

INCREASING HISPANIC PARTICIPATION IN A PUBLIC RECREATION CENTER

A Thesis

by

MARIELA FERNANDEZ

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

August 2011

Major Subject: Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences

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Approved by:

Co-Chairs of Committee,	Peter A. Witt
	David Scott
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## ABSTRACT

Increasing Hispanic Participation in a Public Recreation Center. (August 2011)

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Dr. David Scott

This study analyzed the reasons why a limited number of Hispanic parents take their children to a local public recreation center. The center historically serves the African American population of the community, with many African Americans living in the area surrounding the center. However, in the last decade, Hispanic families of Mexican decent have moved into this particular neighborhood, yet only a limited number of Hispanic children are currently enrolled at the center. The current study sought to 1) understand the historical context of the recreation center in relation to the African American population; 2) understand the attitudes held by Hispanic parents toward the use of the center; and 3) make recommendation to the center management of possible ways to increase Hispanic participation.

The research was conducted over a three-month period in the community surrounding the recreation center. Information was collected through the use of participant observation, autoethnography, historical and archival documents, and interviews. Findings suggest that the history of the recreation center is responsible for the large number of African American users at the facility. The facility had its origins as a segregated African American high school, and even today it serves an important community function in the African American neighborhood. Additionally, Hispanic parents identified a number of barriers to participation including language, lack of awareness, cultural differences, cost of participation, bullying, and negative perceptions of the center and neighborhood. Community members also discussed the lack of enforcement of outreach material available to recruit Hispanics.

In order to increase Hispanic enrollment, the recreation center should take action in several areas. First, the center must extend ownership by implementing programs applicable to other ethnic groups. The center may also want to consider displaying photos or posters of Hispanic role models in order to build Hispanic pride; such methods are already in place for the African American users. Moreover, the implementations of trainings targeting bullying may prove to be useful in limiting bullying of Hispanic participants. Finally, implementation of the ideas contained in the outreach material provided by the Boys and Girls Club may lead to increases in Hispanic enrollment.

DEDICATION

*To my brothers.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my committee. Drs. Peter Witt, David Scott, Sarah Gatson, and Mat Duerden provided a wonderful journey during the past two years. I was challenged throughout the whole process, and I can truly say that I achieved professional and personal growth along the way. I would also like to thank my colleague, Brandy N. Kelly, who conducted the interviews with the African American population during this study. Without her help, I would have not been able to meet my deadline. Additionally, I would like to thank the Hispanic Leaders in Agriculture and the Environment program which provided me with a fellowship and research support funding. The board members and many speakers who participated in the organization's conferences empowered me to take a stand for the Hispanic community. The journey made me question who I was and what I believed in, which played an important role in the development of this thesis.

I would also like to thank other faculty and graduate students who listened to my dilemmas along the way and provided me with quality feedback. I could not have completed the project without them. Finally, I would like to say thanks to those who told me that race and ethnicity are problems of the past. It was the opposing view that helped me maintain a balanced perspective regarding my topic.

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## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of the Problem**

Efforts to achieve equality between racial and ethnic groups have been ongoing since the inception of the United States. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, several milestones, such as the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, were achieved that suggested that the country was moving closer to equality. These amendments were designed to help combat the issues of slavery and racism. The Fourteenth Amendment banned states from denying individuals life, liberty, property, or equal protection under the law (Roland, 2000, para. 1). The Fifteenth Amendment gave the right to vote to anyone regardless of their “race, color, or previous condition of servitude” (Lorini, 1999, p. 26). Although the amendments were supposed to be signs of equality, many marginalized groups, particularly African Americans, found themselves “freedmen” not “free people” (Takaki, 2008, p. 125).

In 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson* established the "separate but equal" doctrine as the basis for public facilities (Anderson, 2004). Although facilities were supposed to receive an equivalent distribution of resources, facilities for persons of color never achieved the same levels as those for Whites (Feagin, 2006). This largely remained the case until World War II. During World War II, Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and other groups fought together for the United States. When the war ended, veterans from marginalized groups returned home refusing to be “treated as second-class citizens” (Takaki, 2008, p. 388). This attitude and a resistance to the pre-World War II practices eventually led to further landmark decisions that impacted access to and equality of resources in public places.

In 1954, *Plessy v. Ferguson* was overthrown when *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled that separate facilities were in fact not equal (Cozzens, 1995). Subsequently, the

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This thesis follows the style of *Journal of Leisure Research*.

Civil Rights Movement led to marginalized groups fighting for equal access for public services, including recreational facilities and activities (Scholastic, 1999). Racial groups gained political momentum when legal proceedings such as *Dawson vs. Baltimore* and the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* were enacted. *Dawson v. Baltimore* declared it unconstitutional to segregate use of public beaches or bathhouses, and the *Civil Rights Act* declared it unconstitutional to segregate public places, including recreational sites (Balkin, Rodriguez, & Agüero, n.d.).

However, backlash to these decisions occurred. In the field of recreation and leisure, Whites, who could afford to do so, opted to privatize recreation resources in order to keep out marginalized groups who could not afford to pay to participate (Wiltse, 2007). Even for public recreation activities and public lands, considerable barriers hindered the participation of marginalized groups, which in turn limited the intermixing of ethnic groups (Arnold & Shinen, 1998; Shinen, Mowatt, & Glover, 2007; Sharaievska, Stodolska, Shinen, & Kim, 2010). Thus, there was de facto segregation in leisure activities. As Philipp (2000) notes, while there are policies to institute mandatory integration in schools and work, none exist to ensure integration in leisure activities. Because leisure is “freely chosen” mandating integration remains elusive and difficult to implement.

To date research in the leisure studies field has mainly investigated separation of groups from the ethnicity and marginality perspectives (Edwards, 1981; Floyd, 1998; Shinen, Floyd, & Parry, 2004; Washburne, 1978; Wendling, 1980; West, 1989). Others have discussed the role of discrimination (Blahna & Black, 1993; Sharaievska et al., 2010), feelings of being unwelcome (Philipp, 1995; Philipp, 1999), and assimilation/acclulturation (Floyd & Gramann, 1995; Stodolska & Jackson, 1998). Yet, the construction of place as a factor in facilitating or limiting access to recreation opportunity has received less attention (Flood & McAvoy, 2007). Additionally, the focus has remained on Whites and Blacks in public leisure activities with less emphasis on the relations between other marginalized groups (Arnold & Shinen, 1998; Shinen et al., 2007), particularly Hispanics and Blacks.

## **Purpose and Research Questions**

This study was designed to analyze the reasons why Hispanic parents decide to enroll or not enroll their children at a public recreation center that has strong historical identification with the local African American community. At the time of the study, the center was mainly used by African Americans. In the past decade, a number of Hispanic families of Mexican descent have moved into the neighborhood. Despite the change in demographics, the number of Hispanic children using the recreation center facility remains small. Thus, the purposes of this study were to:

- understand the historical context of the development of the recreation center;
- understand the attitudes Hispanic parents have towards the uses of the center; and
- make recommendations concerning possible ways to increase Hispanic use of the center.

## **Operational Definitions**

Several terms are used throughout this study which are worth defining. The following items will be defined and discussed as some are quite problematic: race, ethnicity, Hispanic/Latino, and African American/Black.

Race refers to the biologically characteristics, or phenotypes, of individuals (Abizadeh, 2001; King, 1981; Office of Management and Budget, 1997; Saldanha, 2006). Based on these phenotypes, individuals are categorized into certain racial groups, including Whites, African American, and Asian. Cornell and Hartmann (2007) note this is different from the 1930s when racial groups constituted individuals such as the Chinese, Japanese, and Jews. The authors go on to state that today these racial groups are typically considered ethnic groups. Chinese and Japanese descendants are now lumped into the Asian category, which is a racial marker.

Moreover, race is an “ideological construct” which “symbolizes social conflicts” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 198; Abizadeh, 2001; Inwood & Yarbrough, 2010; Nash, 2003). In other words, race is unstable and modified according to the political struggle. This shift of considering race a social construct instead of an objective biological marker has caused some problems. A simple web search pops up many websites entitled, “race

doesn't exist anymore". The sites use the social construction explanation as support to their stance. This has been problematic as researchers who attest that the construct is socially constructed are in no way diminishing the reality of the term.

Additionally, ethnicity can be described as the mixture of "language, religion, culture, appearance, ancestry or regionality" (Nagel, 1994, p. 154). Ethnicity, like race, is socially constructed and problematic. Ethnicity requires that its members self-identify with the culture (Marin & Marin, 1991). However, social, political, and economic factors have contributed to the formation of ethnic groups as well as the constant transformation in these (Abizadeh, 2001; Nagel, 1994; Office of Management and Budget, 1997). Two examples are the examples of Hispanics and African American.

The term Hispanic originated with the Office of Management and Budget in 1978 (Marin & Marin, 1991). In 1997, the Office of Management and Budget revised the term; they began using Hispanic or Latino. The organization recognized that there are "regional" differences within the United States. They note that those living in the "eastern portion of the United States" mostly classify as Hispanic, whereas those living in the "western portion" utilize the term Latino. Hispanic or Latino individuals are currently identified as "persons of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin" (Office of Management and Budget, 1997). Although comprehensive, the term has not resonated with many individuals of the given groups. Some have identified with other terms such as Chicanos, whereas others identify with their native country, adopting terms including Mexicanos, Cubanos, and Puertorriqueños. This led Comas-Díaz (2001) to state, "One of the fastest growing ethnic minority groups in the United States is in search of a name. Or so it appears, given the multiple terms used for its designation" (p. 115). Further, a person's time in the United States may have an impact on how the individual identifies themselves. If they have never visited their country of origin, they may not identify with it. In this regard, there is plenty of research on ethnic minorities who identify as American and are offended when others ask, "Where are you really from" (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Wu, 2002). However, for the purpose of this study, the term Hispanics is used as it is the term

most commonly adopted in the geographic region where the study was conducted. Although some may not agree with the term, none of the participants protested being referred to as Hispanic.

As for the African American population, the Office of Management and Budget (1997) has identified this group as any “person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa”. Throughout the decades, this group has been called many things, including Blacks and Negros. However, for the purpose of this study, the term African American was adopted. The use of this term was determined after discussing the matter with several African American graduate students and professors.

For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on ethnic groups. Although this study aims to focus mostly on ethnic groups, a good portion of the current literature focuses on racial groups, particularly Whites and African Americans. However, some studies have used the terms “race, ethnicity, and minority group status” interchangeably, whereas others discuss the three constructs as distinct categories (Shinew et al., 2004, p. 182). This has made comparison between groups quite problematic. For the purpose of this study, the terms will be regarded as distinct classifications. Because the term Hispanic denotes an ethnic group and not a racial group, I will adopt the term ethnicity to discuss my project. This may become complicated when I discuss the literature that considers racial and ethnic group as one and the same.

### **Significance of Study**

The recreation center which is the focus of this study is owned by the local municipality, mainly supported through public funds, and run by the parks and recreation department. The center houses a branch of the local Boys and Girls Club which serves children from 3-5 PM during the school year and 8 AM-5 PM during the summer months.

A considerable amount of literature indicates that participation in extracurricular programs is helpful in many ways. For instance, participation has been positively correlated with “academic success, developmental asset-building, opportunities for mentoring, and prevention of problematic behaviors” (Wu & Van Egeren, 2010, p. 592).



Participation in such programs has also been shown to positively influence low-income youth who generally display negative outcomes in school and belong to a minority group (Marsh, 1992; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Witt & Caldwell, 2005; Wu & Van Egeren, 2010). Youth programs are also associated with enrichment activities and access to critical program elements such as caring adults, a sense of belonging, challenging activities, and opportunities for youth to excel as leaders and give back to the community (Witt & Caldwell, 2005). Accordingly, the recreation center being studied has the potential to help redirect children's energies in meaningful ways in order to promote positive and diminish negative behaviors.

The center is publicly funded and thus should be available to all children regardless of ethnicity. However, the children who currently use the center are mostly African American. Historical and cultural reasons account for the underrepresentation of Hispanic children as users of the center. This is unfortunate since Hispanic youth typically exhibit higher pregnancy and dropout rates than the rest of the population (Manlove, 1998; Ponciano, 1989; Orfield, 2004). Involvement in quality extracurricular programs at the center could negate some of these negative outcomes.

While focused on a particular recreation center, results from this study should contribute to existing research on ethnic interactions during extracurricular time. Although public parks and community centers have been studied, recreation centers serving youth have received limited attention in regards to their intergroup interactions. The results of this study should provide practitioners interested in promoting multicultural inclusion with insights that can possibly help achieve greater diversity of recreation facility users. Dealing with diversity is critical as the demographics of the United States are changing, and adults and young people need to learn to handle issues associated with bringing groups together.

Chapter II includes a review of background literature critical to an understanding of issues that might lead to non-use of community recreation facilities. The review includes material pertaining to construction of place, ethnicity, discrimination, and marginality. In Chapter III, I discuss the methodology that was employed to conduct the

study. Chapter IV discusses the findings of the study and Chapter V provides a discussion of the findings and implications for practice. Implications include suggestions that might be implemented to increase Hispanic participation. I will also offer some thoughts on future research directions on the topic.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A considerable amount of literature seeks to explain the separation of ethnic groups in their use of recreational facilities and activities. As background for this study, I reviewed literature in the following areas: construction of place, ethnicity, discrimination, and marginality. Construction of place is of primary importance since it provides insights as to why members of the African American population represent the primary users of the center I studied. The ethnicity perspective provides information that can help assess the cultural differences between African Americans and Hispanics, which facilitate or restrict leisure participation. Assessing literature related to discrimination should also be useful to this study. Discrimination may occur when ethnic group members seek to participate in recreation settings with members of other ethnic groups. In this case, I will be analyzing whether the Hispanic children who are or once were enrolled at the center ever experienced discrimination at this center. Finally, the marginality perspective will help in the analysis of whether Hispanics and African Americans have the adequate resources (i.e., transportation, funds) in order to attend the center.

#### **Construction of Place**

In the same way that animals have a sense of territory, humans also claim spaces for themselves (Tuan, 1977). Researchers from several disciplines have analyzed the way different ethnic groups are allocated in public spaces. In the recreation field, public spaces such as public pools, community centers, and federal, state, and local parks have been studied. The general aim of these studies has been to predict the leisure behavior of individuals. Although construction of place has received limited attention, it is sometimes responsible for the leisure behavior seen in these recreational sites or activities (e.g., Flood & McAvoy, 2007).

Understanding the role of culture in place construction is an initial consideration. Gupta and Ferguson (1997) argue that society is a collection of cultures each consisting of differences which set them apart. For instance, cultures are distinguished by their use

of language, customs, and perspectives. It is these differences which lead to the recognition that particular cultural groups do in fact exist (Barth, 1969; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Rosaldo, 1988). Yet, these groups did not magically appear. Cultural anthropologists have argued that the “behavior and attitude patterns” often seen in groups are creations of the “historical circumstances and environmental conditions” (as cited by Woodard, 1988, p. 89; Nadel, 1951; Titiev, 1954; Spindler, 1977). The historical and environmental context explains why groups vary by region (Barth, 1969; Woodard, 1988). Additionally, it may also explain why certain ethnic groups adhere to certain places. For instance, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) state, “Cultural territorializations must be understood as complex and contingent results of ongoing historical and political processes. It is the processes, rather than the pre-given cultural-territorial entities, that require anthropological study” (p. 4).

In effect, to disregard the historical and environmental aspect of place and culture runs the risk of not acknowledging that some groups’ displacement, or dislocation, does not necessarily represent their free will (Forster, 1972; Malkki, 1992). In some cases, groups found themselves confined to places, which later resulted in the development of place attachment (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). Schama (1995) states that sense of place includes the attachment people have with a given space due to the cultural connections through symbols, myths, and memories. Although bonds to certain places have typically been seen as a result of long residence or frequent time spent in a place, an intense, shorter, experience may also create this bond (Tuan, 1974; Williams & Patterson, 1999). Accordingly, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) note that “remembered places have often served as symbolic anchors of community for dispersed people” (p. 39). Thus, the historical development of symbolic places may lead certain groups to heavily traffic a place.

