

An African American Community Recreation Center: Participants' and Volunteers' Perceptions of Racism and Racial Identity

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Recognizing that racial segregation often takes place in leisure spaces, we sought to gain a greater understanding of African Americans who specifically seek out leisure settings that are linked to their sub-population. Thus, the purpose of this exploratory study was to compare African Americans who are involved in an African American community center and/or volunteer for associations closely linked to the African American population to those who are not involved. Comparisons were made based on their racial identity and their perceptions of racism. Our research expectations were that those who chose to be more closely associated with the African American population would have stronger perceptions of racism and racial identity when compared to those African Americans who were not involved. There is a growing area of research that examines the connections between racism, discrimination and leisure behavior and we sought to add to this body of research by examining perceptions of racism and racial identity and its relationship to African Americans' choices of leisure setting. Data were collected through on-site questionnaire surveys that were distributed at an African American community center (Frederick Douglass Community Center-FDC), door-to-door in an African American neighborhood, and at a neighborhood barbershop. Comparisons between FDC volunteers and non-volunteers revealed no significant differences with respect to perceptions of racism or racial identity. Similarly, comparisons between community-wide volunteers and non-volunteers suggested no significant differences in terms of perceptions of racism; however, community-wide volunteers reported significantly higher levels of racial identity than did non-volunteers. Community-wide volunteers were also significantly more active as participants, both at the FDC and in other African American programs in the community. And finally, comparisons between FDC participants and non-par-

ticipants indicated no significant differences between the groups, in either their perceptions of racism or their racial identity. Thus, in response to our research expectations, we found that African Americans involved at the FDC (either as participants and/or volunteers) did not have stronger perceptions of racism and racial identities than did those who remained uninvolved. However, those who served as volunteers in various African American programs across the community did report a stronger racial identity than did non-volunteers. Managerial implications include gaining some insight into those African Americans who specifically seek out leisure settings that are linked to their sub-population, and recognizing that racially segregated programs and services may be desirable for some minority populations given today's racial climate.

KEYWORDS: African Americans, Racism, Racial Identity, Volunteerism, Community Center

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Introduction

The predictions of the last several decades of an increasingly diverse society are now a reality. In tandem, there is also evidence of an increase in intergroup hostility and violence. Nagda and Zuniga (2003) noted that events such as the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles (1992), the dragging of James Byrd in Jasper, Texas (1998), the deadly assault on Asian and Jewish people in Illinois, Indiana, and California (1999), and the dreadful events of September 11, (2001) demonstrate that violence and intolerance continue to be a sad part of our history. As it relates specifically to race, considerable progress has been made toward achieving equity between African Americans and Whites in the United States. Yet, while many White Americans believe racism is declining and have adopted a colorblind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2003; Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002), racial inequalities continue to exist in housing markets (Hacker, 1995; Oliver & Shapiro, 1997), churches (Emerson & Smith, 2000), health care systems (Farmer & Ferraro, 2005; Williams & Collins, 1995), and public schools (Orfield & Yun, 1999; Rockquemore & Arend, 2002).

According to Dovidio et al. (2002), Whites and African Americans have developed different views regarding racial disparities, with Whites generally underestimating or questioning their existence. Conversely, given African Americans' past treatment, many have developed a deep distrust for the police, the legal system, and Whites in general. Further, the different experiences Whites and African Americans encounter on an almost daily basis can have cumulative effects over time, and contribute to a climate of miscommunication, misperceptions, and distrust (Dovidio et al.; Feagin & Sikes, 1994).

Given the circumstances, some African Americans, perhaps not surprisingly, seek leisure opportunities where they have limited contact with the White majority. Because no laws have been enacted to ensure racial integration of leisure spaces (Philipp, 2000), leisure settings are often racially demarcated (Floyd & Shinew, 1999; Gobster, 2002; Johnson, Bowker, English, & Worthen, 1998; Lee, 1972). This observation is consistent with Gobster's finding regarding interracial contact in a Chicago park, insofar as he concluded very little interracial interaction took place between racial groups, and a few users reported conflicts occurred when park visitors attempted to cross racial boundaries. Similarly, Lee posited that people of similar racial identities tend to choose settings and activities that are part of a shared scheme of order, allowing certain customs to be taken for granted and resulting in distinct patterns of participation and separate leisure settings.

Recognizing that racial segregation often takes place in leisure spaces, we sought to gain a greater understanding of African Americans who specifically seek out leisure settings that are linked to their sub-population. Thus, the purpose of this exploratory study was to compare African Americans who are involved in an African American community center and/or volunteer for associations closely linked to the African American population to those who are not. Comparisons were based on their racial identity and their perceptions of racism. Our research expectations were that those who chose to be more closely associated with the African American population would have stronger perceptions of racism and racial identity when compared to those African Americans who were not involved. There is a growing area of research that examines the connections between racism, discrimination, and leisure behavior (Stodolska, 2005). We sought to add to this body of research by examining perceptions of racism and racial identity and its relationship to African Americans' choices of leisure setting. We also sought to add to the research on volunteerism in leisure settings (Silverberg, 2004; Silverberg, Ellis & Marshall, 2001). Our discussion focuses on African Americans, although many of the concepts are potentially applicable to other marginalized subpopulations defined by race or ethnicity.

