited regional parks 60 times per year (ISG, 9). In this case, Whites

park users would be privileged from increased access and decreased fear of using this public resource,

while Black park users could experience decreased usage and increased fear.

Since parks are political representations of our society and tied to identity formation, they can

become contested places where specific groups may be tolerated, regulated, excluded, or welcomed,

depending on how these groups' identity relates to current and historical power struggles. These

conflicts concern who belongs in the society at large. Shrinagesh & Markandey agree when they write

"claiming social space and being seen in public becomes a way for social groups to legitimate their right

to belong to society" (2016, p. 2). Parks in the United States were imagined to be part of the Great

American Experiment that would imbue visitors with a national sense of belonging according to Young,

an environmental historian (Young, 2009). Going to parks has deep cultural meanings and is part of a

cultural expression of who belongs as Americans and is imagined not to belong. For example, in Byrne's

study of social exclusion in Los Angeles parks, Latino participants commented that parks are for "White

wealthy people" or "Americans" and not for Mexicans who may be perceived as "illegal people" (Byrne,

2012, p. 604). Byrne (2012) concluded that Latino participants thought that they "lacked standing" in

their community, which may influence their decision to use the park (604). Similarly, Chaya Harris, an

Outdoor Afro Leader from Boston, reflected being "out of place" as one of the only Black people in Zion

National Park. Harris says, "The parks were magnificent! However, at times I felt isolated, out of place

and frustrated – even invisible when people bumped into to me in the Narrows at Zion. Genuine words

from an Outdoor Afro and picturing my dad's proud expression as he strolled out of Havasupai helped

me focus on the beauty and wonder in the Southwest. They reminded me that we matter, and that

nature is for everyone!" (Harris, 2017).

History, Race and Parks' Foundation

Past forms of racism do not have to be remembered to maintain them. According to Critical

Race theorists, previous constructions of race are part of our cultural heritage and consciously or

unconsciously inform our public institutions (Delgado et al., 2017). By extension, our society designed

and built the structural elements of racism in our parks over time through historical interpersonal

interactions, institutional policies, and societal ideologies (See figure 2). Also, while racial identities shift

to reflect racial constructions over time that serve a purpose for dominant members of society, contexts

may also change while racial constructions persist (Delgado et al., 2017). These constructions influence

our culture and are the background in how we interpret current events. Therefore, Critical Race scholars

insist on examining the historical dimension of racism to understand the architecture that we maintain,

adapt, and inhabit. To do so, Critical Race theorists embrace using revisionist histories, a form of

counternarrative, to counter dominant interpretations of events to more accurately portrait minority

population experiences and challenge historical inaccuracies (Delgado et al., 2017). Counternarrative

can help identify types of discrimination and once recognized; they can be resolved (Delgado et al.,

2017). In this section, I attempt to apply Critical Race Theory and historical counternarrative to illustrate

structural, temporal, and intentional forms of racism that could be perpetuating in the park systems.

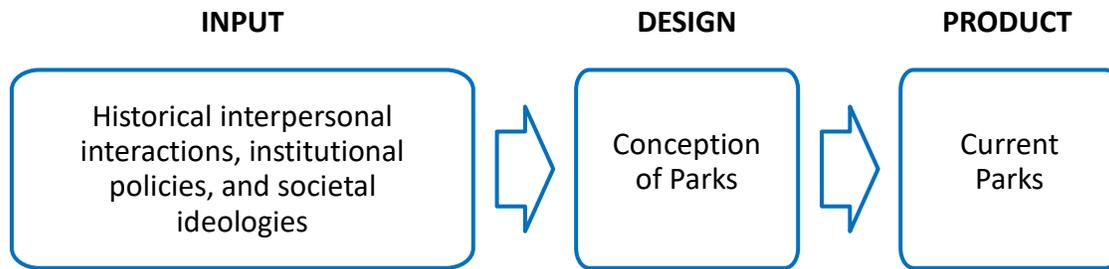| INPUT		DESIGN		PRODUCT
Historical interpersonal interactions, institutional policies, and societal ideologies	⇨	Conception of Parks	⇨	Current Parks

Figure 2: Historical impacts on parks.

African Americans were the target of segregation through Jim Crow laws in the South and by custom in the North, which shaped the development of urban parks. National Parks were officially 'desegregated' after World War II, although segregation was not considered unconstitutional after the Civil Rights Act in 1964. However, the National Park Service had an "unpublicized policy" to discourage African Americans from visiting – even in regions that never had adopted Jim Crow segregation laws, according to Young (2009). One implication of the Park Service's commitment to universal equality and their contradictory actions is that African Americans were not perceived as full citizens, as suggested earlier in the discussion on democracy. For desegregation advocates, park usage, without official or unofficial restrictions, meant more than just the ability to recreate; it was about the use of government offered resources funded by all tax paying citizens. In other words, full access to our democracy. According to Young (2009), African Americans chose to go to parks funded by their tax dollars when possible, instead of private resorts, to reinforce their identity of belonging as full citizens. W.J. Trent, Jr., African American advisor to the National Park Service, pressured the Department of the Interior to complete a legal analysis on racial segregation at Shenandoah National Park. After the report was produced, Phineas Indritz, legal counsel for the department, called park officials "evasive" on the topic of segregation and expressed his concern about the long-term impact of the segregation policy (Young, 2009, p. 664). He said, "Once segregation is established in any service or accommodation, it may become increasingly difficult to eradicate it" (Young, 2009, p. 664). Perhaps Indritz was right. Like other

forms of structural racism, segregation is difficult to eliminate because it became normalized in our society.