The strong identification with a particular space by one cultural group may influence other groups to not participate in the space. They may also receive subtle messages that the place is for “others,” not for them. As noted by Philipp (2000):

How many [Hispanics] avoid leisure places and activities because there are too many Blacks present? How many Blacks must be present in a leisure space before [Hispanics] begin avoiding it? How many Blacks avoid leisure places and activities because there are too many [Hispanic] present? How many Blacks must be present in a leisure space before Blacks begin using it? (p. 122)

Through a process of identification, spaces become racialized, i.e., sites become associated with certain racial or ethnic groups. In this case, when cultures have ascribed symbolic significance to a place, this place may primarily serve members from that group. Thus, this space may start being recognized by its racial characteristics. This is consistent with other studies where certain neighborhoods, schools, and other locations are often recognized by the occupation of certain ethnic groups (Bobo, 1987; Philipp, 1995; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985). Additionally, groups may have their own styles of engaging in leisure which denotes group membership. When the different ethnic groups are situated in spaces, or territories, partaking in similar and distinct behavior, it may inadvertently be seen as de facto segregation. Yet, it is often the political, economic, and social process which typically decides where people will be located. Given that the creation of place, people, and culture entails a complex set of behaviors, bringing groups together is not always successful. The integration of groups may join them together physically, but the process “tends to diminish the role of processes of legitimation and authentication” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 14).

As far as the recreation field is concerned, opening areas for multiple groups has not been successful, particularly because of legitimatization reasons (i.e., McAvoy, 2002). For practitioners working in facilities linked with specific ethnic groups, there is a delicate balance between a group’s legitimatization and the public’s right to recreate. Subcultural differences between groups present another dilemma in bringing people together. This has often been referred to as the ethnicity perspective, and it acknowledges that groups may have their own style of recreating which may clash with others.

### **Ethnicity Perspective**

In 1968, Weber discussed the ideas of class and status. Status is made visible when individuals of a particular class began sharing a certain type of lifestyle (Weber, 1968). Although Weber mainly spoke about elites, he contended that the shared lifestyles symbolized group membership. Relating this idea to leisure, Washburne (1978) noted that each ethnic group possesses different norms and values which reinforce certain leisure behaviors and preferences. Assessing an ethnic group's style of leisure has been labeled the ethnicity perspective. The perspective has been used by a number of researchers, including Edwards (1981), Floyd (1998), Hutchison (1987), Kochman (1981), Shinew et al. (2004), Washburne (1978), Wendling (1980), and West (1989).

Studies have identified different styles of recreating across different marginalized groups. For example, Lee (1972) found that African Americans engage in activities such as talking, listening to music, and displaying "a variety of gestures and postures" (p. 80). In another study, Edwards (1981) found that African Americans opted to participate in leisure activities due to the physical benefits derived from their participation, whereas Whites' participation more identified with opportunities for relaxation. Edwards also noted that Whites opted for skill-based and organized leisure opportunities. In other studies Blacks were found to enjoy meeting new people, especially in developed facilities versus natural areas (Dunn, Kasul, & Brown, 2002; Dwyer & Hutchison, 1990). Finally, Johnson, Bowker, English, and Worthen (1998) found that Blacks preferred to "consume" the land by engaging in activities such as fishing or hunting, whereas, Whites preferred activities which were "less consumptive" such as wildlife watching.

Hispanics appear to display distinct leisure behaviors as well (Baas, Ewert, & Chavez, 1993; Dunn et al., 2002; Khokha, 2009). In the 1980s, Hutchison (1987) noted how African American and White preferences for leisure were most closely related in comparison to the Hispanic-African American or Hispanic-White preferences. Hutchison also discovered that Hispanics enjoyed activities that could be carried out with their families. This finding was confirmed in later studies (Dunn et al., 2002; Khokha, 2009). Researchers found that Hispanics liked to recreate in large groups ranging from 6 to 100

people, composed mainly of relatives and close friends. Hispanics also liked to have cook-outs, play sports including soccer, and play loud music. Socializing served as their primary recreation motivation. Additionally, Dunn et al. (2002) reported that Hispanics liked to be informed of park regulations in Spanish as opposed to information being solely to English. As far as differences are concerned, there appear to be subcultural differences between U.S.-born Hispanics, and Mexico-born Hispanics.

*The Case of Immigrants*

In recent years, the number of Hispanics in the United States has increased partly due to the increased birth rate and immigration patterns. In regards to the latter, Stodolska (2000) argues that “all immigrants bring with them baggage of their culture, which includes distinct leisure-participation patterns” (p. 39). Floyd and Gramann (1993) found that unacculturated Mexican-Americans participated in fewer activities than Whites, whereas higher levels of acculturation in Mexican-Americans resulted in greater similarities in recreation style with Whites. As for Heywood’s (1995) comparison between United States born Hispanics, Mexico-born Hispanics, and Whites, a higher percentage of Mexico-born individuals preferred answering Spanish questionnaires. This population had also spent less time in the United States. Dunn et al.’s 2002 study discussed the importance of having bilingual staff due in part to the Hispanic users’ preference for Spanish signage and maps. Dunn et al. (2002) also noted that working class immigrants liked to undertake leisure behavior in the traditional Mexican way. Additionally, Christenson (2004) remarked that Mexican-American families engaged in activities that were near the home. Christenson suggested that trying to adopt the recreation featured in mainstream White society meant families were subjected to learning “new types of activities, language, societal norms, possibly causing them to feel more inclined to stay home instead of negotiating possible constraints” (p. 30).

These differences are in part due to the immigration process. Ko and Perreira (2010) discuss the premigration, migration, and postmigration stages of Mexican immigrant families. Families were spurred during the premigration stage to leave their

home country due to economic hardship. In this stage, parents often left their extended family in charge of their children until they raised enough money to bring them along. During the migration stage, families had to leave the comfort of their close friends and family for unsure lands. Finally, the postmigration stage required families to adjust to the culture of the United States. It is here where immigrants are fully faced with “the initial transitional shock, imperfect language skills, separation from family and friends, need to regain economic stability, and lack of familiarity with basic institutions of the host country” (Stodolska, 2000, p. 65). All these items have the power to limit leisure participation.

Although some families do comparably better economically in the United States than in Mexico, some have a hard time adjusting to the American life. One of the reasons for this maladjustment is the English-Spanish language barrier (Jackson, 2005; Rublee & Shaw, 1991; Stodolska, 1998). In the case of Latin American women seeking refuge in the United States, their language barrier drove them to engage in activities pertaining to child care (Rublee & Shaw, 1991). Further, the language barrier limited contact with the rest of society and drove some Hispanic families into isolation (Jackson, 2005; Stodolska, 2000). Since family and friends were left behind, immigrants were found to have fewer companions in regards to their leisure activity (Tsai & Coleman, 1999). In effect, being an immigrant may restrict leisure participation. However, another aftermath of ethnicity deals with the exclusion of groups based on the subcultural preference clash.

#### *Exclusion of Groups Based on Ethnicity*

Ethnic group membership implies that members share “a common heritage and culture” as criteria differentiating them “from other groups” (Yatsko, 1997, p. 96). To preserve the integrity of a group, efforts to preserve ethnic boundaries must occur (Barth, 1969; Sanders, 2002). Although racial or ethnic groups are sometimes associated with certain territories, this is not enough to signal group membership, particularly if there is intermixing of ethnic groups in one location. When groups do interact, individuals recognize fellow group members based on the “criteria for evaluation and judgment”



that is set by each culture (Barth, 1969, p. 12). This criteria helps groups identify who is “playing the same game”, yet it also serves as identifying strangers who do not share the same culture (Barth, 1969, p. 15). Moreover, Barth argued that intergroup contact does not necessarily appease conflict; instead, it heightens the differences between groups. Although Sanders (2002) acknowledged this warning, he suggested that the limited interactions between groups based on “territorial segregation” places an emphasis on intergroup differences (p. 328). Territorial segregation can potentially contribute to and repeat the cycle of ignorance about perceived differences which in turn can lead to a lack of ethnic integration.

For some ethnic groups, ethnic boundary maintenance is enforced through the establishment of social network apart from the mainstream systems (Sanders, 2002; Stodolska, Marcinkowski, & Yi-Kook, 2007; Yatsko, 1997). Relating this concept to the recreation field, Stodolska et al. (2007) adopted the term ethnic enclosure, which refers to the development and maintenance of “social networks primarily within ethnic groups” as well as the usage of “ethnic community resources to facilitate leisure” (p. 2). In some cases, however, this enclosure can restrict leisure participation. For instance, Wong (1977) discussed how elites in the Chinese community of New York maintained their community at the cost of “limit[ing] contact with the city, state, and federal governments” which eventually led to isolation (p. 17). Additionally, Edwards’s (personal communication, April 19, 2010) study in a primarily White town in the Southern part of the United States showed that residents displayed collaboration and support to ensure that families could mutually benefit from public resources. On the other hand, residents in an ethnically-mixed town did not display such collaboration. If one ethnic group needed a recreational facility, then that group was deemed responsible to raise the funds and build the facility. Thus, ethnic boundary maintenance/ethnic enclosure helped create resources in the first instance, but negatively impacted cooperative efforts to create resources in the second.

Social distance is another related concept. Social distance refers to the “degree of intimacy” that is acceptable between groups (Dyer, Vedlitz, & Worchel, 1989, p. 607). It

refers to the relationships that are deemed acceptable outside of the in-group, including marriage partners, neighbors, friends, classmates, colleagues, and so forth (Floyd, Gramann, & Saenz, 1993; Hagendoorn, 1995). In previous decades, the government had a role in limiting intimacy. For instance, some states banned interracial marriages between Whites and African Americans (Giannini, Swan, Tragen, & Wood, 1944; Heer, 1966; Pascoe, 1991). Although the government may still play a role in limiting inter-group contact, it has banned segregation in public places. Although this was expected to increase inter-group relations, it has not been effective. Personal decisions dictate who with whom an individual might carry out a relationship or friendship; mandating such personal preferences becomes problematic.

Moreover, social distance is highlighted when marginalized groups fail to assimilate to the majority group's way of life (Floyd, Gramann, Saenz, 1993; Parks, 1924). Even when intermingling occurs, ethnic groups still adhere to their expected roles in society. In 1924, Parks termed this phenomenon as "race consciousness." Although a significant time period has elapsed, race consciousness seems to be in effect even today as individuals are seen positively as long as they adhere to their expected roles (Feagin, 1991; Feagin, 2006). However, individuals adhering to their roles may go unnoticed. For instance, African Americans adhering to their expected roles in society where they are not the dominant culture may not cause a problem, but adhering to their roles may mean that African Americans modify their behavior. In this regard, there has been research conducted on how African American males and females modify their voice in order to sound more White (Feagin, 1991; Massey & Lundy, 2001). Although this means African Americans go out of their way to make Whites comfortable, Whites may in effect not possess an accurate description of reality when they interact with African Americans. As Miller (1976) pointed out, the dominant group's (in this case Whites) way of life is seen as the norm, and ignorance of inequality is desired. Consequently, the dominant group comes to believe that they and the subordinates (minority groups) share the same interests and experiences. As noted by Tatum (1999),

The truth is that the dominants do not really know what the experience of the subordinates is. In contrast, the subordinates are very well informed about the dominants. Even when firsthand experiences is limited by social segregation, the number and variety of images of the dominant group available through television, magazines, books, and newspapers provide subordinates with plenty of information about the dominates... However, dominant access to information about the subordinates is often limited to stereotypical depictions of the “other.” (pp. 24-25)

In effect, if a White individual were to visit an African American facility their comfort level might be lessened and perhaps the disparities between ethnicities would become more apparent. Unfortunately, this level of discomfort may leads members of different groups to recreate separately. In the case of African Americans, they may seek leisure opportunities in places where interaction with the White majority is limited (Shinew et al., 2007). In addition, there are social distance hierarchies which spur the separation of the groups.

In 1995, Hagendoorn noted that even in this era, there remains a “remarkably stable evaluative (stereotype) and social distance hierarchies with respect to [ethnic] groups” (p. 201). In the United States, for example, there is a consensus that Whites hold the most power and prestige with African Americans falling in the bottom. All other groups fall in between the hierarchy (Kahn, Ho, Sidanius, & Pratto, 2009). In this hierarchy, individuals typically favor and view more positively members of their own group. On the other hand, out-group members are “perceived to be all much the same” (Corenblum, 2003, p. 33-34). Hagendoorn argued that there are several reasons for this in-group favoritism, including:

the group members’ need to perceptually differentiate between categories and groups, their need to feel positive about their identity, the strength of the identification with the in-group, the salience of intergroup boundaries, tasks and roles converging with group boundaries, group cohesiveness and adherence to in-group norms, and an emphasis on social comparison and collectivism. (p. 200).

However, there are times when contact with the out-group is deemed appropriate. Generally, out-group contact is accepted if it is with a high ranking group, which can in effect augment the individual's status in society, whereas, out-group contact with a low ranking group will only taint this status in society (Hagendoorn, 1995, p. 203). This out-group preference is not exclusive to adults; there is evidence that children are able to distinguish which out-group preference is more favorable.

Existing research shows that children demonstrate in-group or out-group favoritism (Corenblum, 2003). In Corenblum's study, children were exposed to pictures of other children, some who pertained to their in-group and others who pertained to the out-group. During the exposure, researchers read certain facts and stereotypes about the child being displayed, which the kids were asked to remember at a later time. A consistent finding was that children of European heritage displayed in-group favoritism in their recall of information. In contrast, children of a lower status groups demonstrated favoritism towards peers belonging to the out-group. Additionally, Clark and Clark's (1939; 1947) study with dolls demonstrated that African American girls were more attracted to the White versus the Black dolls. These girls also attributed positive characteristics to with the White versus Black dolls. Although other researchers have found contradictory findings (Gregor & McPherson, 1966; Hraba & Grant; 1970; Johnson, 1966) when this study was re-created in 2007, Davis found similar results as Clark: young African American children attributed positive characteristics to the White doll instead of the Black one. As such, children's out-group favoritism paralleled that of adults, which meant that out-group favoritism was displayed when the group was hierarchically above them.

When Tatum (1999) addressed the issue of why African American children sit together in the cafeteria, she noted that in places that were racially mixed, the grouping with one's own racial or ethnic group served as a "positive coping mechanism" in response to certain "environmental stressors", including racism (p. 62; Stodolska & Jackson, 1998). Often members of different groups experience discrimination at work or school, but in the safety net provided by family and friends, individuals can fully enjoy

their leisure time. It is not surprising that facilities that attract certain marginalized groups become a safe haven for those who just want to relax and simply enjoy themselves without constantly having to justify their culture or worry about associating themselves with others. Thus, congregating with in-group members has the potential to decrease discrimination and facilitate leisure.

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination may cause members of marginalized groups to not participate in leisure activities. Discrimination refers to the different types of maltreatment experienced by group members (Stodolska & Yi-Kook, 2005). Although blatant acts of intolerance are associated with discrimination, discrimination can also be “symbolic” or be characterized as “colorblind racism” (Sharaievska et al., 2010, p. 296). Sharaievska et al. (2010) characterize symbolic racism as including individuals who promote equality but do not support the real-life applications of policies and programs which could potentially diminish the inequality between groups. This view fits Jackman’s (1978) finding that members of the well-educated White population said they favored racial integration, but when it came to putting integration in practice through laws and policies, they disapproved. In contrast, non-educated Whites approved the real-life application of integration principles. This result was attributed to the closer interaction found between non-educated Whites and other ethnic groups.

Colorblindness can be used as a means of avoiding the topic of racism and accusations of racial discrimination. By claiming to be colorblind, individuals can hide their true racial views and prolong inequality. This can be a tricky situation to handle when individuals have children to raise. For instance, Simpson (2007) conducted an experiment regarding the development of prejudicial beliefs in young children using video segments, including “The Puzzle Place, Sesame Street, Little Bill, and Zoom.” The videos were chosen because of their “racially diverse cast, the portrayal of interracial friendships, and a focus on positive relationships” (p. 34). Participants were divided into four groups: 1) parents who were to only show the five educational videos to their children; 2) parents who were to show the same five videos along with a discussion

during and after the screening; 3) parents who were only to discuss topics of racism with their children; and 4) a control group. During the study, parents who were supposed to discuss issues of the different ethnic groups started dropping out of the experiment. They did so for one of several reasons: parents believed their children were color-blind already; they thought that approaching the sensitive subject would induce children to start noticing differences between groups; and parents felt uneasy bringing up the subject matter with their children. Regardless of the reason parents chose to remain silent, children often perceived the silence as negative, and their questions about race and racism typically went unanswered.

Discrimination also influences decisions people make about where and with whom they choose to recreate. Philipp (1999) noted that African American parents shun places and activities where they feel unwelcomed or discriminated against. Their children may thus come to believe that their parents place little worth on these leisure opportunities, and, as a consequence, the children devalue the opportunities. This may be detrimental as the child may carry such low values into adulthood and in effect pass it off to the next generation (Simpson, 2007). Consequently, parents not talking and kids not asking questions can lead to the prolonging of the separation between ethnic groups. Blahna and Black (1993) identified six forms of discrimination in leisure settings:

- “on-site experiences of racism from other recreationists;
- on-site experiences of racism from professional staff;
- differential upkeep and management of sites;
- fear of expected or potential racism;
- socialization resulting from historical racism; and
- social effects of past economic discrimination” (p. 112).

