

Interracial Couples' Experience of Leisure: A Social Network Approach

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There has been a significant amount of research that has indicated divergent patterns of leisure participation among African Americans and European Americans; however, there has been a paucity of research that addresses the leisure patterns of interracial couples and families. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the leisure patterns of interracial couples and families, specifically African American and European American couples. A qualitative design was employed to gather in-depth interview data from six couples. The findings indicated that the interracial couples felt socially isolated in various aspects of daily life, including work, family, and leisure. The primary cause of their social isolation was due to race and racism. The couples experienced low levels of comfort when participating in leisure within public spaces. There was not a distinct pattern of leisure activity among the couples; however, there was a distinct process the couples went through in selecting activities prior to participation in order to avoid negative social reactions.

KEYWORDS: *interracial couples, leisure, social networks, family, racism*

Introduction

For decades the divergent patterns in African Americans' and European Americans' leisure preferences and participation have been documented in the leisure literature. Lee (1972) found that some leisure activities and settings could be assigned the "black" label and others the "white" label. Hatchett (1974) explained that African Americans maintained a distinctive set of leisure activities even in integrated neighborhoods, suggesting that leisure activities may form an important part of racial identity regardless of neigh-

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borhood location or social class. Washburne (1978) developed the marginality and ethnicity perspectives to explain racial difference in leisure participation. It is his theories that much of the race and leisure research has been rationalized. Washburne used the marginality perspective to explain why the participation rates in outdoor recreation were considerably lower for African Americans compared to European Americans. He indicated that African American participation patterns resulted from limited socioeconomic resources and being on the fringe of mainstream society. He explained that this was a direct result of historical patterns of oppression and racial discrimination. Conversely, Washburne (1978) described the ethnicity perspective as one related to subcultural differences. That is, African Americans have different patterns of participation based on different norms, values, and beliefs systems than those in the dominant culture. For example, Dwyer and Hutchinson (1990) argued that African Americans preferred urban, developed leisure locations, whereas European Americans preferred more natural, less developed areas.

In an attempt to understand minority leisure preferences and participation, other leisure theorists have investigated the interrelationships among race, gender, and social class (Floyd, Shinew, McGuire, & Noe, 1994; Stamps & Stamps, 1985). Although Stamps and Stamps (1985) hypothesized that leisure participation among African Americans and European Americans of the same social class would be positively correlated, particularly at the middle class level, they found low correspondence at the middle class level and no association at lower class levels. They concluded that race seemed to be more important than social class in determining leisure participation. In contrast, Floyd et al. (1994) showed strong correspondence among African Americans and European Americans who perceived themselves to be middle class; however, low correspondence was found among the two groups (and females in particular) who perceived themselves to have lower class or working class status.

Although much remains to be learned, there is greater understanding today than in years past regarding the differences and similarities between African American and European American leisure preferences and participation. However, if European Americans theoretically participate in activities *A*, *B*, and *C* for leisure, and African Americans participate in activities *X*, *Y*, and *Z*, what happens to the leisure preferences of those who have been racialized as "other," that is, interracial couples and biracial people? To date there remains a paucity of research regarding this issue, and therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to explore the leisure preferences and participation patterns of interracial couples and families. The study was limited to only African American and European American couples. Furthermore, the current literature concerning interracial families suggests that these couples participate in community support activities to form social networks (Faulkner, 1983; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Therefore, social network theory was used to guide the study's framework.

Family and Leisure

The leisure and family literature has provided insight into the multiple realities of family life as it relates to leisure experiences of individual family members and the familial unit as a whole. For example, Shaw (1992) examined the view that "the family that plays together stays together," which reflects a "romanticized version" of family life (Woodard, Green & Hebron, 1988). Shaw explained that the dominant ideologically-based view of family leisure as fun for all may obscure the work associated with family activities and the unequal distribution of such work. Her research ultimately exposed the power relations and unequal division of labor within the family unit. Mothers were more likely to report family time as work, whereas fathers were more likely to report family time as leisure. In essence, Shaw found that women and men do not experience family time in the same way, and both parents do not equally share the work associated with family activities.

Orthner and Mancini (1990) examined the relationship between shared leisure activities and family bonding. Their review and summary of the literature relating to family interaction and cohesion suggested that couples who spend leisure time together in joint activities tended to be much more satisfied with their marriages than those that did not. Another consistent finding was that high concentrations of independent, individual activities had a negative impact on marital satisfaction. The authors indicated that spending a great deal of time alone was associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction. Conversely, the authors found that there was a positive relationship between shared leisure activities and marital communication and interaction. They also argued, though, that there is insufficient evidence to suggest that leisure can or cannot significantly affect marital stability. This is because couples might be very satisfied with their relationship and leisure, but for a variety of reasons the relationship may still terminate. Orthner and Mancini (1990) concluded by indicating that there is still much to be learned concerning leisure and marital satisfaction.

Other studies have also been helpful in providing some insight regarding leisure and the family. Freysinger (1994) found that leisure interaction with children was positively related to satisfaction with parenting for fathers, but not for mothers. Groves, Cialdini, and Couper (1992) found that whether leisure outcomes were primarily individual or family oriented, the first concern was the creation of a positive environment, since this was essential to building relationships and expressing abilities and talents. Madrigal, Havitz, and Howard (1992) found that couples who perceived greater equality and companionship in their marriage viewed extended periods of time together as being more pleasurable and important.