Racism, Discrimination and Leisure Participation

Over the years, several research studies have reported on African Americans' experiences with discrimination in leisure settings such as parks, campgrounds, recreation areas, pools, beaches, golf courses, and forests (Gobster, 1998, 2002; Hibbler & Shinew, 2002; Johnson et al., 1998; Kornblum, 1983; Philipp, 2000; Shinew, Floyd, & Parry, 2004; Shinew, Glover, & Parry, 2004; West, 1989). This research has reported that discrimination can affect the quality of recreation experi-

ences, prevent people from frequenting leisure places of their choosing, and force people to isolate themselves during their leisure engagements. In Floyd's (1998) critique of Washburne's marginality and ethnicity theory, he stated, "Black-white differences in leisure participation are not only confounded with socioeconomic status, historical and contemporary racism and discrimination are not accounted for" (p. 9). Floyd suggested that differences between majority and minority groups are often attributed solely to socioeconomic explanations without recognizing the range and types of discrimination that exist in society.

Perceptions of discrimination and racism helped explain, in part, the findings of a study that examined Black and White differences in visitation patterns to wildlands and national forests (Johnson et al., 1998). Johnson et al., predicted "safety concerns" would be a marginality factor for African Americans because "Blacks more so than other ethnic groups, are more cognizant of the potential for race related crime and other random violence when they recreate..." (p. 107). Although their findings did not support this prediction, their discussion included the recognition of racism and its impact on participation. During informal dialogues with African Americans in the study area, comments were made regarding the awareness that areas of the forests were racially demarcated, which subsequently influenced visitation patterns. More specifically, a few African Americans commented that they "would not feel comfortable camping in the forest because they were concerned about being hassled by groups of (white) drunks or rednecks" (p. 116). The authors noted that this finding provides support for the likelihood of "interracial confrontations in outdoor recreation areas and suggests that the continuing racial tensions in American society are not limited to 'indoor' realms such as housing and education but also extend to outdoor environments and should be considered in investigations of southern, rural populations" (Johnson et al., p. 116).

Other studies have also found that race and racism are important determinants of one's leisure choices, preferences, and activities. As Shinew, Floyd and Parry (2004) stated, "understanding the relationship between constraints and race is important not only for furthering our knowledge of access, choice and enjoyment of leisure pursuits, but also for gaining greater insight into broader societal issues surrounding race" (p. 182). Focusing on African Americans' unique negotiation of typical leisure constraints, and incorporating Shaw's (1994) framework for studying women's constraints, Shinew et al. explored the way race and racism influenced African Americans' leisure. Their findings indicated that African Americans were no more constrained than their White counterparts in regard to park use. However, the study alluded to the actions of self-determination, empowerment, and other strategies used by African Americans to fully engage in aspects of life and leisure that they deemed beneficial.

Gobster's (2002) study of a popular urban park in Chicago, also found that racial discrimination was a problem for some park users. In his study, a racially diverse sample of park users were asked, "In your past use of the park were there any times or situations where you felt discriminated against because of your race or ethnic background?" Reports of racial discrimination were highest among African Americans (14%). Gobster concluded that discrimination can lead to feelings of

discomfort among users and lower their enjoyment of the leisure experience, and he acknowledged that in some cases it can lead to feelings of anger and actual physical violence, which may ultimately lead to user displacement or even nonuse by some groups.

Other researchers have also examined discrimination as it relates to leisure experiences. For example, Philipp (1995, 1999) conducted two studies that examined the influence of discrimination on leisure behavior. In the earlier study, Philipp found African Americans and Whites rated the appeal of many leisure activities differently, and that African Americans felt significantly less comfortable in approximately half of the leisure activities examined. He applied the marginality and prejudice-discrimination frameworks to explain his findings, and concluded many of the leisure activities that take place outside the home and local community are associated with lower appeal and comfort, which may be related to perceptions of present or historical patterns of discrimination. He posited that it is difficult to ignore years of discrimination against African Americans when considering their leisure choices and behavior. In a later study, Philipp examined the perceived welcomeness of several leisure pursuits by asking African Americans and White Americans how welcome African Americans would feel in a variety of activities. Results indicated that African Americans reportedly felt unwelcome in a number of leisure pursuits; whereas Whites reported that they thought African Americans would feel welcome in these same activities, thus indicating the different perceptions of the two groups.

The findings of these studies indicate that racism and discrimination often influence the leisure choices and behaviors of African Americans. Stodolska (2005) developed a conditioned attitude model of individual discriminatory behavior in an attempt to further our understanding of these relationships and to provide a theoretical framework for research on the leisure of ethnic and racial minorities. Stodolska commented that the effects of real and anticipated discrimination on the leisure lifestyles of minorities may “induce members of such groups to modify their behavior in order to reduce the opportunity for hostile action or to allow for retaliation in response to overt discrimination” (p. 1). Regrettably there continues to be demarcated leisure settings where certain minorities are not perceived as welcome, and where leisure participation is in essence limited to Whites (Gobster, 1998; Johnson et al., 1998; Philipp, 1999, 2000; Stodolska). In many instances, both Whites and minorities are aware of those settings where minorities belong, as well as those where they are not welcome (Phillipp, 1999; Stodolska).