The presence of past forms of structural racism have been shown to impact how people may perceive parks. Erickson, Johnson, and Kivel (2009) sought to gain an understanding of low visitation rates through semi-structured interviews with African Americans in Denver in relation to low minority usage rates to Rocky Mountain National Park. The researcher explored historic and cultural factors that could influence the communities use of the park. They found that African Americans in the Denver area historically travelled and recreated outdoors, but not at the Rocky Mountain National Park. Interviewees opted for locations that they deemed safe; these locations were passed down from generation to generation. Some interviewees did not travel to national parks because they associated the "countryside" with poverty and a demotion of their self-worth. Others associated the "woods" with lynching and felt unsafe. Although most lynchings occurred during the nadir of race relations in the U.S. (1877-1940) (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017), the endurance of the legacy of racism and the associated trauma, is evident in false lynching rumor in St. Paul in summer of 2017. That summer a White man committed suicide in Indian Mounds Park. An unidentified man posted a blurry picture of the hanging man at twilight surrounded by police officers. Along with the picture, the man wrote "They still killing us and we still killing each other! #MakeGoViral" (Gottfried, 2017). Social media users shared the post more than 11,500 times in a 13-hour span (Gottfried, 2017). Black Lives Matter St. Paul, one of the sharers, later released an apology to the family for sharing and the image was removed out of respect for the man's family. The fact that a police force lynching of a Black man in a public park, a White space, was plausible to so many people revealed the ever-present fear of historical acts and the continued reality of racial violence against African Americans.

Also, understanding how the Black population experienced parks in the past is particularly relevant considering that, like Erickson et al., Krymkowski et al. found that recreation preferences in the

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Black community are passed from generation to generation (Krymkowski et al., 2014). Per the Twin

Cities Metropolitan Council's 2016 visitors study, minorities were more likely to rely on family and

friends for information than outside information on parks (ISG, 2016). A personal story, one of the

Critical Race Theory's analytical tools, illustrates how minimizing the impact of past experiences can be

short-sighted. In 2016 the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council began working on a Park Equity toolkit to

strategize ways to alleviate the negative impacts of persistent structural racism in parks. Specifically, in

the Twin Cities metropolitan region, Whites visit parks almost two times more frequently than Black

residents (ISG, 2016). The Council invited regional park managers, local racial equity advocates, and

consultants to a series of design workshops. Representing a consulting firm, I attended all three

workshops. During the meeting, we discussed equity and inclusion park without bringing up past racism.

One Black participant shared a story about how his uncle got violently assaulted in a park while coming

home from work after dark. That meeting participant's family used this as a cautionary tale about the

dangers of entering parks at night for Black people. During the story, one of the park managers, a White

woman, rolled her eyes. After the story, I felt tension at my table, and a Black meeting participant at my

table stood up and called the whole room "racist."

  Structural and temporal racism built into the broader community could also impact how

minority communities interact with park systems. Using Critical Race Theory perspective in a public

health study, García, Gee & Jones found a direct relationship between historical discriminatory park and

residential planning practices and low usage patterns among racial and ethnic minorities in Los Angeles,

California (García et al., 2016). The researchers conclude, "Viewed through the lens of White privilege,

city planners, politicians, and White residents intentionally excluded people of color from parks,

playgrounds, and neighborhoods through various means (e.g., de facto segregation, zoning laws, and

fiscal discrimination) in order to preserve power and wealth" (Garcia et al., 2016, p. 407). Essentially,

García et al.'s demonstrate that although the cultural and political context of Los Angeles has changed,

past disparities in where parks and recreation resources were built in relation to minority populations have been maintained in the foundation of the system (García et al., 2016).

Persistent residential segregation has the potential to influence park usage. However, as Byrne laments, leisure researchers rarely discuss the likely effects of residential segregation on park usage (Byrne, 2012). Shrinagesh found that "proximity was a robust predictor of use," and Peters found that people tend to go to parks that are closest to their residence (Shrinagesh, 7 & Peters, 421). In a focus group conducted by Byrne in Los Angeles, multiple minority participants stated that "traversing predominately White neighborhoods" surrounding a regional park "made them feel anxious" (Byrne, 2012, p. 605). National residential segregation has been persistent despite social changes that should decrease it: the growth of the Black middle class, the passage of fair housing legislation at the national level, surveys results showing increasing White openness to living in more diverse neighborhoods (Logan, 2011). Using the data in the 2010 Census, the US2010 Project researchers, a Brown University initiative, measure the changes in residential segregation in 367 metropolitan areas across the U.S. De facto segregation is a historical and cultural component of Minneapolis. Like other Midwest cities, residential segregation is persistent but improving. In US2010 Project researchers ranked 50 U.S. cities on Black-White segregation using an index score where 50 was considered moderate (Logan, 2011). Minneapolis ranked 40th worst in Black-White segregation with a score of 50.2 in 2010. This score represented a 17.7 unit decrease in Black-White segregation since 1980 (Logan, 2011). In comparison, Detroit ranked #1 worst in 2010 with an index score of 79.6 and Las Vegas ranked #50 worst in 2010 with an index score of 35.9 (Logan, 2011). Logan et al. assert that the reason behind slow residential integration is that systemic discrimination in the housing market has not ended and is not prosecuted (Logan, 2011). Minority persons in rental and homeowner market are treated differently than compared to Whites. White flight is also still common; meaning that Whites rarely move to minority