Thus, researchers have made many scholarly contributions regarding familial leisure issues. As the face of America changes, however, it is increasingly important to include nontraditional families in our research on families and leisure. There has been very little written on the interracial family, and

nothing regarding the interracial family contextualized in leisure within the leisure literature. As the number of interracial marriages increases, it will become increasingly important to understand the needs of these families.

Interracial Families

According to recent empirical studies, various types of interracial relationships have become more common over the course of this century (Kalmijn, 1993). Spickard (1989) explained that romantic relationships between African Americans and European Americans have a long, though not necessarily celebrated, history in America dating back to the nation's colonial past. However, Spickard pointed out that the concept of intermarriage is, by and large, a more recent phenomenon and has recently gained increased attention in the media and in the popular literature. Interracial marriages are more acceptable and common than in the past (Kalmijn, 1993). Today, there are nearly 3 million married interracial couples in the U.S., representing approximately 5% of all marriages (Suro, 1999). Furthermore, Sandor (1994) estimated that there were 2.5 million interracial couples dating. Demographers argue that interracial relationships will continue to grow, producing children and families with their own unique set of social issues (Xie & Goyette, 1997), including issues related to leisure behavior.

A substantial historical literature base suggests that interracial marriage may have a number of negative effects on the couples and their children (Bowles, 1993; Gordon, 1964; Henriques, 1974; McDermott & Fukunagua, 1978; Washington, 1970; Xie & Goyette, 1997). Among the suggested negative effects are anxiety, insecurity, guilt, anger, depression, and identity conflicts (Stephan & Stephan, 1991). On the rare occasions that biracial people and/or interracial couples are asked about their social reality, they often report that the psychological and sociological problems that they face are manifestations of racism and overall societal pressure (Porterfield, 1982; Reddy, 1994; Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995; Stephan & Stephan, 1991). This suggests that, perhaps the broader concern is not the issues affecting those involved in interracial relationships, but rather the societal issue of race and the "possessive investment in whiteness" (Lipsitz, 1998, p. vii). Lipsitz explained that "Whiteness" has cash value, which provides advantages to Whites in such areas as employment, housing, education, and health care. He argued that European Americans are encouraged to invest in "Whiteness," to remain true to an identity that provides them with resources, power, and opportunity. This would include making a concerted effort to preserve the purity of the so-called "superior White race" and not allow inferior people of color to pollute that purity. The following statement disclosed a biracial male's perspective on interracial unions. He also alluded to the social construction of race as being at the crux of the problem facing interracial people:

Unfortunately, what makes it [interracial relationships] a loaded issue has everything to do with caste and politics, not really cultural differences. That's noth-

ing. Nothing. It's what we have in a psychological way and a social-political way done to race and culture that's got things all screwed up. And that's where the problem lies (Lorenzo, biracial male). (as cited in Rosenblatt et al., 1995, p. 295)

Are there unique and specific ways interracial couples not only select leisure activities, but also utilize leisure pursuits to sustain and strengthen their individual and collective social networks? Have interracial couples had to modify what may be described as "self-selecting leisure preferences" in order to "fit in" with the Black or White context of the experience? In what ways have seemingly trivial decisions concerning leisure choices and selections repeatedly escalated into significant role/status/identity shifts for interracial couples? For example, the urban, high-rise bred African American male who marries a suburban European American female may find himself having to adapt to less familiar leisure habits—even something as "traditional" as supervising the grill for a neighborhood cookout in the backyard. His situation would be distinctively different from the European American urban male who either is not the product of generations of high-rise residency or who at least would have seen himself represented in this grill chef role via mass media.

A related concern is interracial families' perceptions of discrimination (in public places (Feagin, 1991) or more specifically in leisure settings (Floyd, 1998; Philipp, 1999; West, 1989)) and how this impacts their leisure behavior and choices. Feagin (1991) found that African Americans "remain vulnerable targets in public places." Feagin stated, "When blatant acts of avoidance, verbal harassment, and physical attack combine with subtle and covert slights, and these accumulate over months, years, and lifetimes, the impact on a black person is far more than the sum of the individual instances." (p. 115). West (1989) stated that leisure settings are not immune to interracial conflict, and Floyd (1998) suggested that more work needs to be done to investigate the types of range of discrimination and how they impact leisure choices and constraints.