*On-site Experiences of Racism from Other Recreationists*

Studies have shown that marginalized groups often experience racism from other on-site recreationists (Doherty and Taylor, 2007; Feagin, 1991; Stodolska and Jackson, 1998). In a study pertaining to minority student’s recreational experiences, Blahna and Black’s (1993) discovered that discrimination from other recreationists was pronounced.

An African American study participant related stories of Ku Klux Klan rallies being held in a park, while a Hispanic participants related the story of a White man threatening to call immigration because he was using the tennis courts. Other studies also report significant discrepancies between the discrimination experienced by Whites and discrimination experienced by minorities. For instance, Chavez (1993) studied various visitors to Southern California's national forests. Only 2.9% of Anglos reported discriminatory acts against them. In contrast, 32.4 % of Hispanics reported being victimized.

In another study, Tirone (1999) discussed youth's interactions in leisure settings. Most of the teens reported being victims of "name-calling and taunting" (p. 2). Additionally, Hibbler and Shinew (2002) noted that interracial couples experienced stares or other acts of hostility when visiting leisure spaces. Finally, Flood and McAvoy (2007) reported that American Indians faced disrespect from other recreationists in the form of stares, racial slurs, and threats. In such cases, recreationists may expect staff and security to protect their rights to recreate, but this protection may not always be guaranteed.

#### *On-site Experiences of Racism from Professional Staff*

According to Blahna and Black (1993), it was not uncommon for professional staff to ask marginalized group member to leave a recreation area that is supposedly open to everyone. In their study, one participant stated that a park guard asked the group to leave by stating, "You know you guys don't belong in this park, they kill Hispanic people here" (p. 113). The researchers also noted that professional staff may unduly monitor minority groups. One respondent noted that his Hispanic community hosted a Latin band, and security swarmed the place, something that had not been seen when White bands came to the community. Further, in Tirone's (1999) study with Canadian teens and immigrant children from the South Asian countries, South Asian youth appeared to be singled out due to their skin color, traditional clothing, and religious beliefs. However, the youth workers never intervened when the South Asian youth were being victimized.

Several other studies have reported racism among staff. Hibbler and Shiner (2002) found that interracial couples were sometimes refused service in public locations. Flood and McAvoy (2007) found that American Indians were disregarded in decisions pertaining to the national forests. Instead, staff harassed and racially profiled this population, which deterred further participation. In addition, Dunn et al. (2002) found that racism was not a problem for the Corps of Engineers employees, but the concern arose with the “agency’s lack of cultural understanding, and its apparent lack of understanding of how to deal with people from a different cultural background and speaking a different language (p. 9).

#### *Differential Upkeep and Management of Sites*

Blahna and Black’s (1993) study participants felt that the White neighborhoods had cleaner parks, while parks situated in the African American or Hispanic neighborhoods were not as clean. This finding is with accordance with other research which points out differences in resource allocations of parks and open spaces in low-income versus affluent neighborhoods (Floyd, Taylor & Whitt-Glover, 2009; Stodolska & Shiner, 2010). Ethnic minorities tend to live in low-income neighborhoods, putting them at a disadvantage as far as the upkeep of their local parks. In Stodolska and Shiner’s (2010) study pertaining to constraints facing minority’s participation in physical activity, the researchers found that there were “poor maintenance of parks”, including “jogging trails full of potholes, dilapidated playground equipment, trash, lack of water fountains and unsanitary restrooms” (p. 321).

#### *Fear of Expected or Potential Racism*

The risk of experiencing racism is also a limiting factor when marginalized groups choose to recreate. This fear of racism is sometimes results from previous encounters with racism, stories about discrimination as presented by the media, or discrimination stories that circulate regarding particular recreational sites (Sharaievska et al., 2010). This potential fear of discrimination has the power to influence leisure preferences, including, the type of activities one chooses to undertake and the “choice of where and with whom to participate” (Stodolska & Jackson, 1998, p. 39). For instance



Woodard (1988) noted that African Americans engaged in “domestic type pursuits” because they were scared of being discriminated against. Further, individuals may choose to recreate in ethnically-segregated groups because they feel more comfortable and there is less discrimination (Stodolska et al., 2007).

Several researchers have examined how minority group members feel in certain recreational settings (Blahna & Black, 1993; Chavez, 1993; Phillip, 1995; Phillip, 1999; Shinew et al., 2004; West, 1989). For example, West (1989) determined that African Americans were not utilizing regional parks because they did not feel welcomed. Philipp’s (1999) study surveyed both White and African American users to see how welcomed the latter group was in certain leisure activities. He found that Whites thought African Americans felt welcomed in the activities, while African American participants reported feelings of being unwelcomed. In another study, Hibbler and Shinew (2002) discussed how biracial couples sometimes expected racism in certain parts of the country. For example, while planning their honeymoon, a White wife brought out a map to figure out where the couple was going to be travelling. Her African American husband carefully pointed out that they would not be visiting the southern states as racism was very likely to occur. Given these circumstance, professionals should not only monitor if discrimination is occurring at their facilities, but they should determine how the facility is perceived by different groups.

#### *Socialization Resulting from Historical Racism*

Historical racism refers to negative historical events which have occurred and can impact future leisure attitudes toward places (Erickson, Johnson, & Kivel, 2009; Shumaker, n.d.; Wiltse, 2007). In the 1930-1960s, the usage of “The Negro Motorist Green Book” was prevalent (Erickson et al., 2009). The book made it easier for the African American population to recreate as it listed the recreational opportunities where African Americans would not feel discriminated against. As time has progressed “Blackness and inferiority, Blackness and subservience, Blackness and danger, has survived” (Dalton, 1995, p. 156). The result is that the current African American users may carry the stigma of the past users, which inadvertently can label a recreational

setting as for or not for African Americans. Accordingly, Harris (1997) suggests that some outdoor areas may have negative connotations for African Americans as typically lynching and images of slavery were related to the outdoors. Additionally, Erickson et al. (2009)'s study suggested that African Americans were restricted in their visitation to Rocky Mountain National Park for many reasons including the historical oppression of African Americans in this given site. The authors also point out that in Taylor's (2000) timeline of "wilderness and the beginnings of the national park system", the focus remained on "White men" with little to no reference to African Americans' usage of the land. Holland (2002) notes that few leisure opportunities were provided for African Americans throughout the history of the United States. Few opportunities have the potential of influencing leisure behavior of this group today.

#### *Past Economic Racism*

As far as past economic racism, this refers to the differential allocation of resources across groups (Feagin, 2006; Nieto, 2002). This notion taps into the power hegemony that exists in society. For instance, a look at the history of ethnic groups displays that groups first coming into the United States lived in certain neighborhoods which were inferior to their already established White counterparts (Takaki, 2008). The inferior neighborhoods also had recreational opportunities which were not up to par to their White counterparts (Feagin, 2006). Thus, when discussing power hegemony, scholars are really discussing the inequality which ensues, which results in discrimination. However, in the field of recreation, investigators have generally overlooked this and have instead focused on the marginality perspective (Floyd, 1998; Sharaievska et al., 2010).

#### **Marginality Perspective**

Washburne (1978) observed that a group's marginal position in society can affect their leisure behavior. The marginality perspective refers to the limited socioeconomic resources available to some of the ethnic groups, often due to past economic discrimination (Floyd, 1998; Stodolska & Jackson, 1998; Washburne, 1978; West, 1989). In the United States, Whites have had more access to resources leaving

marginalized groups with limited opportunities (West, 1989). In effect, the limited socioeconomic resources experienced by marginalized groups are reflected by the inability to pay the costs associated with participating in leisure activities (West, 1989, p. 11). These costs may take the form of paying for entrance fees, transportation, and equipment. The theory assumes that if these socioeconomic limitations were removed, then participation in leisurely activities would increase.

Several studies supported the marginality perspective (Washburne & Wall, 1980). In 1988, Woodard (1988) found that “socioeconomic variables” including having “full time employed adults” in the family played a contributing factor in whether African Americans chose to recreate in domestic, metropolitan, or night life activities. Typically more full time adults equated with an increase in metropolitan or night life activities. Domestic activities were those requiring little money such as watching television, so this area increased when socioeconomic variables were decreased. Additionally, West (1989) reported that access to transportation affected Black Detroiters ability to visit a park. Similarly, Dunn et al. (2002) found that transportation was a problem for Hispanics trying to visit Corps lakes that were located in rural areas. In order to fix this problem, Hispanics suggested that the parks install public transportation to the lakes, or even just provide adequate directions, both in Spanish and English. In another study, Henderson and Ainsworth (2001) discovered that women of color did not participate in leisure behavior due monetary restrictions, the physical environment, and/or “a lack of facilities and opportunities” (p. 27).

Craig (1972) argued that a group’s marginal position in society can result in the cultural differences stated in the ethnicity theory. If a group had limited access to leisure opportunities because of socioeconomic reasons, then there would have been less room to develop an affinity for that type of recreation. This could lead to conflict between wanting to participate and the inability to participate. In turn, the conflict may lead individuals to deny having a desire to participate in outdoor recreation in order to reduce the tension the conflict has caused.

**Summary**

Research on the construction of place, ethnicity, discrimination, and marginality is considerable and offers explanations for why ethnic groups, particularly adults, may remain separated in their leisure pursuits. However, not as much information is available concerning similar issues with children and youth. This study will aid to bridge the gap between the studies geared mostly toward adults with ones focusing on leisure opportunities for children and youth. Further, as the Hispanic population is expected to grow in the United States, this study will be useful in understanding Hispanic involvement in spaces currently “occupied” by other ethnic groups.

### CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that inhibit Hispanic children from attending a public recreation center which is primarily used by African Americans. In order to accomplish this task, I first sought to understand the historical context of the recreation center. In addition, efforts were made to analyze the leisure participation and constraint patterns for the African American and Hispanic population living near the center. Data collection took the form of gathering and analyzing participant observations, autoethnography, historical and archival documents, and participant interviews (Low, Taplin, & Scheld, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Data analysis involved open coding, determination of reliability and validity through data triangulation, member checking, peer review, and acknowledgement of researcher biases.

#### **Participant Observations and Autoethnography**

I had been previously employed at the recreation center being studied from the summer 2009 until the spring 2010. I was in charge of supervising the 6 and 7- year olds during the summer, and then I was in charge of hosting an art camp during the school year. Throughout this time, I paid close attention to the interactions between the Hispanic and African American children as well as the interactions occurring between employees and attendees. At the time, I had no idea that my observations and impressions formed would be crucial information for this study.

When I was accepted into my Masters program, the director of the recreation center approached me about possibly conducting this particular study. He had been interested in the topic for some time but had never found someone to carry it out for him. Consequently, rapport had already been established with the center, which made accessibility to records and access to the community much easier. I could wander the hallways and flow in and out of rooms whenever I pleased. Although there was some resistance at first to my efforts by some staff members, the director's desire to see this research project completed trumped the opposition.

## **Study Participants**

To gather background information about the recreation center the following individuals were interviewed: a former park and recreation board member; a former parks and recreation department director; the current director of the recreation center; three staff members at the recreation center; two community members with knowledge of the center and its history; and an employee from the Boys & Girls Club. To gather information pertaining to the leisure and constraint patterns, 12 Hispanic parents and 11 African American parents were interviewed. The parents included those who take their children to the facility, parents who took their children to the center but later withdrew their children, and parents who do not take their children to the center.

### *Identifying Parents to Interview*

To identify Hispanic families who use the recreation center, I went through the attendance records kept at the center. A list of the Hispanic users was compiled, and a letter was sent to parents of the children listed on the sign-up sheets. After a week, I started placing phone calls to parents to determine who would be interested in participating in the study.

To recruit African American families who used the facility, flyers were posted around the facility in highly visible areas such as the front door and the check-out counter. Only a few parents were recruited using this method. Thus, a snowball procedure was employed to recruit additional parents. During interviews with parents who agreed to participate in the study, they were asked for names of other parents who bring their children to the center, and subsequently my colleague made contact with these parents.

I also asked the recreation center director to help identify homes in the neighborhood occupied by Hispanic families who do not take their children to the center. House visits were made to this population to see if individuals qualified and were interested in participating in the study. Additionally, although some Hispanic users signed up, it was not enough to achieve the sample size for the study. The same method

was supposed to be used for the African American nonusers, but the director was reluctant to point out these homes.

To recruit additional participants, I went to a bus stop situated next to a government housing unit to recruit the African American and Hispanic parents whose children were nonusers of the center. Although Hispanics and African Americans both lived in the neighborhood, on the two days that I went to the bus stop only African Americans were there.

In addition to recruiting people through contacts at the bus stop, I also wanted to recruit people who lived at the local housing development. However, I was directed by the property manager not to knock on people's doors due to their policies. However, I saw a Hispanic woman standing outside her home, and I stopped to see if she would be interested in participating. I gave her the details of my project and informed her that I still needed to contact a couple more Hispanics to participate. Fortunately, she served as my informant and walked around the neighborhood with me pointing out the homes of Hispanic families living in the area. She said I could use her name as a way of establishing credibility with the people who lived in these homes.

For this study, the focus was on Hispanic families of Mexican heritage. Some of the recreation center's attendees were biracial (i.e. half African American, half Hispanic). However, to delimit the study, these families were not selected for the interviews. In addition, recruiting Hispanic families could potentially present a challenge if solicitation was based on the family's phenotype or last name. In the case of families who took their children to the center, I had access to the center's attendance records. The records have a section which asked the parents to self-identify as Hispanic or non-Hispanic. In order to qualify for the study, the Hispanic box had to be marked. As for the race category, at one point Hispanics had been considered White in the State of Texas (Allsup, 2011). Although time has elapsed, some Hispanics still identify themselves as White. For this study, Hispanics with White ancestry were considered biracial and ineligible to participate. However, on occasions when Hispanics identified themselves as White because it was the governmental term given to them and not necessarily their

ancestry, this population was eligible to participate. At the beginning of each interview, I clarified that only those identifying as Hispanic with Mexican heritage without biracial identification were the only ones who were allowed to participate. Table 1 displays the participants, both Hispanic and African American, who were part of the study.

Once recruitment finished, I was able to conduct interviews with 11 African American families and 12 Hispanic families. Mothers were the most common participants in the interviews (10 in the African American sample, and 12 of the Hispanic sample). Almost half of the participants in both categories fell under the poverty line, 55% for African Americans and 50% for the Hispanic participants. Out of the two groups, Hispanics were more likely to have lower levels of education in comparison to their African American counterparts. Table 1 provides more information about each participant.

**Table 1: Parent Participant Information**

Laura	Laura is married, and at the time of the study, she was expecting her third child. Her eldest daughter is a 7-year-old attendee at the center. Laura and her family are Hispanic.
Sandra	Sandra is a Hispanic, divorced mother. She moved to the neighborhood with her two young children to get “back on her feet.” Her children do not attend the center.
Angelina	Angelina is a married mother with two girls, none of whom utilize the center. Angelina moved to College Station two years ago and has only spent three months in this particular neighborhood. Angelina and her family identify as Hispanic with Mexican heritage.
Maura	Maura is the grandmother and primary caregiver of her son’s three boys. The 11-year old boy attended the center for a few days but withdrew because of bullying. Maura and her husband are from Mexico.
Esperanza	Esperanza is a married mother of four children, none of whom utilize the center. Esperanza and her family moved to the community from North Carolina due to work relocation. Esperanza and her family identify as Hispanic.



**Table 1 Continued**

Cindy	Cindy is the mother of four children. She speaks limited English, so she thought her three eldest children would benefit from attending the recreation center due to the tutoring opportunities. However, fights were becoming a problem, which caused the children to cease attending. By that time, the eldest daughter was getting older and could help her younger brothers with their homework. Cindy and her family are Hispanic.
Lorena	Lorena is a married mother of four children. Her two eldest children attend the recreation center during the summertime. Lorena and her family are Hispanic.
Carolina	Carolina is a Hispanic, divorced mother of three boys. She decided to enroll her sons after being told by her sister and sister-in-law that the center took care of kids.
Vanessa	Vanessa is a divorced mother of five. She also takes care of one grandson. Vanessa and her family have lived in the neighborhood for three years; the first of which her kids utilized the recreation center. The kids stopped attending due to lack of variety of activities. Vanessa and her family are Hispanic.
Alejandra	Alejandra is a divorced mother of two kids aged 10 and 11. The children do not attend the center. Alejandra was a daughter of immigrant parents; she was born in Chicago. Her and her family have lived in this neighborhood for seven years. Alejandra and her children identify as Hispanic.
Evelia	Evelia is a married mother of two children aged 8 and 10. The children attend the center during the summertime only. Evelia is from Mexico. Her and her family identify as Hispanic.
Cecilia	Cecilia is a mother of six. Her five youngest children are biracial (African American and Hispanic). Cecilia focused her answers to questions on her eldest daughter, who is Hispanic. Although Cecilia's cousins and sister attend the recreation center, Cecilia's daughter has never attended the center. Cecilia herself is Hispanic.
Tonya	Tonya is a single mother of three aged 17, 11, and 7. Her two younger children attend the recreation center. Tonya and her family have recently moved to the area. They identify as African American.
Brooke	Brooke is a single mother of two boys and works full time as a pre-school teacher. Her sons utilize the recreation center. Brooke and her children identify as African American.