There is a paucity of research in our field regarding racial identity and African Americans' leisure as it relates specifically to the selection of leisure settings. In a recent study by Shinew, Glover, and Parry (2004) on interracial interaction in community gardens, the authors found that African Americans were significantly more likely to identify with their race than were their White counterparts, however their study did not examine the influence racial identity had on the selection of leisure settings. The current study sought to add to the leisure literature by examining racism and racial identity and its relationship to choices of leisure settings and involvement.

African Americans' Racial Identity and Social Connections

Racial identity among African Americans is a well researched area of study (Seller et al., 1997). Racial identity development has been associated with a number of factors including self-esteem (Baldwin, Duncan, & Bell, 1987), academic performance (Taylor, Casten, Flickinger, Roberts, & Fulmore, 1994), and career aspirations (Parham & Austin, 1994). Racial identity theory examines the extent to which persons of color perceive themselves to share a common racial heritage with their similar socio-racial group (Kohatsu et al., 2000) and the process by which members of oppressed groups “overcome society’s negative evaluation of their group and develop an identity with its roots in the culture and sociopolitical experiences of their ascribed group” (Helms, 1994, p. 301). Racial identity includes the subjective understanding of oneself as a racialized person, and the realization that one is both similar to and different from other people (Omi & Winant, 1994; Woodward, 1997).

The definition of “Black” is distinct from other racial groups in terms of the standard for inclusion. African American membership has been defined by the “one-drop rule that deems individuals with any Black ancestry whatsoever (regardless of their physical appearance) as members of the Black race” (Rockquemore & Arend, 2002, p. 52). This historically unique membership categorization is linked socially and economically to the institution of slavery. During the slave period, miscegenation was prohibited to prevent Black blood from contaminating the purity of the White race (Mills, 1998, 1999). History indicates, however, that White masters routinely raped Black female slaves, but due to the one-drop rule, their mixed-race children were labeled Black. Rockquemore and Arend noted, “The historical legacy of the one-drop rule demonstrates the longstanding existence of racial hierarchies in the U.S. and their firm grounding in White supremacist ideology” (p. 52)

Goffman (1959) noted that “the self” is projected and received by others through many identities, including racial identities. Racial identity is a part of the self that can be used to empower African Americans by reflecting shared symbols and meanings, including positive stereotypes and perceived unique traits. These unique qualities and stereotypes play a role in how African Americans view themselves and how they interact with other ethnic and racial groups. Guthrie and Hutchinson (1995) found in their study on interracial interaction patterns between African Americans and Asian Americans living in the same housing project that African Americans’ unique qualities and stereotypes helped them to “maintain group cohesion” and served as a means to isolate nonmembers within the given community (p. 390). Similarly, White and Burke (1987) found in their study of African American and White students that African Americans’ commitment to ethnic identity and membership was strongly correlated to levels of ideal self-esteem, self-evaluation, self-efficacy and a sense of security (White & Burke).

Several scholars (Cross, 1971, 1973, 1978; Hardimon, 1982; Hardimon & Jackson, 1998; Jackson, 1976) have explored African Americans’ racial identity development. Hardimon and Jackson developed a model of identity development that “can be viewed as a road map of the journey from an identity in which racism and discrimination are internalized to an identity that is affirming and liberating

from racism” (p. 194). Hardimon and Jackson’s road map uses five points of reference that describe states of racial consciousness, including:

- (1) *naïve*, without consciousness of social identity; (2) *acceptance*, of prevailing social definitions of Blackness and Whiteness; (3) *resistance*, the rejection of the racist definition of Blackness and Whiteness; (4) *redefinition*, suggesting the remains of one’s racial identity; and (5) *internalization*, the integration of the redefined racial identity into all aspects of the self (p. 194).

The transition from one stage to another tends to take place when an individual recognizes that his or her current view is contradicted by new experience and information, detrimental to a healthy self-concept, or no longer serving some important self-interest. Within the fifth stage an African American recognizes that his or her racial identity is important, which may be expressed by his or her preference in or selection of social settings and activities. Also, a heightened awareness of other identity issues and oppression are explored (possibly by activism or volunteerism) and a sense of racial support exists whereby those who have attained this fifth level work with other African Americans at the other stages in assisting them to deal with whatever issues their stage of development presents, and helping them achieve a positive Black identity. The acts of assistance resemble self-empowerment efforts, and are often performed through community outreach, which makes this concept relevant to the current study.

McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001) noted that although voluntary groups are perhaps less important sources of social ties than are neighborhoods, schools or work places, they are significant because they represent a unique arena for developing a strong interplay of structurally-induced and choice-produced *homophily*. The authors described homophily as the point in which “...similarity breeds connection...” and from this point of similarity, people’s thoughts, opinions, attitudes and preferences for interactions are affected and determined (p. 415). Race and ethnicity are the two homophilic ties that create strong divisions (Lincoln & Miller 1979; Mayhew, McPherson, Rotolo, & Smith-Lovin, 1995). McPherson et al., also noted the connection with shared geographical space, in that it is important in “determining the ‘thickness’ of a relationship” (p.430). Simply stated, we are most likely to have contact and connections with those who are closer to us in geographic location than those who are distant. As it relates specifically to this study, the combination (same race, shared physical space, and in some cases similar recreation and/or volunteer experiences) may make a potent combination for affirming a person’s identity. Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study was to compare African Americans who are involved in an African American community center and/or volunteer for associations closely linked to African Americans to those who are not. Groups were compared on their racial identity and their perceptions of racism. We expected that those who chose to be more closely associated with the African American population would have stronger racial identity and stronger perceptions of racism.