To build on this research, this study examined interracial couples and the role of leisure in addressing the problems they face as a racialized couple. Social network theory was selected as the framework for the study. Floyd and Shinew (1999) stated that understanding social groups and social interaction provides critical insight into leisure choices and meanings

Theory

Social network theory was utilized as the theoretical framework to guide the systematic inquiry into the phenomenon of interracial families and leisure. "Network analysis is a style of social science research that focuses on people's social networks as a means toward understanding their behavior" (Fischer, 1977, p. 63). The primary focus of network analysis is on the interpersonal relationships of an individual and his or her various associations. Individuals are linked to their society primarily through relations with other

individuals, such as relatives, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances. Each individual is the center of a web of social bonds that radiates outward to people that are known both intimately and casually, and to the wider society (Fischer et al., 1977). These relationships are considered to be our personal social networks. Researchers (Fischer, 1977; Wellman & Wortley, 1989; Wireman, 1984) have found that Americans utilize social networks to gain support, establish group norms and values, and maintain a modified version of community in spite of the changes taking place in America's social and economic culture. According to Wellman and Wortley (1989), this support is provided in four major dimensions: emotional aid, information, companionship, and financial aid. These four dimensions are frequently utilized to study the depth of an individual's support system and are the foundation of network analysis. Further, Stokowski (1994) explained that one's leisure patterns are significantly influenced by one's social network. Therefore, this theory has been used to help explain leisure behavior in previous research studies.

The current literature concerning interracial families suggests that these couples participate in community support activities to form social networks (Faulkner, 1983; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Wellman and Wortley (1990) indicated that social networks have been successful in providing support for such marginalized groups. For example, there are more than 50 interracial family and singles support groups in the United States. Many of these organizations have the word "social" or "network" in their official titles and/or mission statements, indicating their networking emphasis. Much of their focus is on providing an opportunity for biracial singles, interracial couples, and families to develop social networks, often in the context of leisure. Further, it is widely accepted that many children experience their first social ties with non-family members in a leisure context, typically in the form of play behavior at school, daycare, and parks. They often learn social behaviors of sharing, negotiating, and exchanging ideas in these leisure settings. This developmental behavior has particular significance for biracial children; empirical evidence has indicated that there are additional benefits for biracial children in having opportunities to interact with other biracial children and interracial families given their identity conflicts (Wardle, 1989). Because the leisure literature suggests that leisure is a context for the development of social networks (Stokowski, 1994), it is reasonable to postulate that interracial couples may build social networks through leisure as an instrument to gain support and assist in their adjustment to their social situation.

There appears to be some variation in the uses and meaning of social networks between African Americans and European Americans. For example, there is evidence within the social network literature that suggests that African Americans utilize "fictive kin" as a primary element of informal support (Hill, 1972; Stack, 1974). Fictive kin refers to the extending of kinship status to non-blood-based relationships in an effort to expand one's social network (Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994). This kinship is extended to individuals who are not related, but refer to one another in kinship terms. Guttman and Guttman (1976) indicated that the fictive kin relationship tra-

dition pre-dates slavery for those of African descent. However, fictive kin relationships are less prevalent among European Americans (Chatters et al., 1994).

Another example of social network differences between African Americans and European Americans contextualized in leisure is participation in church activities. Robinson (1998) reported that African Americans spend almost twice the amount of time in church activities as compared to European Americans. Similarly, Floyd and Shinew (1999) found that African Americans rated this activity significantly higher in preference than did European Americans. The church is often referred to as the focal point of the "Black Community" (e.g., bell hooks, Jesse Jackson, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, etc.). Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody (1994) explained that the church is often used as a significant aspect of African Americans' social network.

Thus, the nature and uses of social networks by European Americans and African Americans has been documented. It is not yet known, however, how interracial couples utilize social networks. It is also not known the extent to which they might do so together as a "couple" or separately as individuals. In either case, people rarely haphazardly invent social network behavior, nor do they have a completely individualized approach to utilizing social networks. Rather, people draw upon the patterns and modes of relating to others that they have acquired from their membership in a variety of social groups based on their race, gender, and social class. This study seeks to discern the extent to which interracial couples' use of social networks is unique to their particular marginalized status. The social network framework may prove beneficial in providing a level of understanding to the more global concept of interracial relationships and leisure behavior.

Methods

Sample Selection

The six interracial couples or 12 married "conversational partners" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.10) who participated in this study were drawn from the Champaign-Urbana (CU), Illinois, community. Conversational partners are individuals who are treated as partners in the research process rather than objects of research. The study was limited to only married African American and European American couples.

Champaign is a city of 65,000 residents with its neighboring city to the East, Urbana, having a population of 35,000 residents. The two cities are also the home of the University of Illinois with an enrollment of approximately 35,000 students. CU is typical of a middle class American university community and has a mean family income level of \$36,950 (Destination Champaign, 1993). Currently, the African-American population is approximately 14.2% with an Asian population at approximately 4.1%, and a Hispanic and Native American population at less than 1%, respectively (Destination Champaign, 1993). The remaining 80.7% of the population is European American.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of interracial couples and their leisure experiences, attempts were made to diversify the sample in terms of length of time together. The sample included married interracial couples who had been together less than 5 years, more than 10 years, and a couple who has been together more than 15 years. All the conversational partners had a minimum of one child in the home. Same race couples were not interviewed. The data were collected during the spring, summer and fall of 1999 utilizing a purposeful sampling technique. Specifically, a snowballing technique was used to locate the couples, beginning with a couple that was referred by a key informant. Table 1 summarizes demographic characteristics of the couples in this study.