**Table 1 Continued**

Jada	Jada is at stay home mother who has four of her children living with her. Their ages are 8, 7, 5, and 4. Her children had been enrolled at the center previous years but have since ceased participation. Jada and her family are African American.
Sakina	Sakina is a single mother of two, and at the time of the study, she was expecting her third child. Neither of the children attends the recreation center. Sakina and her family were relocated to Texas after Hurricane Katrina. Sakina and her children identify as African American.
Laticia	Laticia is an African American mother of four, and her two youngest are 8-year-old twins. Laticia's children attend the recreation center. Laticia grew up in the area.
Brianna	Brianna is a single mother of two children. One is a 5-year-old, and the other one is a 9-month-old. The eldest child attended the center at one point but was withdrawn due to the fights that broke out. Brianna and her children identify as African American.
DeAndra	DeAndra is a single mother of three small children aged 6, 3, and 2. The eldest one is eligible to participate but is not enrolled at the recreation center. DeAndra is from the neighboring city but has recently moved into this neighborhood. She went to the Lincoln Center as a child. DeAndra and her family identify as African American.
Adonna	Adonna is a mother of three and works part time. Adonna and her husband are from College Station and have returned after moving away for some time. Adonna's children are enrolled in the recreation center. Adonna and her family identify as African American.
Lauren	Lauren is a single mother of an 11-year-old one daughter. Her daughter does attend the recreation center. Lauren actually works part-time for the recreation center; she also attended the Lincoln Center as a child. Lauren and her daughter are African American.
Dee Ann	Dee Ann is single African American mother. She focused the interview on her two youngest daughters, who are both 12. Dee Ann's daughters do not attend the recreation center.
Reggie	Reggie is a single father of a 10-year-old daughter, who attends the recreation center. During the interview, Reggie shared that his daughter's mother had passed away within the past year. Reggie and his daughter identify as African American.

### Parent Interviewers

I conducted the majority of the interviews with Hispanic families. This was deemed appropriate since I am Hispanic. However, for the African American parents, a fellow African American graduate student was hired and trained to conduct the interviews. Stodolska and Yi-Kook (2005) have noted that the researcher's background can influence the way he or she understands the "leisure behavior of people from distinct ethnic groups" (p. 56). Matching up our backgrounds with those of the study participants minimized the potential for misunderstandings and allowed members of each ethnic group to identify more closely with the researcher who conducted the interviews.

Both my research colleague and I had received training mandated by the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects. My colleague also received the working manuscript which included background information on the study, the literature review, the methodology, and the guiding questions that would be used to interview the participants. We also had several discussions regarding the study and I introduced her to the recreation center director to help her coordinate interviews.

### Developing Rapport with Parents

It was important to establish rapport with the parents that were interviewed. For this study, establishing rapport was a challenge since we had not prior interactions with the parents we sought to interview. To help establish rapport, I conducted interviews with the Hispanic parents and my African American colleague took the lead on interviews with the African American parents. In addition, we also attempted to diminish the power differential between participant and researcher by modifying body position, verbal tone, and language (Sheppard, n.d.). For instance, we utilized the same words or phrases the interviewees used when conducting the study. Moreover, when an interviewee said something that was potentially bothersome to us, we attempted to refrain from using a tone or body language which could be considered disapproving or condescending.

### Participant Consent

Before beginning the study, approval was sought from the Texas A&M Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects. Respondents were asked to sign an approved consent form. The form was made available in either English or Spanish. It provided a description of the study, the participant's rights, and possible risks associated with participation. Participants were also informed that management at the recreation center had the desire to increase Hispanic participation and their recommendations would be part of the information given to the director at the conclusion of the study. The consent form also asked respondents' consent to being audio recorded during the interviews. Parent participants were paid \$25 for their involvement in the study.

### Location of Interviews

Interviews were conducted at mutually agreed to locations, typically in the participant's home or at the recreation center. Interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and were recorded using a digital recorder. The digital files were sent to a professional transcription service for transcribing.

### **Parent Interview Guides**

The interview questions were semi-structured (Burck, 2005). This allowed my colleague and me to ask general topic questions and then follow up with questions based on responses. It also allowed participants to feel empowered with their answers since we were not constantly interrupting them to steer them back to the questions. The interview questions were developed based on the purposes of the study and information identified during the literature review.

Different interview guides were used depending on the individuals surveyed. For parents an interview guide was developed using the following sections: child's out-of-school time activities, family recreation, neighborhood characteristics, and issues related to attracting Hispanics to the center. If the children had attended the center, we were interested in how long the children had attended. Since the city offers other programs, we also were interested in whether parents took advantage of any of these other opportunities. In addition, we were interested in discovering the factors that went into

parents' decisions about having their child attend the recreation center. If their children went to the recreation center, parents were also asked to describe their experiences interacting with the recreation center, including experiences with the staff, activities, and other attendees. They were also asked to comment on what they thought their children's experiences had been at the center.

For parents who had children who had not participated at the center, they were asked how their child spent his or her out-of-school time. If parents gave responses such as playing, sleeping, or resting, then the following question was asked, "Who takes care of your child when he/she is not at school?" Parents were also asked if they were aware of the public recreation center and the programs it offered. If they were, they were asked if they had ever considered taking their child there.

Interviews then progressed to questions about family recreation. We asked parents about their typical forms of recreational activities and with whom they tended to participate. For example, does the family recreate with family and friends who are of the same ethnicity, or those of other ethnic groups? Parents were also asked to describe their recreational experiences as a Hispanic or Black individual, e.g., "Are there some things you might not be able to do because of your ethnicity?" With the completion of these questions, interviews moved to the child's experiences with ethnicity.

Because we were trying to understand the neighborhood surrounding the recreation center, it became vital to understand community dynamics. For example, perhaps negative relations with neighbors impacted whether or not parents allowed their children to attend the center.

Parents were informed that the recreation center supervisor would like to attract more Hispanic users. Subsequently, they were asked about possible barriers which could limit Hispanic participation. Parents who did not utilize the center were asked if these concerns also kept them from participating. All parents were asked to give any recommendations to the supervisor help him increase Hispanic attendance. The last two questions addressed whether Hispanics coming to the center was a good thing, and whether there were drawbacks to having Hispanics attend the center.

Parents were also asked to fill out a form to solicit background information. The form asked for the participant's race, education, occupation, income, and number of children living in the household along with their ages and sex. Filling out the form was optional.

### **Historical and Archival Documents**

In order to understand the historical context of the public recreation center, I contacted the College Station historian. She gave me a brochure and information about Project HOLD, the city's online database, containing historical information about the city. There were particular sections dedicated to the study site. In addition, search engines were used to locate information about the history of the center including an article in the local newspaper.

### **Interviews with Individuals Knowledgeable about the Recreation Center**

In addition to the archival information that was available interviews were conducted with several individuals with knowledge about the recreation center.

#### *Former Parks Board Member*

A former parks board member was interviewed to find out more about the historical context of the recreation center. The individual began his service as a parks board member in 1983, and has served intermittently since then. The individual was asked about his experiences serving as a parks board member, particularly those experiences related to the recreation center. He was also asked about the image of the recreation center, and if it had changed over the years. In addition, because of his current position as a city council member, some working knowledge of city programs will be assumed. Questions were also asked about diversity and any factors that might dissuade Hispanics from attending the recreation center. He was also asked for specific recommendations for attracting more Hispanics to the center; benefits of having more Hispanics attending the center; and whether the city budget could afford more participants at the center.

*Parks and Recreation Department Director*

The director of the City of College Station Parks and Recreation Department from 2008-2010 was interviewed. The former director was asked questions about his experiences working for the College Station Parks and Recreation Department. He was also asked about diversity at the center and in other city programs. In addition, the director was informed about the center supervisor's desire to attract more Hispanics to the facility and asked for possible obstacles that might impede Hispanics from enrolling their children along with specific recommendations for the recreation center supervisor in his efforts to attract more Hispanics. The director was also asked to discuss if the current recreation center supervisor took the steps necessary to include Hispanics, would the City have enough resources to support programs directed at the Hispanic population. The, the interview concluded with questions about the benefits and significance of increasing Hispanic enrollment at the center.

*Recreation Center Supervisor*

The center supervisor was also interviewed. He has had relations with the center for the past 25 years. He was asked how the racial composition of the center had changed over that time. Furthermore, he was asked about the significance of recruiting more Hispanics to the facility and about interactions between Hispanics and other individuals using the facility currently. The center supervisor was also asked if he could foresee any possible obstacles that would dissuade the Hispanic population from using the center, including whether the history of the center or the center director being African American presented a barrier. Questions were also asked about any steps that had already been taken to include the Hispanic population. Finally, the supervisor was asked about the African American community's reaction towards Hispanic attendees and what he thought the users of the center would look like in 10 years in the future.

*Employees of the Recreation Center*

Additionally, three employees were asked for input in regards to the project. One of them was not available for comment, but she forwarded an essay to me. The essay discussed her results after interviewing a recreation center assistant supervisor. It also

discussed her experiences while working at the center. These experiences included items pertaining to managerial operations, staff-attendee interactions, and diversity. The diversity component was a matter of interest as the staff member is not African American. However, she was not available for further comment. Additionally, a current African American worker was asked about her thoughts regarding barriers limiting Hispanic participation. She was also asked for input in regards to what changes the director can make in order to outreach to Hispanic families. She was also asked to comment on her coworkers who are not African American and find themselves in this position. Finally, a former employee was interviewed for the study. Her input was valuable because she was not an African American, and I was interested to see what it was like for her to work as an outsider.

#### Community Members

Finally, two community members were interviewed. One of the community members is Hispanic, whereas the other one is African American. They are residents of the area surrounding the recreation center during the mid-1900s. The community members were asked for the history of the recreation center and the surrounding community. They were also asked for the history of recreation as it pertains to the City of College Station. Finally, they were informed of the director's desire to increase Hispanic attendance. They were asked for suggestions as well as possible barriers limiting Hispanic participation.

#### **Field Notes**

Field notes were written after each interview (Berg, 2009). These notes included cryptic jotting, detailed descriptions, analytic notes, and subjective reflections (Berg, 2009). Cryptic jotting refers to in-depth notes written down during an interview. These allowed us to identify important sections in a long recording or provided rich information of the interview when some of the participants refused to be recorded. In addition, we provided detailed descriptions after the interview has taken place. Detailed descriptions include items on interviewees' appearance, "what they said, what they did, and even if they had noticeable characteristics" (Berg, 2009, p. 220). Following



Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), detailed descriptions involve sensory imagery with a rich use of adjectives and adverbs to capture the scene.

We also kept analytic notes, which referred to the ideas that came to mind during the interview. These ideas may link to theories not previously considered, linkages between participants, and so forth. Finally, we kept track of our subjective reflections, which allowed us to self-reflect on the interviews and jot down any personal feelings that may have been felt due to the interaction with the participants (Berg, 2009, p. 220). This process ensured that one participant's data did not severely skew the general findings.

### **Data Analysis**

The interview digital records were sent to a transcription agency. The resulting transcripts were subjected to analytic induction (Katz, 1983; Riessman, 1993). Open coding was used to analyze the interviews and to identify categories and subcategories. Triangulation was achieved through the use of data from a variety of different data sources. Following Creswell (2007), the transcripts were compared to the researchers' field notes and to see if new categories would emerge. Atlas.ti was used as the primary analytic tool for coding and developing categories (Scientific-Software, 2007).

### **Reliability and Validity**

Several strategies were used to increase reliability and validity: data triangulation, debriefing, member checking, and stating study biases and limitations (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

#### Data Triangulation

Data triangulation was achieved through the utilization of multiple data sources. The interviews with parents, staff, and community members were compared against the historical and archival documents. This was done to seek corroboration as well as differences in thoughts and views.

#### Peer Review and Debriefing

Peer review and debriefing were used to establish reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that the debriefing process allows the interviewer to understand his or her

role in the study as well as the biases that he or she brings to the study. The interviewer may develop hypotheses and assumptions that which make sense to the researcher due to personal experiences, biases, or assumptions, but the debriefing sessions are necessary to point out any inaccuracies in data coding and development of themes. In this case, peer review and debriefing was undertaken using my thesis committee members, other professors, and fellow graduate students.

#### Member Checking

Finally, member checking aided in establishing credible data. Once all data were collected and analyzed, a follow up meeting occurred with selected participants. This process consisted of a home visit or phone calls where participants were informed of the major findings in the study and asked for their feedback and thoughts on the themes developed to date.

#### **Researcher Identity**

Due to my previous personal and professional experiences, I brought several biases into this study. First, I was employed by the recreation center after I graduated from my undergraduate studies. Although I had worked with children before, this was the first time I had done so in a summer program. This was definitely a new experience, and I felt like I did not belong to this place. I was timid and shy in comparison to my Black coworkers. At times, children reminded me of the fact that I was not Black. On one occasion, a young boy started calling me his mother, but one of the girls snapped at him and reminded him that I was in fact not the right color.

During my graduate studies, I received a fellowship through the Hispanic Leaders in Agriculture and the Environment. This organization hosted mandatory events for the fellows with the desire that we would become leaders and empower Hispanic communities. The program also made us aware of the inequalities and injustices faced by our community. Participation in the fellowship program made me want to be a leader for the Hispanics I ended up studying.

Additionally, as the Hispanic individuals were interviewed, the limited comfort zone for Hispanics in regards to the Black population became apparent. At the beginning

of the study, I took this comfort zone for granted. However, I soon realized this limited comfort zone was instilled in me at a young age. When I was a young girl (3 or 4 years of age) and living in east Texas, I remembered how my parents would raise the windows and lock the doors if we had to drive through any Black neighborhoods. I remembered being told to duck in case a Black individual decided to throw something at our passing car. At a Laundromat one time my mother accused a Black woman of stealing her money. My mother had also seen some men stealing a car radio. These men happened to be Black. In addition, anytime my brothers and I said anything positive about Blacks, we were reminded of how they did awful things. Further, when I was a child a Black man stopped to ask for directions in my neighborhood. My White neighbor responded by taking out his shot gun and taking a few shots at the man. Nothing seemed to be wrong with the Black man, but again I was taught to be afraid. These experiences led me to be afraid of this population since an early age. Finally, as I began doing interviews with individuals, I kept receiving messages to be afraid of the Black population in the neighborhood. They were portrayed negatively, and I believe that made me a bit afraid as a lone Hispanic woman conducting interviews.

My African American colleague considers herself to be an activist-scholar with an epistemological framework rooted in womanist and social justice literature. In her own words, she notes the following about her background,

I came to this project interested in creating a bridge of solidarity between the African- American and Hispanic communities. Growing up in Southern California during the 90's where there were tumultuous years of race relations, I often heard in the popular media that there was division between the African American and Hispanic, predominantly Mexican American, communities. Although it was not a division that was ever talked about in my home I was deeply connected to Black and Brown solidarity in which I viewed people of color, around the world and in America, as oppressed by a larger system of structural as well as internalized racism. To that end when asked to help with this project I felt part of my role could be to help illuminate the oppressive root of

racism against all communities of color and the need for solidarity against a divide and conquer mentality.

While I view myself as a woman of color and identify as a “brown person,” for the purpose of this research I identified with the label African American researcher. With my own research centering on communities of color, primarily with individuals of the African Diaspora (i.e. Black American, Caribbean American, Black of Hispanic origin, African-American, etc.), I am firmly rooted in highlighting the beneficial qualities of the communities in which individuals from the aforementioned groups represent and reside and challenge the deficit approach which has systematically been used in scholarly studies to berate and pathologize groups of people.

I began my relationship with the Lincoln Center two years before this research began while working on an independent project that focused on identity development of young Black women. The support that the Center provided at that time was invaluable. Since moving to the area and becoming a graduate student at Texas A&M, I have become thoroughly involved in African American student functions as well as African-American community-centered events that are held at the Lincoln Center.