Method

The Study Site - Frederick Douglass Community Center

Located in the northeast corner of Champaign, Illinois, the Douglass Park area has been and continues to be the central hub in a predominantly African American area of the city. Enclosed by two railway lines, the area is populated by some of the first Black built houses and churches. In 1945 a community-built recreation center called the Frederick Douglass Center (FDC) was constructed in the park for both adults and children to use year round.

Under FDR's New Deal, the Works Progress Administration created additional programming and employment opportunities within the FDC. Preschool, dance, boxing, slow pitch softball, and etiquette classes were offered, and administrators were hired who worked with Champaign's recreation department to ensure there were adequate resources for the upkeep of the community center. Due to segregation at the time, African American youth were excluded from participating in opportunities outside their immediate Black community. Thus, youth camps and programs were provided at the FDC specifically for African Americans. Although places such as the Orpheum Theater (now a museum) were sometimes open to African Americans, Black patrons were only allowed to sit in the last two or three rows. On hot, sunny days African American children looked through fences at the public swimming pools where they were not allowed to swim.

The 1960s brought "urban renewal," that fostered an explosion in the Douglass Park area population with the introduction of several public housing sites. The issues of civil rights also dominated the 1960s, and although greater opportunities emerged nationally, Champaign was slow to respond. Racial tensions grew because the promises for equality that could be heard on the radio and television could not be seen in the immediate community. Several community Black newspapers and magazines began to highlight injustices and celebrate African Americans' achievements. However, these forms of communication would not be enough to vent the fuming frustrations in the community, and the late 1960s and 1970s saw a rise in aggression from African American groups to the point that a local gang took control of the FDC for a few days in protest.

The center and park were taken over by the Champaign Park District in the mid-1970s, which led to the construction of a new center amid the community's concern over equal representation, equity, and self-ownership. In the 1980s, equal opportunity laws finally allowed more possibilities for African Americans and their families. Many took advantage of these opportunities and populated other areas of the city, making the Douglass Park area no longer the only predominately African American area of the city.

During the 1990s, the FDC saw an increase in collaboration with the other agencies and organizations, particularly those with close ties to the African American population. National organizations with local affiliates such as the Urban League and the NAACP held events and ongoing programs at the FDC. Champaign Public Library, with funding from the state, constructed a new branch within the park in 1998, a long-held desire of the residents. Currently, the FDC offers a wide variety

of recreational programs and activities, such as youth basketball, day camps, after school and senior programs, as well as several African American cultural programs such as Martin Luther King Celebrations, Black History Month Programs, and a Black Expo. Given the purpose of our study, we felt this community center served as an appropriate site to conduct our research.

The Survey Instrument

To gather responses from a wide array of people who represented participants and volunteers, as well as non-participants, FDC staff members were enlisted to distribute surveys at various times and places. A brief training took place to explain basic survey distribution procedures and to ensure they understood the contents of the survey instrument. The distribution method included distributing surveys at the FDC, going door-to-door in the immediate neighborhood, and distributing surveys at the neighborhood barbershop. At the FDC, surveys were administered at several different locations, including registration tables, the gym during open hours, and the library. Those who agreed to participate were asked to complete the questionnaire and return the instrument immediately. The staff member waited while the individual completed the instrument. In a few instances, respondents asked the staff to read the survey instrument to them. The survey took most respondents between 10-20 minutes to complete, and the distribution process took place over a two month period. Only those aged 18 or older were permitted to complete a survey instrument. The survey was pilot tested prior to distribution, and some changes in wording were made to improve clarity.

A total of 95 surveys were distributed, and 95 surveys were completed. In essence, everyone who agreed to take a survey completed a survey. Although a tally was not kept on the number of people who refused to participate, FDC staff members reported they had "very few" people who were approached who did not want to take part in the study. The survey instrument sought to measure racial identity, perceptions of racism, participation at the FDC, and voluntary activity at the FDC and other African American programs in the community.

The centrality subscale of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) was used to measure racial identity (Sellers et al., 1997). The centrality dimension of the scale is related to the extent to which a person defines her or himself with regard to race. As noted by Sellers et al., "it is a measure of whether race is a core part of an individual's self-concept" (p. 806). The centrality scale consists of 10 items that measure the extent to which being African American is central to the respondents' definition of themselves. Items included, "In general, being Black is an important part of my self-image," "Being Black is an important reflection of who I am," and "I have a strong attachment to other Black people." A 7-point Likert-type scale that ranged from "very strongly agree" (7) to "very strongly disagree" (1) was used. Higher agreement was indicative of a stronger racial identity. The subscale's internal consistency (.83) and validity have been established (Sellers et al.).