neighborhoods. Lack of residential integration is important to emphasize, because minority usage of parks could increase as neighborhoods become more diverse.

Byrne advocates for an investigation of how historical processes that influenced park design impacts minority park usage (Byrne, 2012). He argues that park spaces are "instantiated by White ideals of nature into park landscapes, thus encoding those places as 'for Whites only'?" (Byrne, 2012, p. 596). Duncan and Duncan, cultural geographers, assert that White philosophies of green spaces, such as the notion of the urban pastoralism produce racialized nature-spaces (Duncan & Duncan, 2003). This design concept views parks as natural areas for urban residents to rejuvenate. Since parks were designed to be places of quiet contemplation, many parks have noise ordinances to maintain a peaceful environment. This park design may serve White park users who tend to recreate alone (Gobster, 2002). However, leisure scholars have documented that African Americans prefer to use parks for group gatherings with family and friends (Gobster, 2002). A Twin Cities Metropolitan Council study, Park Use Among Communities of Color, highlights how the design fails to serve Black park user. An African American focus group participant is skeptical about regional parks willingness to accommodate cultural preferences of Black park users. She says, "Sometimes I wonder if people feel like the parks are culturally friendly. Like I know for me, the one thing I don't like is that they took the noise—the noise ordinance that they passed for the parks, like the ability to have music and play music in the park…So, if I want to do a celebration at the park, I don't feel like it's culturally friendly for some of the things that me as a culture would like to do at the park" (Salk 2014, p. 9).

Conclusion

In this paper, I proposed that a richer understanding of inequitable park usage among minorities requires a shift from the principle leisure studies explanations -- marginality, subculture, or discrimination hypotheses-- based on categorical concepts of race to research that explicitly

acknowledges race and the role of structural racism. This change is needed to shift the responsibility from the individual to the systems that produce park usage disparities (Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012). I have used Critical Race Theory, a race equity methodology, to explore how racial formations in seemingly race-neutral parks and previous constructions of race and racism imbue our park systems. Parks are identified as White spaces because parks and user identities influence each other to privilege the majority user. Histories of parks in the form of counternarratives were valuable to illustrate how disparities may have evolved in the built environment. The Critical Race Theory framework was suitable to study how historical concepts of race and racism shaped parks' development and how park users experience green spaces. As a result, I conclude that the park system is not broken – it is working exactly how it was designed to work. Critical Race Theory calls for leisure studies scholars to develop a clear definition of the issue that is centered on race and racism; otherwise, solutions will be incomplete and likely biased toward the white perspective, as suggested by Gómez (2008).

A goal of researching leisure studies was to investigate how racial and ethnic minorities may perceive Minneapolis' parks. Minneapolis is a seemingly progressive city that is full of recreation opportunity. However, this paper is a reminder of the broad impact of the history and the U.S. legacy of racism on our public institutions and built environment, which keep minority populations from accessing these opportunities. National and local shifting demographics imply that racial and ethnic minorities are our future decision-makers in how public funds will be spent. We'll need to expand our notion of what parks should be used for, not based only on white visitors' preferences, to ensure that parks are relevant to everyone. From research to management, change will take time, investments, and an institutional commitment to eventually adjust infrastructure and programming. Also, racial and ethnic minorities will need to be part of the conversation about parks' future.

The paradigm and demographic shifts are an opportunity for parks to be reinvented. Parks could be agents of change. Consider that if social identities within the park can promote feelings of belonging

or rejection in society, then parks could be leveraged as schools of democracy. "School of democracy" is the idea that participation in an organization can induce civic skills and political efficacy (Dobkin Hall, 2010). Parks could be an ideal location to develop civic skills regarding building commonalities across diverse groups. Specifically, Peters cites Dines and Cattell's research in East London, which showed that public spaces could foster "interethnic understanding by providing opportunities for people to meet, which might not happen in organized settings" (Peters, 2010, p. 418). Parks and Power, a Minneapolis park activist group, views parks as an entry point into local public and political life (Boarini, 2016). During the November 2017 elections in Minneapolis, Parks and Power actively helped minority community members run for the Minneapolis Parks & Recreation Board Commissioner seats. Perhaps, parks could live up to their democratic ideals. Urban parks could be powerful tools to connect our segregated urban landscapes and integrate people from different backgrounds.

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