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**Papers From Fourth  
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**Data Collection Techniques  
for Multicultural  
Environments**

# Outdoor Recreation Participation: Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, and Asians in Illinois<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, and Asians in Illinois attach a high level of significance to outdoor recreation. However, there are important differences in the outdoor recreation participation patterns of these four groups, including the activities participated in and where they participate, that have important implications for recreation resource planning and research.

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Recreation resource planners face significant issues as they try to meet the needs of people from increasingly diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Research has identified differences in the recreation preferences and behavior of Blacks and Whites (Dwyer and Hutchison 1990; Dwyer and Gobster, in press); but planners face important questions about how to best serve other important groups as well, including Hispanics and Asians. A comparison of the recreation participation patterns of these four important groups is made using recreation participation data for 1987 and 1989 collected in telephone surveys for the Illinois Department of Conservation. The analysis is based on 1,661 Whites, 249 Blacks, 56 Hispanics, and 37 Asians. The discussion focuses on differences among these four groups to help planners identify the special needs of each group and to suggest possible responses to changes in the racial and ethnic composition of the populations served. Small sample sizes preclude analysis of the substantial variation in recreation participation within each of these groups.

## The Results

Each of the four groups places a high level of importance on outdoor recreation, with Asians giving it the highest rating, followed by Hispanics, Blacks, and Whites.

There are important differences in percent of the group participating among Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians across 31 diverse outdoor recreation activities. In general, Whites are the most likely to participate in each activity and Blacks least likely. The participation of Hispanics and Asians usually falls between the other two groups. Notable exceptions include high participation by Blacks in softball or baseball, running or jogging, basketball, and horseback riding; high participation by Hispanics in soccer, basketball, and picnicking; and high participation by Asians in picnicking, tennis, and observing nature.

There are also important differences in the kinds of places in Illinois where each of the four groups engage in recreation. Whites are more likely than the other groups to use private clubs that require memberships such as a country club or swim club; but less likely than the other groups to use vacant lots or streets. Blacks are less likely than other groups to use a friend's yard or

property; or commercial recreation areas open to the public, such as a campground, water park, or golf course. Hispanics are least likely to use Federal recreation areas or forests. Hispanics and Asians are more likely than the other groups to use city and county recreation areas or forest preserves, or school yards; while Blacks and Hispanics are least likely to use State parks or other State-operated recreation areas in Illinois. Whites have the highest average level of satisfaction with parks in their neighborhood, and Blacks the lowest.

There are significant differences in the outdoor recreation travel patterns across the four groups. Whites are more likely to take overnight trips in Illinois or outside Illinois than Blacks, Hispanics, or Asians. As with activities, the largest difference is between Blacks and Whites, with the other groups falling between them. Whites who do take overnight trips for recreation tend, on the average, to take more trips than the other groups. The out-of-state travel patterns of the ethnic groups suggests relatively high levels of trips to areas where there is a high proportion of individuals from their group, such as Blacks traveling to the Southeastern United States and Hispanics to Mexico, perhaps reflecting trips "back home." Asians concentrate their out-of-state overnight trips in adjacent states. There is less overnight travel by Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians; and their concentration in urban areas (particularly Blacks) makes urban and near-urban resources especially critical to these groups.

## Discussion

There are many important differences and similarities in recreation participation across the four groups; but the largest and most consistent differences tend to be between Whites and Blacks. Across the 31 outdoor recreation activities examined in this study, a substantial portion of the significant differences in participation are between Blacks and Whites. This suggests that planners concerned with White and Black communities should be aware of possible differences in participation. There appears to be a general tendency for greater Black participation in sports than Whites; but lower participation than Whites in activities that take place in more remote areas and involve undeveloped settings or water resources. These findings are consistent with a number of other studies (Dwyer and Hutchinson 1990). Blacks are also less likely than Whites to take overnight trips in Illinois and elsewhere; but Blacks who travel are more likely than other travelers to take trips to the southeastern United States (except Florida). There are also important Black-White differences in the types of outdoor recreation resources used in Illinois, with Blacks more likely to use streets and vacant lots; but less likely than Whites to use all other types of recreation resources.

It is also important to recognize differences between other racial and ethnic groups as well, and certainly to avoid referring

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to all non-Whites as "minorities" and assuming that all "minority groups" have similar participation patterns. While limited sample sizes make it difficult to make comparisons across the minority groups, significant differences (among Black, Hispanic, and Asians) emerged with seven activities. There is significantly higher participation in picnicking by Hispanics and Asians when compared to Blacks. Hispanics have significantly higher participation than Blacks in swimming at pools, simming elsewhere, and fishing. Asians are significantly more likely than Blacks to go sightseeing, observe nature, or play tennis; but significantly less likely than Blacks to play baseball. Hispanics and Asians are more likely than Blacks to use a yard or local park for outdoor recreation.

There is no clear pattern of difference between Whites and Asians or Hispanics. This is partly due to the small sample sizes, and partly to high levels of diversity within the Asian and Hispanic groups. This diversity could reflect a combination of recent immigration and individuals who have been in this country for a long time, as well as the diverse countries and cultures from which members of these groups have come. It is particularly interesting to note the high level of significance that Asian and Hispanics attach to outdoor recreation activities. We have much to learn about these important groups, as well as about Black and White groups in Illinois and elsewhere, to provide for the needs of all recreation customers.

Planners should interpret with care the results of this and other analyses of actual participation patterns. Present patterns reflect preferences; but are also limited by constraints such as availability of recreation facilities, skills and equipment, knowledge of and ability to travel to recreation areas, and fear of discrimination or other antisocial behavior. While it was not possible to evaluate all of these factors, when individual (gender, age), household (number, income), and locational (Chicago, northern suburbs, southern suburbs, and North, Central, and South Illinois) variables are held constant, some differences between groups are eliminated; but many others remain. This

suggests that we have yet to understand many of the differences that we have observed.

## Conclusions

The results point out that there are important differences in recreation participation across the four racial and ethnic groups. This suggests that planners give careful attention to the needs of each of these groups. Past studies have focused on Black/White comparisons and this analysis confirms these differences, but also suggests that Asian and Hispanic groups are different from Blacks and Whites and from each other. While we have made comparisons among four groups, there is significant variation within each of those groups and great care must be taken to avoid stereotyping a group by its average or by its differences from others. Additional research is needed to identify the recreation preferences of important population groups such as those studies here; but we also need an intensified effort to understand why these differences exist and explore more fully the variation within each group.

## Acknowledgment

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## References

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