Data Collection

Long interviewing was selected as the data gathering method for this study. In using long interviews, conversational partners were allowed to expand on general orienting questions. Field notes were taken before and after each interview session, and took the form of a field journal to record thoughts, impressions, initial ideas, working hypotheses, and issues to pursue. Observational data related to the home environment, how the family dressed, mannerisms, and any other data of interest, such as leisure paraphernalia, were also recorded.

Member checks (Schwandt, 1997) were used to assist in establishing trustworthiness and authenticity. This gave the conversational partners an opportunity to verify or refute the researcher's findings. It also provided a vehicle for honoring the participants' right to know how they were being represented. The member checks took place in the form of follow-up interviews, home visits, phone calls, and/or the conversational partners reviewing transcripts and written reports. The member check data were added to the couples' verbatim transcript files primarily as additional data; however, they also assisted in corroborating findings and meeting the criteria of confirmability.

Each member of the couple participated in a minimum of one individual interview and one interview as a couple. Some conversational partners participated in additional interviews as part of the member checking process. Each session lasted on average 90 minutes. This was necessary to reach a data saturation point. Also, the interviews were approximately ten days apart. The ten days between sessions allowed time to transcribe tapes, "process," and "internalize" interviews in order to make the most effective use of subsequent interviews.

An interview protocol was used to give the interview sessions a semi-structure format. The interview protocol consisted of 19 guiding questions within specific topical areas. The topical areas were interracial relationships, race, socioeconomic class, gender, family, leisure, social networks, and societal issues concerning interracial relationships. All interviews were recorded with an audio recorder and were transcribed verbatim following the inter-

TABLE 1
Demographic Characteristics of Couples

Couple	Age Husband	Age Wife	Time Together (years)	Education Husband (years)	Education Wife (years)	Occupation Husband	Occupation Wife
Phil (B) & Cori (W)	33	34	16	20	17	Educator/ Ph.D. student	Engineer/ Business owner
Frank (B) & Nikki (W)	21	24	2	16	13	Student athlete	Housewife
Bob (B) & Jan (W)	42	41	9	15	17	Police officer	Dental hygienist
Paul (B) & Pat (W)	43	43	16	19	15	E.R. surgeon	Housewife
Roy (W) & Darla (B)	42	44	7	21	15	Executive director	University administrator
Ted (B) & Tressa (W)	21	21	4	15	17	House- husband	Sales professional
Mean	33.7	34.5	9.0	17.7	15.7		

Mean age all: 34.1 Mean years education all: 16.7

Note: B = black, W = white

views. The interviews took place in a combination of mutually agreeable locations—in couples' homes, restaurants, the researcher's office at the University of Illinois, and a public park. The optimal location was in the couples' homes. This provided an opportunity to gather field notes related to the physical setting in which the couples negotiated their daily lives. This information illuminated other issues surrounding the couples' reality and provided dialogue for subsequent interviews. All the conversational partners were assigned a pseudonym to conceal their identity and to ensure confidentiality (results below use these pseudonyms).

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this investigation, in part, followed McCracken's (1988) analytical structure. However, due to the positivistic nature of McCracken's structure, the approach to qualitative data analysis set forth by Witz, Goodwin, Hart and Thomas (in press) was used as a supplementary philosophical guide, thus, the data analysis of this investigation combined the two approaches. The five stages of McCracken's structure are as follows: (a) familiarization (gaining a comprehensive understanding of the conversational partners' life worlds), (b) fragmenting data (immersion into the data until implications and observations were fully played out), (c) category development (a process of refinement including identifying patterns and themes), (d) category relationship development (organizing of themes into patterns of interrelationship), and (e) identification of patterns and themes (bringing themes of all interviews together to determine how the information could be synthesized into a thesis). The Witz et al. (in press) approach to qualitative data analysis is summarized below:

Analysis of an individual case begins with listening, digesting and getting insight while processing the tapes that have been made and planning the next tape to be made. It involves attitudes and strategies that aim at getting at the phenomenon as it is found in that case and at becoming aware of the essential story of that case—the nature or essence of the phenomenon in that case as part of the general nature of the person. (Witz et al., in press)

While going through the McCracken stages of analysis, the researcher followed the Witz et al. philosophy of constantly empathizing with the conversational partners. This involved pouring oneself into the couples' experiences in an attempt to understand the essence of their realities. For example, the researcher spent weeks simply listening to the tapes and reading the verbatim transcripts in an attempt to become intimately familiar with the data. This immersion assisted in gaining a deep understanding of the data, which was crucial in identifying major stands in the couples' histories relevant to the research questions. The empathetic approach produced various insights and hypotheses to explore, which led to the development of thematic categories that were compiled and coded into computer files. The initial categories included race, leisure, social networks, family/friends, and gender. Continuing to follow the McCracken approach through stage five,

the writing process began while constantly empathizing with the couples' experiences.

Results

After careful analysis of the study data, one major theme emerged. The interracial couples in this study had limited social networks due to perceived negative societal reactions. The limitations on the couples' social networks were found in the areas of family, work, and leisure. Therefore, the results have been organized by reporting the couples' social network isolation into these three categories.