Finally, an additional bias that emerged was my different geographic, cultural, and economic positioning to the community. Interviews were conducted either at the homes of participants or at the center itself. Although the center was a neutral meeting space and both the interview participants and myself were familiar with the location, when I went into individual homes I had to adjust to the living environment in which I entered. Although I have worked and lived in low-income communities in the past, doing interviews in this community felt like there was an invisible barrier between the community and me. Although I ethnically shared similarities with the participants that I interviewed, culturally I felt I had to penetrate this wall. While I passed the gated community of the [government housing] every day and when going through the gates for the first

time, I remembered some of the stories that I had heard or things that I have experienced from working in low-income housing communities that caused me to question my cultural competence. As someone who grew up in middle-income communities, although I ethnically was not an outsider, I did not know how I would be received in a low-income government housing community in the South or its surrounding community. I had perceptions of the participants, anticipating that I would be talking to mostly single mothers and that families would be in small or cramped living conditions. Therefore, when I encountered single fathers, dual parent households, and two-story homes that exceeded my expectations, my bias from my own experiences were triggered.

An additional bias that emerged in this regard was my different geographic and economic positioning to the community. There is, in my opinion, a very obvious—visible and felt—disparity between the development of and services rendered to the [government] housing community and the new housing developments across the street that is simply separated by train tracks. Internally, I felt community members should be outraged that an oppressive society had caused this situation for themselves as well as for the children around them.

It is my firm belief that every interview I conducted was done so with the same level of inquiry and reasonable probing. The intended goals or focus of the study was not altered and the information collected appropriately. I must however acknowledge that my personal background and upbringing, research interests, prior interactions with the community, and personal convictions may have all factored into the qualitative collection of data.

### **Study Limitations**

This study had several limitations. First, children were not interviewed in this study. This occurred for several reasons. First, there was limited time and resources to complete the study and including children would have greatly expanded the scope of the project. Second, research suggests that parents are often responsible for their kids' involvement in out-of-school time programs (Larson & Richards, 1994; Steinberg, 1999;

Wu & Egeren, 2010). Research suggests that it is not until adolescence that children start thinking more abstractly and are able to reason, which includes refuting parents' ideas (Crystal, Killen, & Ruck, 2010). Since the recreation center only serves kids up to the age of 12 and most of the parents had children who were under that age limit, interviews with children were not conducted. This was based on the assumption that parents had the ultimate control of their children's participation; the children would not necessarily stand up otherwise.

Second, the race of the interviewers was potentially an issue. To compensate, we tried to conduct interviews of Hispanics by a Hispanic interviewer and the African Americans by an African American researcher. Third, anytime ethnic groups are being studied, the researcher assumes there is some homogeneity within the groups, particularly with Hispanics. At times it may be practical to address the "the larger group (Hispanic) while in other circumstances the data may yield more significant information when broken down by subgroup" (Marin & Marin, 1991, p. 32). In this project, the interviews were mainly focus on the Mexican subpopulation. Thus, the results might not be applicable other Hispanic groups such as the Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and so on.

Finally, the study involved only one recreation center. The extent to which results are generalizable to other settings is problematic. However, the findings in the study have the potential to help the director in increasing more Hispanic children to this center. Other researchers interested in similar work may use this study as a guide.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

Analysis of the historical information and interview transcripts revealed several recurring themes. I began the research by collecting information of the genesis of this facility, which produced rich data about the symbolic meaning it had for the African American population. Additionally, there were numerous barriers to participation, which hindered Hispanic participation. These included: a) the recreation center being seen as a place for the African American population; b) cultural differences; c) a language gap; d) lack of awareness; e) safety of the recreation center and community; f) lack of outreach implementation; g) cost; and h) bullying.

#### **The Recreation Center as a Symbolic Place**

In order to better understand why Hispanic families were not attending the recreation center in greater numbers, I sought to understand the history of the recreation center. This was done by examining the historical records found on College Station's online database, Project HOLD, and conducting interviews with city leaders and people with knowledge of the center's history. This information led to an understanding of the recreation center as a symbolic place for the African American population in the community.

One of the articles in the archives documented the progression of the African American migration into the community and a timeline of how educational facilities were developed for the African American population (Jasek, n.d.). Migration into the community resulted from slavery. The African American population had no educational opportunities until the Public School Act of 1871 led to formal schooling for county residents.

The incorporation of College Station occurred in the 1939, but in the 1920s, schools had been established for the African American children (Standish, 2006). Children received instruction at the Wellborn Community School, Washington Chapel, and St. Matthews Church (Standish, 2006). These schools, however, served only elementary aged students. The high school students had to be bused to Bryan, a nearby

town. The school district paid for the tuition and travel costs associated with this bussing, but as the population of African Americans grew, so did the costs. As a result, the College Station Independent School District Board of Trustees considered building a high school in College Station. The bond issue for what was then known as the A&M Consolidated Negro School was approved in 1941. Although this was supposed to be only for children in high school, children in grades 1-12 attended the school. In 1946, the school changed its name to Lincoln High School.

According to Marcus, a community resident and former student of the segregated school, those enrolled at Lincoln High School were all Black; their White and Hispanic counterparts attended A&M Consolidated High School. As enrollment increased, additions to the facilities at Lincoln High School were made. However, according to another historical document (Boykin, 2007), Lincoln High School was not equally maintained to the same standards as the other public schools in College Station. It received less funding for maintenance and upkeep, and the buildings were often unsatisfactory in comparison to the other schools. For example, Boykin (2007) noted, “After rains the school has been almost completely surrounded in mud... Asked for an opinion on equal facilities, the teacher waved a hand and said, ‘This is not equality.’” (p. 4).

In addition, the African American students attending the segregated school received A&M Consolidated’s old textbooks, often with torn or missing pages and, in some cases, derogatory words about African Americans scribbled in them (Nash, 1996). Additionally, A&M Consolidated taught typing, trigonometry, botany, and other classes which were not included in the Lincoln curriculum. Throughout this time, Jasek (n.d.) noted that the school was not only a place of teaching, but it began to be a “social hub” and “spiritual meeting place” for the African American community (p. 12).

However, by the 1950s, conversations were initiated about integrating schools. Groups such as the Brazos Bottoms Philosophical Society and Citizen’s Fellowship began championing the rights of African Americans, including school integration (Boykin, 2007; Morris., 1960). On October of 1960, the Citizen’s Fellowship brought



the need for racial integration to the school board. However, *The Texas Observer* dated November 4, 1960 reported:

The president of the board assured the citizens who were present that there was no desire among the Negroes of the community to have their children attend an integrated school. We do not know which Negroes the school board had consulted, but these persons must not have represented all concerned. Many Negro parents in College Station feel that their children are getting an inadequate and inferior education. It would be apparent to anyone who took time to visit Lincoln School that the facilities there are not equal to those used by the White children. (p. 6)

Thus, the school board dismissed any real attempt to integrate schools at that time (Jasek, n.d.). However, in the 1960s, consistent with the Civil Rights Movement, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People demanded that integration occur within the school district. In 1962, the schools in Brazos County were ordered to integrate by Federal District Judge Joe Ingraham. Although Bryan, the neighboring city, did not integrate until 1971, a Stair Step program was initiated in College Station to initiate school integration (Standish, 2006). Under this program, the Lincoln High School was required to send one grade of its students to the local schools each year; by 1965, students in the first and second grades had been integrated. Thereafter, students in grades three and up were eligible for voluntary integration; the Black students would remain at Lincoln School, unless they petitioned to go to the White schools. However, according to the Anne Boykin, the College Station historian, petitioning was usually frowned upon by other students, including the African American students who were proud of their segregated school (A. Boykin, personal communication, October 1, 2010). Yet, there were students such as Delois Wilborn, who did choose to integrate. Boykin (2007) documented her story:

We loved Lincoln, but we had heard that we were getting the “leftovers” from Consolidated. This we did not like and felt that we deserved a first class education just like the White students. We were proud of our school and loved

our teachers. They were excellent and provided us with a good education with what they had. It was not fair that we did not have all the same opportunities or equipment as the White students. (p. 8)

Wilborn also noted the discrepancies between educational opportunities at Lincoln High School versus A&M Consolidated. Although Lincoln School did not have the same classes as A&M Consolidated, African American students coming in still had to adjust to A&M Consolidated's graduation requirements. According to Wilborn this meant that they had to work hard to make up the required credits; in some instances, African American students did not graduate because of this. While Wilborn noted the greater opportunities presented at the White schools such as more classes and better facilities, she also noted her teacher's shock "to find that some of us just did not know some of the basic information that other students knew. The bottom line was that we had not had the opportunity to be exposed to certain classes" (Boykin, 2007, p. 5).

A year later, in 1966, full mandatory integration became a necessity. A fire burned down the Lincoln School, which led to racial integration as the facility could no longer accommodate students. Marcus, the former student and current community resident interviewed, said, "At that time the school burned, there were three Black schools that burned in Brazos County. Nobody knows anything about what happened." The circumstances around the segregated high school's fire remain mysterious. The current director of the recreation center stated that rumor had it that the fire department was called, but it took them at least 15 minutes before they even left their fire station. Individuals were not certain if those responsible for setting the fires were progressive White individuals or perhaps fed up African Americans trying to spur integration. Accordingly, Jasek (n.d.) stated that the "cause of the fire was never determined" (p. 14).

Regardless of the circumstances, the fire destroyed classrooms, offices, the teacher's lounge, and the library. Thus, racial integration began in the schools located in the City of College Station over the span of a few months. When asked how the African American community reacted, Marcus, the African American community member,

lamented that the community was “devastated” as the school represented their “roots” and “all [they] had.” As for the incidents occurring after the fire, Marcus continued:

When the school was just sitting here, it was burned, and there’s a group called Community Knights. We came in and repaired the building. And we ran it as a community center, and we were funded by United Way when [the Community Knights] was an all-black organization...And that’s how we hired people to direct the place. Then the city bought it, and they were going to make this a bus shed. [The city]...acquired it from the school district and made it a community center. And we were proud of that because this is the only landmark that we have in College Station...so we didn’t want this place torn down and then lose our roots.

Although the historical accounts by Jasek or Boykin do not speak to the Community Knights involvement in the rebuilding, they do make it clear that the usage of the facility as a school was no longer realistic. Jasek (n.d.) does state that the building was used as a temporary park for the city, which rarely attracted any visitors. In 1969, the city situated the parks and recreation headquarters in the facility and featured “educational classes” and “served as a neighborhood recreation center” (p. 14). The city used the surrounding property as a multipurpose sports field. Both accounts state that the facility was dedicated in 1980, and received its current name: Lincoln Recreation Center. The center was “to serve as a tribute to the school that once stood on the site” (Jasek, n.d., p. 14). Two years after the dedication, the Lincoln Former Students Association was established which has kept the history and memories of the old segregated school alive.

Since the 1980s, the Lincoln Recreation Center has continued to develop but not without its challenges. Clinton, a former parks board member, stated that “integration [had] occurred rather late” in the town, which had caused antagonism in some situations. For instance, Clinton shared what happened when air conditioning was suggested for the Lincoln Recreation Center:

There was still some antipathy, and I lost. And the argument was about whether there should be air-conditioning in the gym. And my contention was “Well, of course” you know, and the contrary view which prevailed was that we’re going to have big doors on either end and the wind will blow through. That was clearly nonsense and inappropriate. But nevertheless, it prevailed, and there was no air-conditioning in that gym for many years until we came back and did it subsequently.

Additionally, the later part of the decade brought other challenges. For example, Clinton provided information about an attempt in 1988 to get voter support for the recreation center. However, a Blue Ribbon Committee authorized to prioritize projects did not list the project as a priority. According to Clinton:

Our view was that the university facilities here and the private facilities do just fine, and we don’t need a recreation center, but the city council put it on the ballot and as a result, all these other committees worked against it and defeated it. And so it didn’t get anywhere but that in itself tells you something that the areas in the more affluent part of town were not interested in going over to Lincoln Center, and I think that still prevails today.

The 1990s brought no major changes in the city attitude. Clinton finished by stating that the City of College Station decided to build “ball fields” next to the recreation center in order to increase “African American participation in Little League.” Clinton stated, “They were the nicest fields in the city almost at that time.” However, when the ball fields were created, the Little League team revised their policy. Clinton mentioned, “It used to be based on geography, it wasn’t anymore.” The Little League dictated that children enrolled in a sport played in the fields closest to their home. The organization revised their rules after the creation of the park; their modified regulations randomly assigned children to a ball field. Thus, “it was no longer in the African-American community, it was community fields” where anyone could play. Clinton continued, “We [city officials] had meetings with Little League protesting this, and in fact, Mark Johnson [the Texas A&M baseball coach] got involved....because he was incensed...by

their actions. But to me that was a very sad sign, all is not well between the ethnic groups in this community.” Consequently, the randomization of children in the ball fields became a barrier for the African American children, as they now had to pay transportation costs to play at their designated field.

The Lincoln Recreation Center Director also felt that there were some entitlement issues surrounding the center in the 1990s. He indicated that the current generation felt the recreation center was their place because their parents, cousins, and other close family and friends had attended the segregated high school. However, the director expressed the opinion that the entitlement issues no longer affect the center. He felt that most of that generation had moved out of the community, and other Blacks without the historical connection to the center have moved in.

However, a recreation center employee stated that she felt that the “rec gets taken advantage of, and that’s just by the community. When asked to expand, she said, “They [the community] feel as though it’s been there for so long they get to do whatever they want.” I asked if this came off as entitlement, to which she replied:

Yes, you could say that. I just think it’s more with those that are involved in the community, and it’s some that are connected with the rec center as well. They all just...as far as the city is concerned we get looked over. That’s a big negative.

Another community member stated that he felt like the recreation center and the area surrounding it felt, even today, like a forgotten part of the city. Still, the recreation center stands and is used regularly.

Speaking of the physical attributes of the center, the director noted that the outside of the facility still looks like the old segregated high school. The colors of the school still remain, and the trophies still sit in the gym. On the west wall of the gym are portraits of African American role models for the community, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Maya Angelo, Booker T. Washington, Barbara Jordan, Collin Powell, W. A. Tarrow (a former principal of the high school), and Lillian Robertson (a beloved former director of the center). Additionally, pictures of the African American users are found along the walls of the hallway, with no other ethnic groups displayed. The majority of

the staff members are African American, as is the director, and most days African American children and African American seniors enjoy the facility.

### **Barriers to Hispanic Participation**

Interviews with parents, community leaders, and the director led to several themes regarding why only a few Hispanic parents enroll their children at the center. The themes included the following:

- the recreation center is perceived as a place for the African American population;
- cultural differences;
- mixed emotions about African Americans;
- safety of the recreation center and community;
- bullying;
- language gap;
- lack of awareness;
- lack of outreach implementation; and
- cost of participation.

### *The Recreation Center is Perceived as a Place for African Americans*

As noted, the recreation center had its genesis as a segregated school for African Americans in the mid-twentieth century. Clinton, the former parks board member stated that the recreation center is “still recognized as being an African-American center....that’s still the prevailing image of it. And so officially, of course, it’s the city’s recreation center, but the reality is it is not. It is the area of the African-Americans.”

Clinton made it clear that the facility is a symbol for the African American population:

I think historically it has such very strong roots through its heritage and the segregated school system. And, you know, there’s an alumni association of that school associated with it. I mean its heritage, and its roots are so deep to African-Americans, I think it’s very difficult to break that image. I mean I don’t see that happening until that whole community fades away or whatever if it does.

As noted by the former parks board member, the alumni association continues to keep the memory alive of the old segregated high school. An interview with a former student appearing in the local newspaper reinforced this idea by noting how the facility represented his roots. He said, “We don’t want to lose that. It’s important for us to maintain so we don’t forget where we came from” (Avison, 2005, para. 13). Thus, it was not surprising that the director stated that there were some entitlement issues in the 1990s in regards to the African American population and the facility. When events such as weddings and funerals take place at the facility, they mainly involve the African American population.

Such ownership of the facility did not go without notice as was seen by some of the comments expressed by Hispanic parents. Laura, mother of a 7-year old who attends the center, commented:

Everyone in the front was Black. I think that makes other Black people feel more welcome. And then I was thinking oh, my gosh, is it just for Black kids? I don’t know if it was just a funded event for Black people when I first went. I was like, ‘can she come here?’

Laura was able to overcome her perceptions because she desperately needed a place to have her daughter taken care of. Other parents were able to overcome this view, but mentioned that the number of Hispanic children attending the center was rather limited. In contrast, other parents were not able to overcome this constraint. Angelina, mother of a 2 and 7-year-old, stated that an increase in Hispanic enrollment would encourage her to have her children participate. She was one of the mothers who refused to take her 7-year-old daughter to the center.

Additionally, an employee at the center stated that attendance is about 95% African American. She felt this was a reason why Hispanics were not participating in large numbers. Rosemary, a former employee, simply said, “As far as location, it’s situated in the Black community. No Hispanics will take their kids unless parents were willing to take them for the low price.” However, when parents did choose to take their

children, the facility might not have been welcoming to them. Erika, a worker at the Boys and Girls Club stated:

As a Hispanic child, I don't think I would feel very welcome in a place that has nobody that looks like me on the walls, nobody who looks like me on staff. You feel like the minority. I will be intimidated as a child.