Perceptions of racism were measured with a subscale of the Perceived Racism Scale, a multidimensional assessment of the experience of racism among African Americans (McNeille, Anderson, Armstead, Clark, Corbett, Robinson, Pieper, &

Lepisto, 1996). The overall purpose of the scale is to measure African Americans' perceptions of White racism against African Americans. Content items for the scale were empirically derived by collecting data from African Americans. To construct the items, they were asked to list their personal experiences with racism, and their feelings and coping behaviors in response to those experiences. The subscale used in this study included only the frequency of exposure domain. Questions included such items as "Because I'm Black, I'm assigned the jobs no one wants," "I'm treated with less dignity and respect because I'm Black," "I'm watched more closely than other workers because I'm Black" and "When I go shopping, I am often followed." The items from the scale were accompanied by a 7-point Likert-type scale that ranged from "very strongly agree" (7) to "very strongly disagree" (1). Higher agreement was indicative of a stronger perception of racism. The scale's internal reliability has been established (.96) by McNeilly et al. and the authors noted that the "scale can be used in a wide variety of research and clinical settings for diverse investigations and assessment purposes" (p. 165).

To measure participation at the FDC, an index was created that listed every activity and program offered at the FDC during the two program seasons prior to the administration of the questionnaire. In total, a combination of 23 activities and programs were listed. Respondents were asked, "How involved are you at the Douglass Center?" and were instructed to "identify the activities and programs you have participated in during the last year" by checking all of the response options that applied. Adding together the total number of programs in which they participated created a composite measure of program participation. Conceivably, scores could range from 23 (highest) to 0 (lowest).

In a similar fashion, a measure of volunteer activity was constructed. Respondents were asked, "In a typical month, how many hours do you volunteer for the following programs or organizations?" In consultation with the FDC's community program manager, other volunteer associations were identified as local organizations that African Americans were most likely to volunteer: A Women's Fund, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Center for Women in Transition, Crisis Nursery, Don Moyer Boys & Girls Club, FDC, Empty Tomb, Frances Nelson Community Health Center, Green Meadows Girls Scout Council, NAACP Champaign County Branch, and Urban League of Champaign County. Recognizing there were other organizations for which respondents could volunteer, study participants were also instructed to list any other community programs or agencies organized specifically for African Americans for which they volunteered in the last year. The total number of hours volunteered for all of the associations either listed or identified by the respondents was then aggregated to create a measure of total volunteer activity.

To measure participation in *other* community programs, respondents were asked to "Please list the names of any *other* community programs, activities, or events organized specifically for African Americans in which you participated during the last year (e.g., church, school sports/recreation, or political)." The total number of items listed was then tallied.

Finally, to make the appropriate comparisons (volunteers and non-volunteers, participants and non-participants) the independent variables in the study were

categorized into nominal-level measurements derived from the indices mentioned above. Those respondents whose scores for FDC program participation and total volunteer participation were zero were identified as non-volunteers and non-participants respectively. By contrast, those respondents who volunteered at least one hour and participated in at least one FDC program were grouped as volunteers and FDC participants, respectively.

Results

The following section is divided into four parts: (1) a demographic profile of the respondents who participated in the study; (2) the findings associated with a comparison of the Frederick Douglass Center volunteers and non-volunteers; (3) the findings associated with a comparison of community-wide volunteers and non-volunteers; and (4) the findings associated with a comparison of Frederick Douglass Center participants and non-participants.

Overall Demographic Profile of Respondents

Overall, 95 African American respondents completed questionnaires. The sample was split almost equally between men (52.2%) and women (47.8%). The mean age of the sample was 37.36 ($SD = 7.04$). With respect to marital status, almost two thirds of the sample (60.7%) was single, while the remainder was married (39.3%). As for the household income of the respondents, over half (55.4%) lived in households with an income of \$35,000 or higher. Most of the sample (71.1%) was employed full-time, and the remainder of the sample was employed part-time (7.2%), retired (3.6%), unemployed (4.8%), or attending school (13.3%). Generally speaking, the sample was well-educated with 32.5% having completed a bachelor's degree, 35% having completed some college courses, 10% having completed some form of technical training, vocational training or an associate's degree, 16.3% having completed high school or its equivalent, and 6.3% having completed only some high school. The mean number of years lived in the Champaign-Urbana area was relatively high at 22.15 years ($SD = 15.11$), perhaps underscoring the respondents' connection to their community. Mean scores for participation at the FDC ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 3.88$), volunteer hours at the FDC ($M = 10.89$, $SD = 26.18$), and overall volunteer hours ($M = 10.89$, $SD = 6.18$) were indicative of a fairly active group.

A Comparison of FDC Volunteers and Non-volunteers

Table 1 reveals a demographic comparison between those respondents who indicated they volunteered at the FDC and those who were non-volunteers. With respect to the variables included in the table, education-level was significantly different ($X^2 = 16.08$; $p < .001$) with FDC volunteers reporting higher levels of education. In addition, FDC volunteers ($M = 32.89$; $SD = 11.82$) were typically younger ($t = 1.99$; $p < .05$) than were non-volunteers ($M = 40.02$; $SD = 19.13$), and they lived in the Champaign-Urbana area ($M = 15.13$; $SD = 13.43$) fewer years ($t = 2.65$; $p < .01$) than did non-volunteers ($M = 23.77$; $SD = 15.94$).