Social Networks and Isolation

The couples in this study spoke of being socially isolated due to racism and indicated that this isolation was manifested in family, work, and leisure. Over the years, the conversational partners in this study married, had their first child (and in some cases several children), yet were still navigating through a complex understanding of the nuances related to the uniqueness of being in an interracial relationship. Settling into their newly formed, racialized social network was particularly salient for these couples. As a unit, they were no longer exclusively European American or African American.

A theme that ran through the data was that interracial families have limited social networks due to societal pressures. Friends and family members tended to withdraw from these couples due to issues of race and racism. Therefore, the social network support was limited and affected the physical, emotional, and financial well being of the interracial families. This also significantly impacted the couples' leisure behavior. According to Burch (1969), the nature of intimate social circles of individuals may be the crucial determinant of leisure behavior. The absence of such network support can greatly influence a family's ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle, including leisure, within the societal structure. In reporting the contextual realities of their leisure experience, the couples in this study confirmed the social isolation of interracial families.

Social Network Isolation: Family

Nikki: I'm Italian and the majority are very prejudice. My dad said, "That's just how it's going to be Nikki." "You should have married your own race." I said, "If you can't love me for me, then I guess you don't need to be a part of my life. Cause I ain't gonna change for nobody . . ." So, I don't talk to my dad anymore.

As a result of her interracial relationship, Nikki has not spoken to her father in several years. Prior to dating interracially, Nikki had frequent and substantial contact with her father. In fact, she readily admits that he was a major source of various forms of support for her prior to his knowledge of her dating pattern, which she kept secret for three years. However, as Nikki

settled into adulthood and fell in love with an African American man, she took full responsibility for her life. She did not allow her friends or family members to dictate how she lived her life, even if that resulted in them no longer being involved with her. Nonetheless, as documented by Fisher (1990), the absence of the support of one's father may play a role in one's ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle and could conceivably affect one's overall long-term quality of life.

The literature related to interracial relationships has historically reported that family members often withdraw from those who choose to marry outside of their race (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Spickard (1989) argued that this is especially true of the European American partner's family. The African American partner's family has been far more accepting toward interracial marriage than the often violent reactions of the European American partner's family. This tended to be the case with the couples in this study. Nonetheless, European Americans and African Americans agree that the support of family and friends can be a crucial element in the success and overall health of individuals and families. However, the withdrawal of family members and/or friends appeared to be a frequent pattern among all the couples in this study. Further, in some instances, because of negative reactions from friends and family, it was the couples themselves who made the decision to detach themselves from people, places and situations that made them uncomfortable:

Phil: I don't _ _ _ _ around with these small towns . . . sometimes her family would end up in small towns and they'll wanna go somewhere. Cori knows me . . . I ain't going. Ya don't _ _ _ _ around in these small towns.

Tressa: Half of his dad's side of the family didn't like me, so we stay away.

Interracial couples frequently found themselves in situations where they had to deal with racism, discrimination, and prejudice within their own families. Therefore, over time they developed strong coping skills to buffer them from familial and societal influences. It also appeared to bond them as a couple because many of them did not receive the type of support that same-race couples often receive from immediate and extended family members. Paul explains difficulties with family:

Paul: Things were really bad for a long time. But I think that it strengthens you because you're able to really see yourself and get the support from your spouse. And I think that it helps to clarify your relationship in a way because it helps you get at the root of why you're together as a couple in the first place. But I think it's . . . it's . . . who knows. I mean, I think some people get married for the wrong reasons. And we got married because we loved each other . . . I mean I didn't marry my wife because she was . . . because her grandmother was from Syria or because her father was from Italy. I married her because I loved her. We had some fun doing things together. We had the same vision of where we were going to go in our life. And that's what we did . . . So anyway, It was horrifying for me. The family thing. Because it pointed things out to me in a way . . . and it made us rely on

ourselves . . . much more than maybe we would have if my family had been very supportive. Because other than my father, you know we knew we weren't getting a whole lot of support from very many other people.

Same-race couples may find themselves in situations where they are estranged from their families, but interracial couples frequently experience these estranged relationships specifically due to their partner's racial background. Given the nature of societal reactions to interracial couples, withdrawal of family members becomes increasingly salient to the couple. Although, as Paul stated, a potentially positive outcome of being socially isolated from family members is a strengthened bond between the couple, it should be noted that the lack of familial support can have a long-term, negative impact on couples' lives.

Social Network Isolation: Work

Wellman and Wortley (1989) indicated that contact with co-workers within the work environment can extend one's social network. Therefore, the potential to extend one's leisure-related personal community through one's work activity is often an extension of social network development. However, the couples in this study reported that they had difficulty establishing relationships with co-workers that extended into their personal leisure time and spaces.