Erika went on to say that the Boys and Girls Club makes sure that they are “inclusive” and refrain from “promot[ing] one ethnicity more than the other.” She felt that the recreation center focused too much on the African American population, which is not representative of the “Boys and Girls Club as a whole.” Accordingly, Alejandra, Hispanic mother of a 10- and 11-year old, stated that having too many African Americans was a turn off. Her children preferred places where there was a mix of people. In effect, she chose not to enroll her children. However, there were also some cultural differences that restricted Hispanic parents from enrolling their children.

#### Cultural Differences

Perceived cultural differences between Hispanics and African Americans also appear to be keeping Hispanics from attending the center. In the interview with the director he acknowledged the differences between groups.

There are some cultural things that make each ethnic group not respond to certain givens, you know, in our community, but African-Americans, they may be inclined and comfortable to do things in certain way with themselves as opposed to other groups.

When asked to clarify this, the director said that African Americans “take on the fever.” This meant that African Americans are spiritually orientated and turn things into a church orientation quickly. Additionally, in regards to the differences between groups, Rosemary, the former employee, indicated that activities such as the dancing, music, and basketball cater to the African American population. In regards to the dancing, Laticia, an African American mother of four, stated that she liked the fact that the Lincoln Center allowed her kids to listen and dance to hip hop music. She felt that opportunities such as



this would not be available in other organizations. Therefore, she appreciated this cultural aspect of the activities featured at the center.

While the available activities may seem inviting to the African American population, this may create tensions for the Hispanic population. Laura, mother of the 7-year-old, stated that she normally saw kids playing basketball at the recreation center. She said, "Basketball is generally around only White people and Black people... You rarely see a Mexican playing." Even some of the activities that only occurred once a year were seen as Black activities. These activities included the celebration of Black History month and Juneteenth. Laura added,

...they really come out whenever it's Black History month. They really...they promote stuff. They do stuff. The organizations are all over the recreation center. But then when it is Cinco de Mayo and all that it's not really...there are no flyers going on, there's no events.

Laura was not the only one to express concerns about the emphasis on events important to Blacks. Erika, the African American Boys and Girls Club employee, reacted to the Juneteenth event with the following, "I'm sorry. I'm all for Black power, but I'm an American, too!" She stated that Black power was overemphasized at the recreation center leaving mixed feelings about what it meant to simply be an American.

Cultural differences also involved the type of staff members that are hired at the center. Although there are a few White, and in some cases Hispanic, employees, the majority of the employees are African American. As for those who are not African American, I asked Britney, an African American worker, how they do on the job. She stated the following.

When they first get there, it is a bit different from us. We had a girl that she just got here this summer. At first she was a little, a little distant, kind of put off, but she didn't know what to expect. She didn't know how to handle them [the Black kids]. She didn't know what to do. But I say as you work there, the longer you work there, you get used to it. You get used to it.

Whitney, a non-African American staff member, shared an essay she had written concerning the organization. Her input provided insight into what it was like working as an outsider in the recreation center. Commenting on the staff, she indicated that,

The staff is quite homogenous, consisting of three members who are Caucasian with rest African American. Hispanics aren't represented at all. This seems disproportionate because College Station is not split demographically in this way. With the lack of diversity on staff, cultural diversity training for the staff would be helpful, especially for Caucasian staff like me, but is not available. The attitudes and beliefs of the kids I work with are very different from my own the children lost a lot of respect for me at the beginning of my employment because I did not realize things that seemed obvious to them.

This viewpoint was supported by Rosemary, a former worker who stated that she did feel like she had a connection with the kids because she wasn't White herself, but she said, "they [the Black kids] still looked up to the African American workers for role models." In effect, the Hispanic children had few opportunities to look upon Hispanic workers as role models.

#### *Mixed Emotions about African Americans*

Hispanics were also reserved in their participation rates due to the mixed feelings they had about the African American population. Erika shared, "The ones [Hispanics] that are going to feel really comfortable are the ones that have always lived around African Americans so they already relate and so, you know, they fit right in." This view was also expressed by the parents. For example, Francisco, a former community member, stated the following in regards to his experience with the center:

I don't remember or recall but I might have a bad experience one time and just never went back, I don't know, I just always felt afraid. So, I always felt like I was going to get hurt...They're [Blacks are] more aggressive at times in different ways, you know, not even intentional or being mean or even the ones that are nice they're just—I don't even know how to describe it...they're very athletic, you know, so you can get intimidated by that...

In this case, although the informant had not encountered any negative experience with African Americans, he still felt intimidated. Other Hispanic parents felt the same way. Cindy, who had her children at the center for some time, stated that her children said that “the Black children were crazy. They were crazy, and they wanted to fight for everything.” Angelina, a mother of a 7-year old daughter, complained that “the Black kids are very aggressive, and well I don’t teach my kids to fight.” Angelina noted that the recreation center has some water fountains which are accessible to families without going inside the facility, but she stated that “there are too many Black kids.” Angelina decided to forgo participation, as she stated that “every time things happen between children, adults get involved, and I don’t want any problems.” She not only did not take her family to water fountains, but she also did not enroll her children at the center.

Other parents were braver and actually did take their children to the recreation center, but not without some reservations. Laura shared the apprehension she felt at the beginning,

I’d never feel comfortable to take my kids there because of all the black people. And they are probably like who are you? I don’t know how they are going to treat me, really. And I don’t know them. I guess I just don’t want to have to deal with it.

Another mother, Carolina, said that one of her sons would “sometimes tell [her] he didn’t like it [the other children] because they were Black and they were instigators.” Carolina’s sons had to be careful in their speech and behaviors just in case the African American kids took offense. Carolina’s son had also had problems in the Boys and Girls Club in the neighboring town with their African American participants. With the move, it was expected to get better, but the child pointed out that “there were Blacks [at this center], too, and they were mean, too”. In this case, the mother took some blame for the negative attitudes. She felt like she had played a role in the fact that her sons saw African Americans as mean or bad people. She clarified and said, “Well, they [Blacks] aren’t bad, rather they yell a lot, that’s what it is, they never know when to close their mouth”.

Other parents made the distinction between negative behaviors and the African American race; they just stated that the kids were crazy or bad mainly due to the way their parents brought them up. For instance, Sandra, a mother of two, reported, “I think they're just bad. It's not because they're black it's just because-- my kids can get like that too because they're Mexicans. It's just because some of those kids are really bad. It's just, well, you know.”

Additionally, Adonna, an African American mother of a 6, 7, and 9- year old stated:

These kids jump off the bus, this little White boy, they stayed out here and they just want to - like three - no not three, it was like five little Black children trying to fight this one little White boy, but like I said, that starts at home. That's the parents' fault. Why would you let all your little Black children fight this little White boy?

In effect, the bad behavior some Hispanics saw African American children exhibit was a determining factor in whether these parents chose to allow their children to participate. Sometimes the negative behavior was absent, but the recreation center and the community already had a reputation in the minds of some of the potential users.

#### *Safety of Recreation Center and Community*

Safety at the recreation center was an area of concern. For example, individuals who are court-mandated to provide community service carry out janitorial tasks at the center. This group sits in the benches next to the entry doorway. At times, these individuals are clean cut and wear just jeans and a t-shirt, but at other times, these individuals come in pajamas, baggy clothes, hair that hasn't been brushed, and have tattoos that are apparent on their arms, back, and legs. This causes some parents to be concerned. Laura stated, “I noticed that there were community service people out there. I was thinking, “Is this even safe?” She went on to say that she did not want some “thug” teaching her child.

Additionally, the recreation center has some stories about the past that circulate in the community which may impact current participation. For instance, Laura stated that

she “heard terrible things about this place... My boss told me that a lady that was volunteering there was hit over the head and her purse was stolen.” These stories persist, although the director felt that “there’s a change in the way the environment here within the Lincoln Center has changed over the years so I don’t think very many people realize that that has happened especially in the last five to ten years.” He included the surrounding neighborhood, along with the center, and felt that despite changes, the reputation still remained negative.

Laura also related some concerns about the safety of the community surrounding the recreation center, with particular attention to issues about a nearby apartment complex,

I noticed that the Lincoln Recreation Center was right next to that apartment complex, I was afraid... They all had problems with like child abuse, and government, and things like that. And the children had problems so I was thinking I hope none of the family members try to come over.

When I asked an employee about the apartment complex near the center, she stated that the apartments are “basically the lowest income part of College Station.” However, she said, “I know a lot of kids there that were so sweet, really, really nice kids. It’s because of the neighborhood that they come from that they get labeled that way...”

To better understand what the label of the apartment complex meant, I looked at the apartment reviews posted online, which are sometimes recommended to students before they pick an apartment. Although the reviews may contain exaggerations based on negative experiences, the statements are still published. The first website, ApartmentRatings.com, contained three entries about the apartment complex. One stated, “This place is so bad it has its own police sub-station. Nothing but poor pimps and welfare suckers. They were stealing my stuff from my car as I moved in. So bad I avoid driving by it” (Apartment Ratings, 2004, para. 1). Although the other entries recommended the apartments as a place to live, they acknowledged the negative situations that might occur. Additionally, ApartmentReviews.com offered three more entries. The second entry from 2007 was posted by an individual who was content with

the rent but discussed the usage of drugs and other negative interactions in the neighborhood (Apartment Review, 2007). However, the latest entry dated 2010 suggested that the horror stories were unfounded and might have been caused by previous tenants who have long moved away (Apartment Review, 2010).

Clinton, the former parks board members, provided another view point about the public housing: “The public housing complex, that was a real problem there, it isn’t today...still some challenges there. But it’s nothing like it was in the 80s and that was very much tied to the center in those days.” However, during the interviews with local residents, it appeared that the “stories” still existed. Although drugs were not mentioned as a problem, both Hispanic and African American parents mentioned the constant fights occurring in the government housing area. In addition, some of the other parts of the neighborhood had negative stories tied to them as well. Lorena stated that her brother had mistakenly gotten arrested as the police took him as an individual soliciting services from prostitutes in the area in front of the center.

Thus, when asked about why parents choose not to enroll their children, Sakina stated her concerns,

I don’t know because I mean there’s a lot of stereotypes about the Lincoln Center. It’s like all the kids are bad and it’s worth like the kids from [the government housing], ...they pick or they, you know, they fight with each other and stuff like that so I figured maybe that’s why a lot of different people don’t you know, send their kids because they’re afraid that their kids might get picked on or something like that.

Maura, however, provided a counterargument. She lived in front of the recreation center among mostly African American neighbors. She described them in positive ways, saying that the community was calm for the most part. However, she also stated that her grandson had stopped attending the recreation center within a couple of days. When asked for an explanation, the tone got negative, and she blamed the kids living in the government housing area. To add to this point, when I was working at the recreation center, I remember one particular staff training. The director was mentioning an

interaction with a parent. The parent asked the director why the staff was always yelling at the kids. Before the director could respond, the parent said something to the effect that that yelling was the only way the kids from the government housing understood to follow directions.

In addition to the stories, families who were interviewed mentioned the constant presence of police in the neighborhood. Evelia stated, “Well, ever since I got here, I’ve always seen the ambulance, the police, they’re always busy there, always...” This constant presence of authority appeared to disrupt the calm nature of the neighborhood. Families felt that police are not just a random presence in their environment, but perhaps community residents needed protection. As a result, parents, particularly Hispanics, instructed their children not to leave the home. Children were sometimes allowed outside if they were on the property or being supervised by their parents. This was noticed by one African American parent, Brooke. She stated:

Maybe because their [Hispanics] background they keep their kids at home.

There’s a lot of stay-at-home parents. And the Hispanic culture is a lot of stay-at-home parents and maybe some of them they don’t know.

Additionally, the recreation center director stated that his colleagues and friends had told him that Hispanic parents were just a little overprotective of their children. However, the desire of Hispanic parents to keep their children indoors appeared to be a reaction to their environment. Cindy, a Hispanic mother stated that the police had searched her property on several occasions. She did not understand why she looked suspicious so she insisted on keeping her children inside. Additionally, Vanessa shared her story:

I don’t normally talk to anybody. I’m always either inside or I just go outside and do what I have to do and come back inside. I try not to associate with anybody around here. Every once in a while, I’ll talk to somebody out here or something, but I’ve seen a lot of things.... They [the Black people] fight all the time. The law’s always out here and it’s just not—I don’t know. I’m just waiting, so I can be able to move out.

When asked whether she kept her kids indoors or let them roam around outside. She stated,

They used to stay indoors, but then I told—I would tell them, “You know what? I can’t keep you all inside. I mean, you all just going to have to learn to defend yourselves. If ever you can, whatever you all do...I was going to have to put up with what goes on. If they hit you all, if they fight with you all, you all just fight back. If you all wind up hurting somebody, I guess, I’m going to have to take the responsibility, but I cannot keep you all inside.”

In Vanessa’s case, she got tired of locking her children indoors, so she let them out. However, most Hispanic families kept their kid indoors, which was perceived as being protective to outsiders.

### Bullying

The safety of the recreation center and the surrounding area was a concern for some of the parents. Some did not even venture to enroll their children due to the negative stories surrounding the area. However, for the ones who did enroll their children, bullying became a cause for concern. In regards to bullying, Whitney, the current White worker who submitted her essay to me, wrote that youth were “encouraged to speak out against bullying and prejudice, and to continually maintain pride for themselves and respect for others.” She noted that some of the “posters on the wall read “STOP bullying” “NO Prejudice” “We All Belong Here.” However, Whitney noted that the center could become quite chaotic as rules and expectations are not implemented equally by all staff members. The levels of punishments vary, which made bullying a problem.

Whitney was not the only one to note the problem with bullying. For some parents, the threat of bullying meant that they kept careful watch over their kids. Laura spoke about her daughter’s experiences,

She did go through that [bullying] the first year. The entire year. I kept calling up there and telling them about this girl, that girl, and what was being said and what was going on. She just wasn’t familiar with the phonics and things like that...She



just said that at first, nobody wanted to play with her and they kept calling her White. They thought she was White. She goes, "I'm not White! I'm Mexican." Laura informed me that her young daughter kept getting picked on by the African American kids at the recreation center. The mother pointed out the language gap and race were the reasons that led to the bullying. The mother shared that what stopped the bullying was a family reunion where the family discovered that the daughter had a biracial cousin. The cousin also attended the recreation center, and she served as the bridge between the Hispanic daughter and the African American attendees. As a result, the second year went more smoothly for Laura's daughter.

In the case of Lorena, she stated that her 9-year-old daughter came home one time saying that an African American attendee had hit her. Lorena told her daughter to go "tell the coach." Lorena concluded that her daughter brought it to a staff member's attention, and they brought it to the African American girl's attention. In this case, the mother empowered her daughter to address the bullying herself.

Additionally, the Hispanic community member Francisco also took his foster son to the recreation center for a short time period. Francisco shared that throughout his attendance, the foster son kept being picked on. In this case, adults did not intercede to stop the bullying. Finally, Maura's 11-year old grandson seemed to have also been picked on. In that case, the child ceased participation and refused to go back.

In reference to Hispanic bullying, Sakina, an African American mother of a 5- and 11-year old, stated that she had heard about the bullying, but her 11-year old daughter had never experienced it. This was not the case with Brianna's five year old son. Although he was African American, Brianna's son was bullied by the kids at the recreation center. Brianna attributed it to her son's good behavior. She said, "Even when they cussing at him, he tries to be friends with them. He doesn't cuss. You know, none of that, so if somebody cuss around, he'll be like "you don't cuss; it's a sin." And they don't like that, so they hit him."

As far as how the kids reacted to the bullying, Britney, an African American center employee, was able to provide more insight. She noted that about half of the

Hispanic children enrolled at the center “stay to themselves. They have one or two people they talk to.” She added that these children did not interact with the other children or the staff members. As for my personal experiences at the center, I noticed how the Hispanic children would play together in different parts of the playground or gym. However, Britney went on to state that the current African American attendees would sometimes be mean to other children regardless of ethnicity. Kids were targeted if they were new or were perceived to be different.

Thus, bullying is a cause of concern if the number of Hispanics is to be increased at the center. It was not surprising to hear Brianna say that if Hispanic enrollment was increased, bullying would most likely happen. She stated,

I see the way they treat the people that’s not black. I hear the kids, the little Caucasian kids and Hispanic kids they’ve been picking on them when they get off the bus and stuff. So I understand. Pushing them around, cussing them out. Telling them they going to beat they butt and all of this you know, they’ve been doing it wrong and if they was to go to the [center] it would probably be better, because there’d be more authority around than outside. But at first, I don’t think that’d be too good to that you used to it, because they do them bad.