Table 2 reveals the results of a comparison of FDC volunteers and non-volunteers in terms of their perceptions of racism, racial identities, and participation in

predominantly African American programming. With respect to perceptions of racism, FDC volunteers and non-volunteers revealed no significant differences. Further, FDC volunteers and non-volunteers reported statistically insignificant differences in terms of their racial identities; however, the low probability ($p = .08$) suggests the differences may be *practically* significant. In other words, given the small sample size in this study it is conceivable the result of the test was a Type II error, meaning we failed to show that the two means are statistically different based on our sample data when in fact they are truly different (Judd, Smith, & Kidder, 1991).

As expected, FDC volunteers participated significantly more in programs at the FDC ($t = -2.54$; $p < .02$) than non-volunteers. Moreover, FDC volunteers participated significantly more in predominantly African American programs aside from those at the FDC than did non-volunteers ($t = -3.22$; $p < .01$).

Table 1. Demographic Comparison of FDC Volunteers and Non-volunteers

Category/Characteristic		FDC Volunteers		Non-volunteers at FDC		Overall	
		n	%	n	%	N	%
Sex	Men	18	56.3	29	50.0	47	52.2
	Women	14	43.8	29	50.0	43	47.8
Age	18-29	14	50.0	18	38.3	32	42.7
	30-55	13	46.4	20	42.6	33	44.0
	56 or older	1	3.6	9	19.1	10	13.3
Education	Some high school	1	3.1	4	8.3	5	6.3
	Completed high school	2	6.3	11	22.9	13	16.2
	Completed some college	10	31.3	18	37.5	28	35.0
	Vocational or Tech.Training	0	0.0	2	4.2	2	2.5
	Associates Degree	1	3.1	5	10.4	6	7.5
	Completed college	18	56.3	8	16.7	26	32.5
Marital Status	Single	18	56.3	36	63.2	54	60.7
	Married	14	43.8	21	36.8	35	39.3
Household Income	\$35,000 or higher	20	66.7	26	49.1	46	55.4
	Lower than \$35,000	10	33.3	27	50.9	37	44.6

Table 2. Comparison of FDC Volunteers and Non-volunteers.

Item	Role	M	SD	t	p
Perceptions of Racism	FDC Volunteers	4.45	1.49	-0.703	.49
	Non-volunteers	4.21	1.51		
Racial Identity	FDC Volunteers	5.72	.71	-1.79	.08
	Non-volunteers	5.37	.92		
Participation at FDC	FDC Volunteers	3.87	3.91	-2.54	.02 ^a
	Non-volunteers	1.90	2.57		
Participation in African American programs outside the FDC	FDC Volunteers	6.24	5.11	-3.22	.01 ^b
	Non-volunteers	3.05	3.44		

^aSignificant at .05; ^bSignificant at .01

Note: higher scores indicate higher value

A Comparison of Community Volunteers and Non-volunteers

Table 3 offers a demographic comparison of community-wide volunteers (those who indicated they volunteered for other programs serving primarily African America) and non-volunteers. Significant differences were detected between the two groups regarding education level, age, and time lived in Champaign-Urbana. Community-wide volunteers reporting higher levels of education ($X^2 = 17.76$; $p < .001$), and community-wide volunteers ($M = 33.39$; $SD = 11.51$) were typically younger ($t = 1.93$; $p < .05$) than were non-volunteers ($M = 40.48$; $SD = 19.10$), and they had lived in the Champaign-Urbana area ($M = 16.16$; $SD = 13.11$) fewer years ($t = 2.40$; $p < .05$) than did non-volunteers ($M = 23.84$; $SD = 16.48$).

Table 4 reveals the results of a comparison of community-wide volunteers and non-volunteers in terms of their perceptions of racism, racial identity, and participation in predominantly African American programming. With respect to perceptions of racism, volunteers and non-volunteers were not significantly different. However, volunteers and non-volunteers reported statistically significant differences in terms of their racial identities ($t = -1.99$; $p < .05$), with volunteers reporting stronger racial identity. As expected, volunteers participated more in programs at the FDC ($t = -2.70$; $p < .01$) than did non-volunteers. Moreover, volunteers participated significantly more in predominantly African American programs aside from those at the FDC ($t = -3.14$; $p < .01$) than did non-volunteers.

Table 3. Demographic Comparison of Community-wide Volunteers and Non-volunteers.

Category/Characteristic		C-W Volunteers		Non- volunteers		Overall	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Sex	Men	21	56.8	26	49.1	47	52.2
	Women	16	43.2	27	50.9	43	47.8
Age	18-29	16	48.5	16	38.1	32	42.7
	30-55	16	48.5	17	40.5	33	44.0
	56 or older	1	3.0	9	21.4	10	13.3
Education	Some high school	1	2.7	4	9.3	5	6.3
	Completed high school	2	5.4	11	25.6	13	16.2
	Completed some college	12	32.4	16	37.2	28	35.0
	Vocational or Tech.Training	0	0.0	2	4.7	2	2.5
	Associates Degree	2	5.4	4	9.3	6	7.5
	Completed College	20	54.1	6	14.0	26	32.5
Marital Status	Single	21	56.8	33	63.5	54	60.7
	Married	16	43.2	19	36.5	35	39.3
Household Income	\$35,000 or higher	22	62.9	24	50.0	46	55.4
	Lower than \$35,000	13	37.1	24	50.0	37	44.6

Table 4. Comparison of Community-wide Volunteers and Non-volunteers.