One may never again see the person at the park who stares or, for that matter, the racist uncle who could never accept the relationship from the beginning. If it is a job that the individual enjoys and the income is essential to the financial well being of the family, the people at work may be a part of one's daily life for years. Thus, racism in the workplace can be especially burdensome because work can be a constant and important part of one's life (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Cori explained a work related situation she encountered as she began her career as an engineer:

Cori: In corporate America . . . I was working in Dubuque, Iowa, which I found out later was a pretty racist place and he [Phil] didn't know that. There had been Ku Klux Klan people come there a couple of years before I moved there . . . a pretty hot place. Um . . . and he came to visit me and I . . . um . . . asked the management if I could take him on . . . I told him my boyfriend's coming in town and I want to take him on a plant tour. And um . . . he said, "That's great! Wonderful!" So they scheduled the little trucks and the guide and then . . . Phil came and we got on it and they started . . . and uh . . . I think that we got called in. I don't think we . . . I'm almost positive we didn't make it through the whole um . . . tour. And I got called into one of the top executive's office. And I think he said *something* . . . I don't remember exactly . . . something to the effect that I had made . . . I had um . . . exhibited poor judgment and I was causing disruption in the uh . . . factory. And that he thought that my boyfriend should leave. And I got pretty shy about those sorts of things afterwards. And more so it was . . . it wasn't because of my repu-

tation anyway, but it was because I *really* made Phil uncomfortable. The fact that he had come out of his way to come there, and then I had to send him home. Just the worst, *worst* thing! And I never wanted to put him in that sort of position again . . . personal things and race-based things . . . seem to complicate things . . . if I introduce him into my work environment.

Cori explained how from that point on she was ostracized at work, felt uncomfortable, and isolated from her co-workers. Soon after, Cori resigned from that position, but more importantly, she did not introduce her husband and children into her work situation again, which further isolated her family and reduced the possible social support co-workers could have provided. In fact, Cori and Phil ultimately decided to go into business for themselves in an effort to escape the racist treatment experienced in corporate America. The experience was similar for Tressa in her work environment:

Tressa: A guy I worked with knew I was dating a Black man. I can't remember what it was but, whatever it was he was like, "well if you want it, have your boyfriend just steal it." Ted's brother worked there at the time and I guess he set him straight, and I never had any problems with him since . . . in fact, he will hardly say two words to me.

As noted from the self-reports of Cori and Tressa, interracial couples can experience very hurtful situations within the workforce due to being in an interracial relationship. These two women were middle-class, college-educated people who had heavily invested in their careers. It was evident that their work was important to them and represented a major part of their self-identity. Therefore, to be ostracized at work simply because of who they marry was extremely burdensome. The couples in this study were cautious about letting co-workers know that they were involved in an interracial relationship for fear of some form of retaliation.

Therefore, these interracial couples did not have the opportunity to extend their social networks through their work activity. These conversational partners indicated that most of their work acquaintances are just that, acquaintances. They reported that they did not have significant, meaningful relationships with those whom they worked and typically did not extend their relationships with co-workers beyond the realm of the work environment into their personal leisure spaces. In fact, only one of twelve conversational partners indicated that they spent time with a co-worker outside of the work environment. This may have been due to the fact that he was the only White male in the study, affording him an increased level of privilege and access.

Social Network Isolation: Leisure

Leisure spaces, places, and activities are important locales for the development of social networks. However, these interracial couples found it difficult to establish network ties through their leisure participation. Dominant views of social network formation did not hold for these couples. All the couples involved in this study reported multiple instances of negative leisure experiences due to racism and discrimination, suggesting the Cham-

paign-Urbana community, and perhaps the United States as a whole, are not culturally sensitive to interracial couples and biracial children. These negative experiences constantly affected how they perceived and selected activities. Moreover, this status negatively affected the ultimate outcome of their leisure experiences.

Many U.S. cities are segregated by race, which poses particular problems for interracial couples because they often find themselves attempting to participate in leisure activities in racially homogeneous environments. Whether they participate in leisure within a predominately African American or European American environment, there are issues of comfort for one or both partners and also for their biracial children. The issue of "comfort" based on race and leisure participation must be considered when discussing leisure participation for interracial couples. Philipp (1995) indicated that African Americans felt less comfortable in many leisure spaces than did European Americans. Further, Philipp (1999) found that African Americans felt less welcome in leisure activities than many European Americans thought.

Therefore, it is important to note that some leisure theorists have suggested that leisure may have a negative side as well (Curtis, 1979; Jacobson & Samdahl, 1998; Robertson, 1994; Rojek, 1999). This might include leisure as a context for deviant leisure, sexism or for criminal activities. In this case, it is a setting for racism and discrimination. For example, Ted and Tressa experienced stares, intrusiveness, and hostility when attempting to enjoy leisure experiences. Ted described an evening in a public park when trying to enjoy an outdoor concert:

Ted: . . . there were stares and that's what's - - - - - up . . . which is funny, the stares were from upper class people. Ya know, that I've encountered . . . people who dress nice. Ya know, Tressa came over and sat by me and I gave her a kiss and I saw this guy just . . . him and his wife . . . ya know . . . almost like their mouth dropped . . . people staring and just looking in shock . . . there are always stares.

Ted also explained that he has always enjoyed traveling. According to Edginton, Jordon, DeGraaf, and Edginton (1998), visiting family and friends is one of the primary reasons that people travel, to extend and deepen social network ties. However, since being in an interracial relationship, not only Ted, but also several of the couples had difficulty pursuing their passion to travel and to subsequently deepen their social network associations because of the constraints placed upon them by society. Oftentimes the couples could not be assured of safety, and thus elected to withdraw and remain at home or develop an alternative leisure plan. For example, all the couples were averse to traveling in the Southern states:

Ted: Going through Georgia, I felt unsafe. Going through Virginia I really felt unsafe. I had a person who was dating a White girl, who actually lived there, tell me how bad it was. This was in my mind . . . after that guy in Georgia told me how bad it was. I never encountered it myself, but then I was even more cautious . . .