Interestingly, the director said that to decrease bullying staff members just had to send the culprits directly to him. However, in lieu of the accounts provided by staff members and parents, this might not always occur.

### Language

Spanish was the primary language spoken by a majority of the Hispanic participants. Some of the participants had emigrated from Mexico, and they found language a barrier to participation in recreational activities. Language was a factor in whether or not parents were willing to allow their children to attend the recreation center. During the time this study was conducted, there were not any employees at the center who were able to translate from English to Spanish. However, the current director did not perceive language as a major barrier to participation. He particularly felt that

that language would not be an issue in the future when he believed more children and parents would be learning English,

I can take away language because our kids in grade school already know they have to learn two languages. So, that shouldn't be that much of an issue in the next four or five years. There aren't going to be that many people around and say with adult learning over the next five, ten years—I don't see that being a big reason that people can't speak some of the same language.

Another employee echoed this point of view,

...language has never been an issue. We had one child, and he came for a few weeks--he came during a break or holiday or something we had--and he was the first child that came across that spoke a little bit of English. At first it was a little bit weird for the children, but a few of them were able to help him out, talk to him, let him know what was going on as best as they could. I was surprised that the children did that. He made a few friends while he was there, which was shocking to me. It really was.

Although language did not appear to be recognized by center staff as a major reason for a lack of Hispanic participation at the center, parents felt differently. Brooke, an African American mother, recognized that Hispanic parents had a hard time communicating due to the inability to speak English. She suggested that the center recruit someone who is bilingual. Hispanic parents also stated that language was indeed a barrier. Alejandra, a Hispanic mother who did not take her child to the center stated, "I'm not even going to understand what they tell me." This was one of the reasons that she did not register her child at the center. In addition, Carolina stated that she did not have much confidence in taking her three sons to places where the staff did not speak Spanish. She said that even a flyer stating, "We speak Spanish," would have been enough to ease parent's fears. In the case of this mother, she was not even aware of the programs offered or layout of the facility because she did not know how to ask for this information.

For the Hispanic parents who only spoke Spanish, they indicated that they were often forced to use their children as translators in their everyday life. Interestingly, most parents were against the use of children to translate for them. One mother stated that her daughter got nervous when she had to translate. Thus she refrained from putting her daughter in uncomfortable situations even though it meant not being able to understand what was being said. At other times, children failed to give complete translations when asked to be the intermediary between the organization and their parents. Omissions occurred for three reasons: 1) the child got tired of translating the whole message, 2) the child was trying to coax a parent to do something by giving the parent limited information, or 3) the child wanted to avoid getting in trouble so information was not fully provided. For instance, when asked if her kids helped her with English, Alejandra stated that they helped her learn and read it. They also translated the prices when they would visit stores. However, she stated that,

When they send me letters from school, they read it themselves, and I'm just watching that they're reading it right because sometimes when they finish, they get really quiet and I know it's a bad letter or something. But they help me, they help me sometimes, you know? For all that stuff.

Angelina also stated that her daughter got nervous, and she didn't like that. However, this mother felt it was her responsibility to learn English. She even asked, "Am I supposed to depend on my daughter? Well, no. Little by little I'm learning, but I haven't had the opportunity to take English classes." Angelina also explained that her husband, the sole provider for the family, did not have a stable job. To spend money on English classes was a luxury that they could not afford.

In general, families perceived that it was their responsibility to learn English since they were in the United States. Carolina stated, "When there is someone who doesn't speak Spanish, well-sometimes people who are White Americans try to understand us, and I feel bad, right? Because really I should know English because I'm here, right?" However, this desire to learn English was offset by the need to work to

provide for the family. In effect, Brooke suggested that the recreation center may want to hire someone who is bilingual and can communicate with non-English speakers.

Lack of Awareness

Another reason why there were a limited number of Hispanic children at the center was due to a lack of awareness that the recreation center even existed. Although two parents (Alejandra and Vanessa) cited that they had seen flyers, most parents stated otherwise. For instance, Laura said she learned of the center “pretty much by word of mouth.” This mother went on to say,

I had food stamps and everything like that, and I never knew about the Lincoln Recreation Center. I never knew about a lot of the things until I met some of the other Black women who were on... They were like girl you can get this free help and this free help. And I am like why do they know about everything and I don't?

This mother did not live near the recreation center, but Maura, who lives in front of the center, stated the same problem of not knowing what the center offered. Maura stated that a neighbor took her along when she was registering her Hispanic grandson who lives with her.

Lack of awareness was identified by other interviewees as well. Lorena, who does take her children, stated, “Really we always saw children, but we weren't informed.” Other parents had also driven by the facility and seen children playing outside, but they were not sure what went on in the facility. In effect, some like Lorena came to enroll their children, while others simply drove by. In regards to awareness, Sakina, an African American mother, related the case of the White population,

At first there wasn't that many White kids come. But now we have a whole bunch of White kids coming in. There used to not be that many White kids that come. Then the word of mouth because they come. Maybe some of Brianna and Dominique's friends [her daughters] go to the Lincoln Center now in the summertime and they play in the summer league basketball. So it's just a word of mouth communication. It was lack of communication and the word got out there and then there it is.

The interviewees had many recommendations for how to spread the word. First, as noted, stronger efforts to use word of mouth tactics were recommended. Marcus, a former resident of the community stated that perhaps the Lincoln Center did not have “recruiters getting out recruiting them.” Doing so might increase Hispanic enrollment. There were also recommendations for flyers. Sandra lives in the neighborhood, and she noted, “A lot of people do that, they will come post their flyers on the doors and that's how we know, like, what's going on and if it seems interesting then they'll go.” Evelia suggested that the notes should be in Spanish in order for Hispanic parents to understand. Additionally, others suggested television. For instance, Jada, African American mother of a 5, 7, and 8-year-old, mentioned that she had seen the Boys and Girls Club advertised on television. She said this should be extended to the Lincoln Recreation Center. However, another parent stated, “They should do a commercial on TV with all races on there. Showing all races playing with each other. How they had different programs.”

#### *Lack of Outreach Implementation*

In the interview with Erika, the Boys and Girls Club employee, I was made aware of the Latino outreach program available through the Boys and Girls Club. Erika noted that management at the Lincoln Recreation Center has access to the outreach material to Boys and Girls Club chapters. Erika explained that at various times throughout the year, the Boys and Girls Club provides funding opportunities to jumpstart the initiative. She said that the grant money could be as little as \$500 or enough “to create or retain a position at the Boys & Girls Club.” Erika noted that a recent grant opportunity allowed organizations to create a staff position. This could have “been an excellent opportunity for a club that was trying to recruit Hispanic members...The [club] could create a position for whatever position description [they] wanted to call it, a Latino outreach specialist or whatever to create that position.” Although the grant was for a year, it could have jumpstarted the Latino outreach in its primary stages.

Although this outreach material is provided, the director had not taken full advantage of the opportunity. When first asked if whether the recreation center had any outreach, the director responded,

Outreach, yeah. But to go to the City of College Station and say we really need to be a little bit more aggressive not just in Parks and Recreation but overall. Yeah. We need to—we do need to do it.

After clarifying that I meant by the Boys and Girls Club Outreach material, the director stated that he had not implemented any of the recommendations. He said that he “needed [his] employer to give [him] access to their meeting.” However, he proceeded to finish off by saying, “I can pass out [flyers] and put up posters but that’s not—they’re not going to see it.” Additionally, the director said that he had tried to team up with a Hispanic organization from the nearby university. There were some communication problems, and the organization had not helped out with celebrating Hispanic events like Cinco de Mayo. This left the director frustrated, and he had not tried again to put on events for the Hispanic population.

Additionally, when I shared the results of the study with the director and how the lack of outreach was perceived as a problem, he again focused on the City of College Station and their lack of incentive. Francisco, the Hispanic community member interviewed, was able to corroborate this point. Francisco was also an employee for the parks and recreation department. He stated that the city talks about diversity, “but as far as action, [Francisco] didn’t see a lot.” In his case, Francisco was interested in beautification projects around the City of College Station. However, he felt that the city made it “easier to look the other way and just say “Well, you know, somebody else can help them.” The community member then went on to discuss the diversity on the city council members representing the town. He felt that the nearby City of Bryan had an ethnically diverse group on their council, but the City of College Station lacked minority representation. As far as the interview with the former parks and recreation director, it seemed to boil down to the financial pressures the city was facing which made it almost impossible to fund items like outreach material. In this case, the former parks and

recreation director said the director was going to have to find other opportunities like the Boys and Girls Club.

Cost of Participation

The center charges \$1.00 per day or \$10.00 per year to attend the center. There are also opportunities for low income participants to apply for a discount through the Park Bucks program. Fees are also charged for afterschool program membership, summer program membership, and late pick-up. In each case there are non-resident fees and discounts for low-income residents (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Admission Prices for Those Wishing to Attend the Recreation Center**

\*Table adapted from the City of College Station (2010).

Youth	Nonresident	Fee	Low-income
Afterschool Membership	\$30	\$20	\$10
Summer Membership	\$100	\$50	\$50
Late Pick-Up Fee	\$5 – (1-15 minutes) \$1 each additional minute	\$5 – (1-15 minutes) \$1 each additional minute	\$5 – (1-15 minutes) \$1 each additional minute
Nonmember Guest Pass	\$2 (Daily)	\$2 (Daily)	\$2 (Daily)
ADULT			
Annual Membership	\$70	\$45	\$45
Nonmember Guest Pass	\$2 (Daily)	\$2 (Daily)	\$2 (Daily)

While prices may seem minimal, costs were an area of concern for parents. Hispanic mother Lorena said that her husband’s job was “not a sure thing that will be there all the time.” She went on to state that being charged an admission fee complicated things as the family did not have the luxury to spend money. Cost of admission also



limited some African American families from enrolling their children. Adonna, an African American mother living in the government housing, also felt that price was an issue. She began by stating that the price of admission was reasonable in comparison to other places such as daycare. When asked about the price, Adonna stated that it was “either \$10 to \$20 for like three, but it’s a one-time fee.” She did warn that the summer time could mean parents paying from \$50 to \$100 per child. She said this price was “steep” as people in the government housing “only pay \$25 in rent.” She went on to ask, “How do you think they’re going to be able to afford to pay \$50? What if you got five or six children that you have to send to the Lincoln Center? You can’t afford it.” In Adonna’s case, she had three children, which meant that she was not paying \$50 but \$150. In Adonna’s case, she stressed the fact that there were other priorities that might come before enrollment. Jada stated that Hispanics do not attend the facility because,

this world today is harder-money wise...is expensive. You got to put food on the table and buy clothes, just nothing else to do. Let ‘em run wild. Yup, it depends on whoever needs it...People can’t bring their kids because of transportation or whatever, or they’re just not working, or can’t afford it.

Although some parents perceived price as a barrier, the director stated that individuals are not turned away if they are unable to pay. If a child really needed access to a safe place then exceptions could be made. Cost breaks were dependent on the child’s good behavior. However, this is not something that is announced. The office clerk and the assistant supervisor are in charge of keeping an eye on those who might not be able to pay. Those who say things such as, “Well, I can’t afford \$25” will get sent to the director to discuss their current situation. In some cases, the parents agree to pay within a certain time period, and other times, they simply cannot make the payment. In regards to these cases, the director stated, “It’s only to be discreet as to make sure we’re not offending anybody. People have certain integrity and pride about certain things. So you want to leave them with their dignity about these things.”

An employee expanded on these practices and said that there are well off kids attending the center (i.e., having both parents, living in a nice neighborhood), but they

were a minority. The center mainly served “...low, low, low-income families that are on assistance and all that other stuff.” This became apparent in the interviews with parents. Some were dealing with dire financial situations due to illnesses, displacement from hurricane Katrina, pregnancy requiring bed rest, and so on. In effect, this caused some financial burdens on the families, which restricted the opportunities for families to enroll their children at the Lincoln Recreation Center. In effect, cost of admission appears to be a barrier associated with lower-income families instead of certain families of certain ethnic backgrounds.

### **Benefits of Having Children Attend the Recreation Center**

Perceived benefits of the recreation center were consistent with benefits typically associated with youth programs. The former College Station Parks and Recreation Director said it best,

The value that the Center has is because of the variety of recreational opportunities that they get into. The kids may find something that they didn't even know because they hadn't done it at school necessarily. [The director] has a good opportunity to do stuff that the kids aren't exposed to at the school level. So part of the responsibility, as professionals that [the director] and the rest of us have is to promote other health and wellness activities that the kids can be successful in...in order to give them another outlet or another opportunity for growth.

The former director stressed the importance of children getting the opportunity to experience new things, which may not be present in the school curriculum or at home. Additionally, for the Hispanic population, parents counted on the center for its tutoring opportunities. For example, Cindy noted that since she speaks little to no English, the center provided her kids help with their homework. Hispanics were not the only ones to benefit from the tutoring. For example, Brooke noted that her younger son participated in the tutoring sessions as well as the basketball and football component. She went on to say that her eldest son participated in the Keystone Club, which helped him stay out of trouble. Additionally, parents stated that the recreation center could provide some time

off from their children; in some cases, Sakina mentioned that the center provided a sort of day care for parents. She stated, “For the parents, it works out good...say [they] get out from work late...[they] have a few hours...so once they get off, they can come and get their kids, and it just works out.”

One of the main reasons for participation was that the children liked to participate. In regards to her daughter, Laura stated, “She loves it. She loves the arts and crafts. And she says that she doesn’t even care to go play because she likes to stay inside doing everything. I’m glad they give her an option.” This view was consistent with Terica’s story, which was published in the *Eagle*, a local newspaper. She was documented as saying, “It’s real fun, and you get to play games and do arts and crafts. I have friends here, and I like playing” (Avison, 2005, para. 23). These two girls liked the arts and craft component of the curriculum. Two other mothers, Lorena and Evelia, mentioned that their children engaged in making balloon figures. Parents also mentioned the field trips and the opportunities for exercising that the center provided. Furthermore, Whitney stated that staff members were in charge of several other activities, including a drama program, a power hour for extra instruction, and Keystone Club. Other parents mentioned the role of the Youth Women of Distinction in the enrollment of their kids.

On the other hand, there were at least three families who were not satisfied with the activities at the Lincoln Center. Laticia, African American mother of four children, said the following,

I know on the summer time, one of their biggest complaints was that they didn’t get a chance to play too many activities. It was, it was more so a disappointed thing...So they, they felt like it was just a waste of their time to come some days because they didn’t get a chance to participate that much. So they may feel like sometimes their activities are limited due to maybe the, the crowd size or the behavior.

Along similar lines, Vanessa said her kids stopped attending because “there was not enough activities for them”, and Evelia stated that she wished there were more enrichment activities, particularly geared toward reading. As far as my time with the

organization, there were enrichment activities offered, but staff chose what children to take with them. The choosing was rather random and subjective. If parents did not specify that their children had to participate in a certain event, staff members were under no obligation to take the children. This selection process limited who benefited from the activities.

Participants were also asked about the benefits of having an increased Hispanic enrollment at the recreation center. Five of the African American parents (Tonya, Brooke, Jada, DeAndra, and Adonna) stated that it would be a benefit as their kids would learn Spanish. Jada even suggested that a Spanish class should be started. Learning Spanish was seen as a positive thing. For instance, DeAndra saw learning Spanish as desirable as becoming bilingual could help individuals be more marketable. Additionally, the increase of Hispanic children was seen as a way to diversify the center which in effect would expose children to new cultures. Tonya, mother of a 7- and 11-year old, stated that children need to learn “how to conduct themselves around different types of people. And that’s one place that I feel like that they can learn how to conduct themselves.” The director of the center also added that an increase of Hispanic children will impact the community in a positive way,

[We] want people to be franchised; you want them to be involved in your community. You don’t want to alienate any group. And I think any community voice and all community voices make a stronger neighborhood. So for those reasons I am very much a proponent of opening up the center and what can we do to ensure access, the same access that other racial and ethnic groups [have].

Accordingly, Francisco stated that Hispanics attending the recreation center will “drive home a sense of unity.” He noted that a lot of attention has already been given to the different racial and ethnic groups in different places, but there needs to be “common ground” where these groups can actually come together.

### **Justifications for Maintaining the Status Quo**

Throughout the data collection process, it became apparent that there were certain “justifications” that were offered to keep the status quo intact. There were three

items in particular that arose throughout the conversations, but could not be confirmed, including:

- plenty of Hispanic children already attend the recreation center;
- contested history in regards to the segregated high school and surrounding community; and
- not enough Hispanics live in the neighborhood.