Item	Role	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Perceptions of Racism	Volunteers	4.52	1.43		
	Non-volunteers	4.14	1.54	-1.16	.25
Racial Identity	Volunteers	5.71	.70		
	Non-volunteers	5.33	.95	-1.99	.05 _a
Participation at FDC	Volunteers	3.75	3.83		
	Non-volunteers	1.80	2.49	-2.70	.01 _b
Participation in African American programs outside the FDC	Volunteers	5.92	5.09		
	Non-volunteers	2.98	3.34	-3.14	.01 _b

^aSignificant at .05; ^bSignificant at .01

Note: higher scores indicate higher value

A Comparison of FDC Participants and Non-participants

Table 5 offers a demographic comparison of FDC participants and non-participants. With respect to the variables included in the table, FDC participants reported lower household income levels ($X^2 = 4.33$; $p < .04$). However, no significant differences were reported in terms of comparisons of age ($t = .415$; $p = .68$) or years lived in Champaign-Urbana ($t = -1.70$; $p = .09$).

Table 6 reveals the results of a comparison of FDC participants and non-participants in terms of their perceptions of racism and racial identities. With respect to perceptions of racism, FDC participants and non-participants were not different significantly ($t = -1.83$; $p = .07$), however again, the low probability suggests differences may be *practically* significant, and given the small sample size it is conceivable the result of the test was a Type II error (Judd, Smith, & Kidder, 1991). FDC participants and non-participants also reported statistically insignificant differences in terms of their racial identities.

Table 5. Demographic Comparison of FDC Participants and Non-participants

Category/Characteristic		FDC Participants		Non-participants		Overall	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Sex	Men	26	48.1	19	65.5	47	52.2
	Women	28	51.9	10	34.5	43	47.8
Age	18-29	18	40.9	11	45.8	32	42.7
	30-55	21	47.7	9	37.5	33	44.0
	56 or older	5	11.4	4	16.7	10	13.3
Education	Some high school	4	7.0	1	3.6	5	6.3
	Completed high school	7	12.3	6	21.4	13	16.2
	Completed some college	16	28.1	11	39.3	28	35.0
	Vocational or Tech.Training	0	0.0	2	7.1	2	2.5
	Associates Degree	4	7.0	1	3.6	6	7.5
	Completed College	15	26.3	7	25.0	26	32.5
Marital Status	Single	31	58.5	17	58.6	54	60.7
	Married	22	41.5	12	41.4	35	39.3
Household Income	\$35,000 or higher	23	46.9	20	71.4	46	55.4
	Lower than \$35,000	26	53.1	8	28.6	37	44.6

Table 6. Comparison of FDC Participants and Non-participants

Item	Role	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Perceptions of Racism	FDC Participants	4.47	1.44		
	Non-participants	3.85	1.55	-1.83	.07
Racial Identity	FDC Participants	5.49	.83		
	Non-participants	5.41	.93	-.39	.71

Note: higher scores indicate higher value

Discussion

The purpose of this exploratory study was to compare African Americans who are involved in an African American community center and/or volunteer for associations closely linked to African Americans to those who are not. Groups were compared based on their racial identity and their perceptions of racism. We expected that those who chose to be more closely associated with the African American population would have stronger racial identity and stronger perceptions of racism. In most cases, these expectations were not supported. Comparisons between Frederick Douglass Center (FDC) volunteers and non-volunteers revealed no significant differences with respect to perceptions of racism or racial identity. Both groups reported fairly high levels of racial identity and rather neutral levels of perceptions of racism. FDC volunteers were significantly more active as participants, both at the center as well as in African American programs outside the FDC.

Similarly, comparisons between community-wide volunteers and non-volunteers suggested no significant differences in terms of perceptions of racism (which again were fairly low); however, community-wide volunteers reported significantly higher levels of racial identity than did non-volunteers. Community-wide volunteers were also significantly more active as participants, both at the FDC and in other African American programs in the community. And finally, comparisons between FDC participants and non-participants indicated no significant differences between the groups, in either their perceptions of racism or their racial identity. Thus, in response to our research expectations, we found that African Americans involved at the FDC (either as participants and/or volunteers) did not have stronger perceptions of racism and racial identities than did those who remained uninvolved. However, those who served as volunteers in various African American programs across the community did report a stronger racial identity than did non-volunteers. Further, volunteers were significantly more involved as participants at the FDC as well as in other African American programs outside the FDC.

There are two important findings that deserve attention. First, the racial identity for all study participants was quite high. According to the authors of the scale (Sellers et al., 1997), the centrality dimension of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) refers to the extent to which a person "normatively defines her or himself with regard to race. It measures whether race is a core part of an individual's self-concept" (p. 806). Implicit in the conceptualization of centrality is that there is a hierarchical ranking of different identities, such as gender, age, and occupation, with regard to the proximity of an individuals' core definition of self. In general, the higher the racial identity, the greater the role race plays in how a person defines her or himself. The racial identity scores reported by the African Americans in this study were relatively high compared to previous research (Sellers et al.), thus suggesting strong racial identity among the residents. Also noteworthy is community-wide volunteers had significantly higher racial identity than did non-volunteers. Although causality cannot be determined, the potential implication of this finding is that volunteers had a higher state of racial consciousness, which can be manifested through a greater awareness of oppressions and a desire to become more actively involved (Hardimon & Jackson, 1998).