Jan: Um . . . when we were, you know, planning our wedding and all that kind of stuff, and what we were going to do on our honeymoon, I said, "Well,"

um . . . we kind of got out the MAP and said, "you know, Which direction should we go?" And Bob says to me, "Well, we can't go South." And I said, "Why not?" "What do you mean we can't go South?" He said, "Because it's not going to go over well down there."

It is interesting to note, as is evidenced in the quote above, that whether or not the couple had actually experienced trouble traveling in the South, they all perceived it to be unsafe for them as a couple or as a family.

A recurring theme among these couples was being very "careful" where they go for leisure experiences. It became obvious from the interviews that there was an awareness involved in selecting and participating in leisure activities for interracial couples. There are times when people are able to minimize the likelihood of encountering problems, or diminishing their impact, by being very aware of their surroundings and the places they frequent (McNamara, Tempenis, & Walton, 1999). The couples in this study accomplished this by doing research prior to becoming involved in a leisure experience. For example, they would call ahead, visit a leisure site prior to exposing family members, or ask friends about the possibility of encountering problems. Nonetheless, even when caution was taken in the leisure selection process, the feelings of real or perceived constraint were rarely forgone due to the constant need to be on guard and feeling the need to protect oneself and family. While probing for deeper explanations, Phil gave the following response when asked why he was constantly on guard:

Phil: Um . . . for me it is because I am always in protector mode, always . . . always. Ya know and I tell Cori, ya know, you might be relaxed, but I'm not cause I'm always making decisions, looking around, making certain that nobody's runnin up on us . . . I'm very cautious that way . . . in today's climate I'm concerned with racist mentality you know . . . I'm concerned that mutha _ _ _ _ _ are not running up on us . . . my kids and wife are the most precious things in my life. We're pretty nervous folk.

The recurring theme of not feeling "normal" and often being met with hostility was very problematic for the couples. Darla and Pat gave further explanations of experiences and feelings related to interracial couples' leisure experiences:

Darla: When we go out and stuff we get stares ya know people looking to see if we're together or ya know, my children are all African-American so people are like. . . ya know what's going on with that?

During a vacation to Wrightsville Beach, Pat and her family were refused service at a restaurant and generally received "poor" and "rude" treatment while attempting to experience leisure.

Pat: We would never go back to Wrightsville Beach. It's on the outer banks of North Carolina. We hope they're about to be devastated by Hurricane ah . . . Daniel. Because my attitude is why should I give my money to someone who . . . can't appreciate the fact that I'm the same as everyone else and why should I give my money to someone who's a jerk.

Along with attempts to research safe places for leisure participation, another pattern for coping with the racism and discrimination was for the couples to withdraw from public spaces as much as possible. Reported directly and implied, many couples just preferred to stay at home and not be seen in public because the aggravation and fear that accompanied their visibility was simply not worth the trouble. Obviously, this limited the couples' social networks, since isolation reduced opportunities to maintain friendships and extended contacts. This placed a greater reliance on family members for support, but as discussed earlier, extended family members were often unsupportive because of their opposition to interracial relationships. Tressa amplifies her feelings of withdrawal:

Tressa: I don't want to go out and do anything in public any more. Like . . . I used to want to go out if we'd be done with school and stuff . . . when like I didn't have to work or whatever. But now it's like I don't want to because I'd rather just be safe at home and just sit . . . so we can relax, so yeah. So, . . . cause it's so much more relaxing just to sit here and you know, not do anything and not deal with stuff.

The interracial couples preferred to participate in those leisure activities that did not require a great deal of contact with those outside of their relationship, including other extended family members. For example, renting movies for home viewing was reported as a favorite leisure activity by at least one partner of all the couples studied. As previously stated, it was not necessarily the actual activity that was the distinction of interracial families' leisure, but rather the process they went through to in order to engage in leisure. Interracial couples' constant concern for safety and comfort limited their ability to establish and maintain meaningful social network ties within a leisure context.

Discussion and Implications

This research suggests that the construction of attitudes and opinions concerning leisure among interracial couples and their families are distinct from those of same-race couples and families. The essential difference in participation patterns seem to relate to the social and cultural practices that influenced and defined the range and reach of leisure activities chosen from, as well as ultimately selected. For example, a major finding of this study was the process that interracial couples went through in order to participate in leisure activities. The couples did extensive research regarding a leisure opportunity prior to participation to ensure comfort and even psychological and physical safety. Often times the couples would send the White or Black partner into a leisure setting as a tester to "get a feel" for the environment prior to exposing the entire family to a situation. The couples would frequently call a leisure service provider to inquire about multiculturalism and issues of safety to interracial families. Also, they indicated that they would "read up" or ask friends about leisure experiences before investing time and emotional energy. For all the couples in this study, it became part of their

standard operating procedure to thoroughly investigate leisure offerings prior to participation, in an attempt to not subject themselves or their children to overt racism.

It was found that interracial couples in this study experienced significant levels of social isolation due to issues related to racism. The results clearly indicated that racism was an important leisure constraint for interracial couples. The couples were very vocal in reporting how racism, discrimination and prejudices affected their leisure participation. Whether perceived or real, interracial couples felt uncomfortable in various leisure settings due to their racialized status. Philipp (1995) found that African Americans and European Americans had different levels of comfort on a wide variety of leisure activities. Philipp argued that African Americans tended to feel more uncomfortable in a greater number of activities than did European Americans, due to issues of race and discrimination. This study supports his findings in that all the couples reported that they have experienced "racist treatment" while attempting to participate in family leisure. Further, in the initial stages of the couples' relationships, the European American partner was often personally unaware of the depth of racial discriminatory treatment, but later in the relationship that partner also began to feel that the discrimination was transferred onto them and their children, causing tension in their racial ideology. The European American partner was faced with losing much of his or her White privilege due to being involved with an African American partner. The White partner would appear to lose much of their social status by being in a relationship with a nonwhite person. The salient issue was that due to issues of race, interracial couples' social networks were limited and this negatively impacted their leisure involvement.

The information collected from these conversational partners did not support all aspects of social network theory, but did demonstrate the significant practice of social network theory in the daily lives of interracial couples. For example, this study supported Stokowski and Lee's (1991) findings that social network relationships facilitate and also constrain social behaviors within a leisure context. In listening to the couples' stories, it became clear that social relationships were extremely meaningful in the day-to-day social realities of these families. Further, by examining the families' social networks, certain aspects of their leisure behavior were better understood. For example, due to social network isolation, interracial families tended to gravitate toward home-based leisure activities to avoid the negative influences of societal pressure. Stokowski and Lee (1991) identified several social network interactions within a leisure setting, including social isolates. Social isolates are those who reported no or weak ties with others within a given community. Further, Stokowski and Lee's study indicated that the recreation patterns of socially isolated people reflected the constraints of their life-style or limited social connections. There is congruence between their findings and the findings of this study related to interracial families' leisure participation. However, for interracial couples in this study, the core of their isolation was perceived to be externally imposed by the negative influences of society, whereas

other social isolates may have chosen to withdraw from network participation.

This study was limited by the homogeneous characteristics of the interviewees. They were all middle class and resided in a midwestern college town. In each couple, one partner was African American and the other European American. Further, there were only six couples studied, limiting the ability to generalize the results. Findings of this study may be transferable only to other interracial couples with similar demographic characteristics (European American/African American, middle class, high educational attainment, and residing in a university community). The study was also limited by the amount of time the researcher was involved with the conversational partners. The couples participated in a total of three formal interview sessions over an eight-month period. Although there were follow-up interviews in the form of member checks, the study could have benefited from an ethnographic design that would have given the researcher additional exposure to the conversational partners.

Although much has been learned from this study, the more general topic remains a fertile area for future research. Since demographers contend that the number of interracial relationships will continue to grow, there is a need for a greater understanding of interracial couples and their leisure patterns. Looking at the virtually unlimited interracial combinations of various racial groups, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic backgrounds, much could be learned. Further, it may be beneficial to employ alternative methodological practices and theoretical approaches to future inquiry.

Investigating the use of a more critical theoretical framework relating to interracial couples may be an appropriate next step in understanding interracial couples. For example, the use of Critical Race Theory (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999) as a lens of analysis would further forefront the impact of racism on interracial couples and their biracial children. Critical Race Theory might assist in tracking the continued "possessive investment in whiteness" (Lipsitz, 1998, p. vii), and the White supremacist discourse. Further, this discourse holds promise in gaining a deeper understanding of the issues related to interracial couples, because at the core of this discourse is White racial purity. More specific to interracial relationships, women are central to the White supremacist discourse because the fate of the White race is posited as hinging on the sexual behavior of White women (Ferber, 1998a; 1998b). Harper (1993) suggested that images of White women in this discourse depicts them either as breeders of the race or as traitors. That is, women are defined solely in terms of their reproductive and sexual ability. White supremacists are adamantly against White race mixing of any kind, particularly within the context of interracial marriage and procreation. Thus, controlling White females' sexual behavior and preventing interracial reproduction is a primary goal of White supremacists. Utilizing White supremacy discourse along with critical race theory may be a logical next step in understanding interracial couples' leisure experiences and in analyzing the racism they face in society.

Social scientists have begun cursory investigations of biracial children (Bowles, 1993; Henriques, 1974; Reddy, 1994; Xie & Goyette, 1997). The overall literature base, though, is still sparse and completely lacking of information dealing specifically with biracial children and their leisure patterns. The leisure literature is full of information on children's leisure in general and is beginning to inform us regarding African American children's leisure patterns (Philipp, 1999; Shinew, Hibbler, & Anderson, 2000). This study, however, demonstrates that it would be extremely timely, and socially relevant, to investigate biracial children's leisure patterns as well. Finally, in order to address the issue of generalization, perhaps utilizing a multi-method approach of qualitative and quantitative inquiry to further investigate interracial couples and families would greatly enhance our knowledge regarding this increasing population.

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