Second, the perception of racism among the study participants was not as high as we expected. It should be noted that some studies have shown that perceptions of racism differ depending on whether the questions are assessing the individual's experiences versus that of the group (Sigelman & Welch, 1991). The scale used in this study to measure perceived racism was constructed to assess the subjects' own personal experiences with racism, rather than the experiences of African Americans in general. Racism is a complex phenomenon that can manifest itself subtly in sharp looks, unassuming gestures, and simple disregard or through outright mistreatment, discriminatory actions, and acts of violence. Due to our disconnect from past historical situations, and possibly due to the suppression of the media, we are no longer bombarded with images of hoses and dogs let loose on African Americans, nor typically witness repeated acts of hostile treatment towards African Americans. As a result, this could play a role in the way one would perceive racism personally or collectively. Further, the statements in the scale may have been too blatant. Dovidio et al., (2002) described a form of contemporary bias called "aversive racism." "In contrast to 'old fashioned' racism, which is blatant, aversive racism represents a subtle often unintentional form of bias that characterizes many White Americans who possess strong egalitarian values and who believe they are nonprejudiced" (p. 90). Thus, the statements in the scale may be more indicative of old fashioned racism than the more modern aversive racism.

Previous research has examined the connections between racism, discrimination and leisure behavior (Gobster, 2002; Stodolska, 2005; West, 1989), and we sought to add to this body of research by examining perceptions of racism and racial identity and its relationship to African Americans' choices of leisure settings. There continues to be demarcated leisure settings where minorities are not welcome, and where leisure participation is in essence limited to Whites (Gobster, 1998; Johnson et al., 1998; Philipp, 1999, 2000; Stodolska). Although much has been written about racial identity in general, there has been limited research regarding racial identity and African Americans' leisure, particularly as it relates to choosing leisure settings that are designed specifically for African Americans. For example, Shinew, Floyd, and Parry (2004) noted several differences in the leisure pursuits of African Americans and Whites, and interpreted their findings as African Americans freely choosing not to participate in stereotypical White leisure pursuits, suggesting a form of resistance and self-determination. They referred to Washburne and Wall's (1980) contention that certain leisure activities may have White identities and as a result be across the boundary for African Americans. We do not fully understand the roles racial identity and perceptions of racism play in African Americans' desire to select leisure settings that are not part of White mainstream society. This study sought to begin to address this gap in the literature.

The results should be interpreted through the limitations imposed by the methods used in the study. Study participants were not randomly selected. Rather, FDC staff distributed surveys to reach various individuals and groups. Clearly there could be bias in this method of data collection. Additionally, only 95 African Americans completed the survey instrument. A larger sample might have produced different results. To measure participation at the FDC as well as volunteer partici-

pation, a nominal-level measurement index was created. Those respondents who indicated they did not participate in FDC programs were labeled non-participants and those who indicated they did not volunteer were identified as non-volunteers. Conversely, respondents who volunteered at least one hour and participated in at least one program were classified as volunteers and participants, respectively. This level of classification is rather rudimentary, and does not take into account the difference between an individual who participated in one program (or volunteered for one hour each month) as opposed to someone who participated in six programs (or volunteered for twenty hours each month). A more sophisticated measure of level of participation might have produced different findings.

Despite these limitations, the present study suggests a number of areas for future research. These results contribute to previous research regarding race and leisure settings (Floyd & Shinew, 1999; Gobster, 2002; Johnson et al., 1998; Shinew, Glover, & Parry, 2004). Many researchers have written that leisure is a space where people of different races often separate; this study sought to examine whether those individuals who chose a community center and/or volunteer opportunities associated with the African American population had stronger perceptions of racism and racial identity. However, this study did not ask respondents how involved they were in other leisure activities. It would be useful to get a more complete picture of the leisure lives of the study participants. Shinew and Floyd (2005) suggested that the notion of resistance emerges when African Americans use their leisure or gain from their leisure a sense of empowerment. They concluded that through leisure experiences, African Americans might gain a sense of autonomy, personal control, and sense of entitlement that may be lacking in other aspects of their lives. The current study did not examine resistance or empowerment, but the linkages between perceptions of racism and racial identity, and resistance and empowerment, and how these concepts relate to leisure choices is a fertile area of study. Further, this type of study lends itself to qualitative data collection methods. Given the sensitive and complex nature of the study's concepts, methods that allow more in-depth investigation would be useful. Another avenue to examine is the strength of social connections (*homophily*) that are formed in leisure settings in terms of both racial identity and perceptions of racism. To what extents do these bonds directly relate to civic-minded participation and the development of social capital?

Clearly, additional research is needed to further our understanding of the roles of racism, and racial identity on the leisure lives of African Americans. Recent events such as racially related deaths and anti-affirmative action proposals suggest interracial contact often occurs under strained conditions. Thus, a community center that serves primarily African Americans, where those of similar racial identities can come together in a leisure setting and be part of a shared scheme of order, is understandably attractive to many African Americans. Perhaps it is appropriate and even beneficial that some leisure spaces are racially demarcated. However, the concern is whether leisure spaces are racially separate due to choice, or due to feelings of being unwelcome and/or discriminated against. Understanding the difference between these two conditions is an important and socially relevant area of study for both leisure researchers and practitioners, and needs to be investigated in the future.

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