#### *Plenty of Hispanics Already Attend*

The first justification for not seeing a problem was a view that plenty of Hispanic children already attend the Lincoln Recreation Center. Marcus, the African American community member, was told that the goal of the project was to increase Hispanic enrollment at the center. When asked to comment on the reasons that might be keeping Hispanics from attending, Marcus responded, “I thought that they were [participating]. I thought that [the recreation center does] have Hispanics.” When asked if this number was substantial, Marcus said it was not, but the center still had Hispanic enrollment “like every day.”

Although Marcus stated that there were low numbers of Hispanic children, he seemed to be content with the status quo of their participation. He also suggested that most of the Hispanics living in the area used the facility, but his perception did not seem to match the results of our interviews. Out of my 12 participants, 7 lived in the surrounding area, and they either chose not to enroll their children, or they withdrew them shortly after enrollment. Additionally, during the member check phase of the study, the director stated that a lot of Hispanic children had been enrolled and attending in the last two months. When asked to clarify the number, he stated it was about 10 children. This number is substantial increase from previous reported attendance levels. At the beginning of the study, the director and staff members struggled even to name three Hispanic children attending their after school program.

#### *Contested History*

As I noted above, the director suggested that the history of segregated high school and surrounding community should not dictate the current users of the facility.

The director went as far as suggesting that Lincoln High School was central to the Hispanic population as well. He said, “And believe it or not, if you go back, and I've heard this, that some Hispanics that lived in College Station, some went to Consolidated and a handful did go to Lincoln.” However, confirmation for this statement was not found. When asked to comment on this statement, Francisco, a former resident of the area, stated the following,

I know none of my family did, I could tell you that for a fact. None of them went to Lincoln High. They didn't, you know. Again, that's why I'm still kind of shocked to hear you say what you said because – I wonder what families there were because there weren't very many that I know of.

When Marcus was asked about this, he also stated that the school was just “all Black”, no one else. This information is difficult to verify. In Marcus's case, this meant that he had to know everyone's family background to ensure this was an accurate statement. Further, the director also stated that the surrounding area was a mixed area where everyone got along. In regards to this statement, Clinton, the former parks board member, provided clarification. He stated, “Since I've been in this town, it hasn't been mixed. Since I've been in this town, it was very much an African-American area and there was some student housing on the edges of it, you know, some were leased for housing, student housing.” In effect, the recreation center and the community have been historically African American, which would suggest why the bulk of the center's users are mostly of that racial group.

#### *Not Enough Hispanics in the Neighborhood*

Finally, some individuals felt that there were not enough Hispanics in the neighborhood to expect much Hispanic participation at the center. However, the director pointed out that only about 25% of the users are from the surrounding area. Because the recreation center picks up children from the schools, users are from all parts of the town. Additionally, in the study at least 12 Hispanic families were identified in the surrounding neighborhood. Out of these 12 families, we only interviewed 9. The rest of the interviews, particularly of Hispanic parents enrolling their children, were held in other

parts of the town. According to the list of Hispanic users I compiled, most of the families who enroll their children were not from the surrounding area. Thus, just because more Hispanic families are not found in the neighborhood should not limit the current Hispanic population.

### **Summary**

Reasons limiting Hispanic enrollment included the historical significance the Lincoln Recreation Center has in the African American population. Due to the historical significance, stakeholders such as the Lincoln Former Students Association made sure to maintain the memory alive. Additionally, there existed some cultural differences amongst the groups. The activities taking place within the center seemed to be more applicable to the African American population. Hispanics were left wondering where they fit in. Additionally, the lack of proficiency in English also fueled the perception Hispanic parents had with regard to enrolling their children at the center. However, in some cases, lack of awareness also played a big role in the limited number of Hispanic children enrolled. Furthermore, the safety of the recreation center and the surrounding neighborhood was noted as a concern. For some parents hearing negative stories, might have caused them avoid the center. Finally, the lack of outreach efforts may be a sign of lack of desire to increase Hispanics at the center. However, cost of participation and bullying were deciding factors in children's participation. These two items not only applied to Hispanics but African Americans as well.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The first two goals of this project were to understand the historical context of the recreation center and the attitudes that influenced Hispanic parents' enrollment of their children at the center. In the previous chapter, findings were reported relative to: 1) the recreation center as a symbolic place; 2) barriers to Hispanic participation; 3) benefits of children attending the recreation center; and 4) justifications for the status quo. In this chapter, I will discuss these themes as they relate to the literature reviewed in Chapter II, including construction of place, ethnicity, discrimination, and marginality. These perspectives appear to be useful for interpreting discrepancies in participation at the recreation center between the African American and Hispanic children.

#### **Construction of Place**

The review of the center's history suggested that there are strong historical reasons that the center is perceived by the African American community as their space. Hispanics may not have been recruited for participation or not see themselves as particularly welcome at the center. Beginning as the site of a segregated school for African Americans in the 1940s, the space evolved after the Civil Rights Movement into a recreation center which served as a hub of activity in a still predominantly African American community. The diversification of the population in the community to include Hispanics has not changed the African American community's attachment to the recreation center. It is the facility where family members of some of the current African American users attended school. In the present day, this facility hosts church activities, weddings, and funerals. The recreation center is more than just a building; it is place where a community legacy and a sense of place are maintained. Local African American culture is maintained in this location through the display of historical pictures and trophies reflecting the center's past. Activities still cater to the holidays and historical interests of the African American community, and staffing reflects the current user clientele. While there may not be deliberate attempts to exclude Hispanics from using the center, the strong symbolic and historical ties of the space to the African American



community may have led to inadvertent practices that in fact would lead Hispanics to either feel unwelcome or at a minimum not feel attracted to the space (Philipp, 2000). Thus, the space remains racialized (Bobo, 1987; Philipp, 1995; Schuman et al., 1985).

Additionally, if efforts are undertaken to encourage more Hispanic involvement at the center, this may be perceived a threat to African Americans legitimizing the space as part of their heritage (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; McAvoy, 2002). The African American population, particularly the Lincoln Former Students Association, is still working ardently to keep the memories of the Lincoln High School alive. Making Hispanic children feel welcome may be seen as undermining the historic role that the center has played. Efforts to make Hispanic children more welcome, for example by adding Hispanic symbols or celebrating Hispanic culture or historical events, could be seen as removing or diminishing attention and legitimation from the African American population. This topic should be explored further in future studies.

### **Ethnicity Perspective**

Hispanic families who ventured into the center found that African Americans and Hispanics had their own style of engaging in leisure. This finding was consistent with the literature, which referred to differences in norms and values possessed by different racial or ethnic group. These differences can ultimately reinforce leisure preferences and behaviors (Floyd, 1998; Hutchison, 1987; Kochman, 1981; Shinew et al., 2004; Washburne, 1978).

From my observations during the time I worked at the center and the interviews that were conducted, it was clear that the recreation center catered to the preferences of the African American users. Further observations and interviews highlighted the importance of basketball, hip-hop, and hip-hop dancing at the recreation center. Although Hispanics are also consumers and producers of hip-hop (Chang, 2005; George, 1998; Rivera, 2001), the study participants attributed this form of entertainment to the African American population. The community center also organizes cultural celebrations important to the African American community, such as the Black History Month and a

Juneteenth Celebration, but does not undertake similar efforts for festivals such as Cinco de Mayo.

The literature also suggests that Hispanics may prefer to socialize in large groups with family members and friends while having cook outs, playing soccer, or playing loud music during recreation (Baas et al., 1993; Dunn et al., 2002; Khokha, 2009). The study did not directly yield information on whether the absence of opportunities consistent with these preferences led to Hispanics not being attracted to the center.

#### *The Case of Immigrants*

In the literature review, researchers stated that the Hispanic population prefers communication in their native tongue (Dunn et al., 2002; Heywood, 1995) and families often keep indoors (Christenson, 2004). After migration, individuals often face dilemmas, including “imperfect language skills”, “need to regain economic stability”, and “lack of familiarity with basic institutions of the host country” (Stodolska, 2000, p. 65).

In this study, language played a major role in whether parents enrolled their children at the center. Not knowing English meant that Hispanic parents did not feel comfortable interacting with the English-only speaking staff members. The willingness of service providers to communicate in Spanish might be critical to attracting Hispanic users (Dunn et al., 2002). Communication might include staff being able to interact with parents and children, posters and signage. Additionally, the “need to regain economic stability” was reflected as the interviewees and/or their spouses spent most of their time working. To enroll the children in the center seemed like a luxury. Further, it was noted that Hispanic families keep their kids at home. This was in accordance to the research performed by Christenson (2004). However, in this case, staying at home was not due entirely to the reasons cited by Christenson. In this case, Hispanic families kept their families indoors for safety reasons. The negative interactions with their neighbors, landlords, and sometimes police led to Hispanics keeping their children indoors. Finally, Hispanic parents lacked familiarity with the recreation center. Because parents were not

familiar with the center, they did not feel comfortable enrolling their children in after-school or summer programs.

*Exclusion of Groups based on Ethnicity*

Ethnic group membership implies that group members share certain cultural traits which differentiate them from other groups (Barth, 1969; Yatsko, 1997). Differentiation involves a complex set of criteria by which to judge who is “playing the same game” (Barth, 1969, p. 15). In this study, differentiation was seen when Hispanic children entered the center and were perceived to be different. Ethnic boundary was seen in the accounts of staff members, who were not African American. For example, the White staff member, Whitney, suggested that she felt isolated, and she did not understand the culture at the center. Additionally, she said that staff members displayed favoritism toward the children. Although it was not clear how favoritism was shown (i.e., African American children versus Hispanic), one parent did state that African American children seemed to have more privilege with staff members. This type of favoritism would require more investigation in the form of children interviews, as it can be indicative of in-group preference in the African American users.

Further, the exclusion of groups based on ethnicity may lead to ethnic enclosure, where groups develop their own social networks which both facilitate and restrict leisure (Stodolska et al., 2007; Yatsko, 1997). The Lincoln Former Students Association was an example of a network that helped maintain the identity of the facility and continued to celebrate the significance of the center. However, their efforts may purposely or inadvertently restrict participation by members of all other ethnic groups. Possible restrictions cannot be simply overcome by having Hispanics raise their own funding (M. Edwards, personal communication, April 19, 2010). In addition, evidence from past actions of city government and the taxpayers suggests that public funds would not be allocated for separate facilities geared towards Hispanic families. In all likelihood the facility will continue to mainly attract African American residents unless significant efforts are made to create activities, symbols of inclusion, such as celebration of

Hispanic cultural events, and staffing patterns that make the center appear more welcoming to non-African American users.

In addition, stereotypes may contribute to maintaining groups separate in recreational spaces (Feagin, 2006; Hagendoorn, 1995). For example, some Hispanic parents felt that African Americans were aggressive and loud. In some cases, these stereotypes were the result of negative interactions with the African American population, whereas other families had no such negative interactions, but still held the stereotypes. As a result, Hispanic parents chose to stay away from the center. Again, it will take special efforts to overcome the stereotypes and create both access and willingness to participate for Hispanic families.

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination is multifaceted and can describe a host of intolerant acts (Stodolska & Yi-Kook, 2005; Sharaievska et al., 2010). Perceived or actual discrimination can lead to diminished experiences or lack of involvement. Discrimination manifested itself in several ways in the current case.

Sharaievska et al. (2010) described what can be called colorblind racism, which refers to individuals who believe that in reality everyone has equality of access and opportunity. This stance typically reinforces inequality as individuals promoting this point of view refuse to address structural inequalities in the system. In this study, colorblind racism was evident in the beliefs of some African Americans that race or ethnicity were not limiting factors to Hispanic participation at the center, i.e., everybody was welcome to participate. However, Hispanic parents discussed a number of problems limiting their participation including cultural differences. On the other hand, some African Americans appeared to have no problem with Hispanic children attending the center and in fact felt there were advantages to having Hispanics be involved. For example, some African Americans felt that Hispanic involvement would help their own children learn Spanish.

Additionally, Blahna and Black's (1993) framework was utilized to discuss the other acts of discrimination. Blahna and Black's framework included the following: 1)

“on-site experiences of racism from other recreationists; 2) on-site experiences of racism from professional staff; 3) differential upkeep and management of sites; 4) fear of expected or potential racism; 5) socialization resulting from historical racism; 6) social effects of past economic discrimination” (p. 112). Most of these types of discrimination were found in the historical and participant accounts. However, not all of them affected Hispanic families.

Discrimination can result from the actions of other participants. Several researchers have suggested that some participants may exhibit discrimination toward others who are racially or ethnically different (Blahna & Black, 1993; Doherty and Taylor, 2007; Feagin, 1991; Stodolska and Jackson, 1998). In the current instance, racism did appear to be manifested toward Hispanics through bullying, including name-calling and taunting. Hispanic parents attempted to deal with such behaviors by actively monitoring their children, empowering their children to stand up for themselves, or by simply ignoring the behaviors. But, it was more usual for parents to refuse to allow their children to attend the center as a way of avoiding the bullying.

The actions of program staff may also lead to real or perceived discrimination (Blahna & Black, 1993; Dunn et al., 2002; Hibbler & Shinew, 2002; McAvoy, 2007; Tirone, 1999). In this study, it was not clear whether or not staff members took appropriate interventions or directly addressed the problem of bullying. It appeared that parents had a stronger role in limiting bullying. Furthermore, the subjective and random manner that staff members chose children for activities might have been seen negatively by others. One parent’s statement that African American children had a privilege over Hispanic children might have attested to this. The parent stated that the privilege took the form of Hispanic children not getting picked for activities, or Hispanic children getting punished more severely for their actions. However, future research is needed to get stories from the Hispanic children regarding the matter.

The risk of experiencing racism is also a limiting factor when marginalized groups choose to recreate (Blahna & Black, 1993; Sharaievska et al., 2010; Stodolska & Jackson, 1998). The information collected for the current study suggested that potential

racism is spurred by stories circulating about the center (Sharaievska et al., 2010). In this case, Hispanic families constantly heard negative stories about the center and the community around it. Thus, parents chose to not allow their children to participate. In addition, as suggested by Tatum (1999) and Stodolska et al. (2007), Hispanics may be choosing to recreate in their own ethnically segregated groups because they feel more comfortable, and there is less discrimination. Thus, Hispanic children who did attend the center tended to congregate with other Hispanic children.

Finally, historical racism towards African Americans in the community surrounding the center may account for why the center is defended as an African American space. Preserving the center as a space for African Americans and not promoting Hispanic participation may be a form of resistance to the dominant White culture (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). Hispanics become a threat to the role of the center in preserving culture and identify among the local African American population.

### **Marginality Perspective**

Finally, the marginality perspective holds that group may be unable to participate in leisure activities due to their marginal position in society (Washburne, 1978). Due to differences in the allocation of resources, marginalized groups may not have enough funding to cover the cost of participation (Floyd, 1998; Stodolska & Jackson, 1998; Washburne, 1978; West, 1989). It is assumed that if the cost of participation is lessened, then this will lead to participation in leisure activities.

In this study, the price for admission was an issue for both Hispanic and African American parents. Since both groups have had a marginal position in society, it was not surprising to see that they faced some financial struggles. However, in this case, the removal of cost did not necessarily lead to an increase in participation. The director stated that parents unable to afford the fees were still allowed to enroll their children. This remains a dilemma as it is a public recreation center, which still has to recover costs through user fees. Consequently, advertising the possible non-existent fee is not logical or desired.

### **Theoretical Importance**

This research builds on the youth development literature. Few youth development studies have utilized the frameworks utilized in the literature on race, including the ethnicity and marginality perspective and discrimination (e.g., Wu & Van Egeren, 2010). As can be seen in this study, youth development programs are not exempt from group territorializations. Nevertheless, youth development programs are critical enrichment opportunities to supplement school instruction. Due to the economic downturn, some schools have had to cut programs including recess, the arts, and physical education. After school and summer programs have replaced these lost opportunities. Additionally, youth development programs offer tutoring opportunities which provide extra help to those children who may be at risk of academic failure. For kids to miss out on these opportunities because of ethnic reasons creates a wedge between their development and their counterparts who do participate.

Additionally, this study attempted to integrate the literature discussing place, ethnicity, marginality, and discrimination. Although other fields (i.e., anthropology, geography) have emphasized place as a meeting ground for group contention, this literature has received limited attention in the field of recreation. Although some authors do address the issue, additional research needs to be conducted.

Finally, this work focuses on African American and Hispanic users, which are both considered ethnic minorities. Most studies contrast issues related to the dominant group, Whites, with ethnic minority groups. Some studies have compared and contrasted Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics, but overall studies have shied away from direct comparison between ethnic minority groups. Additionally, the Hispanics and African Americans being studied possessed lower levels of income, which limited recreation opportunities in this particular city. The city caters primarily to the middle-income residents, with limited public opportunities for others. In essence, this study depicts the intergroup conflict that may arise between ethnic minority groups when scarcity of resources happens.

### **Recommendations to the Recreation Center**

The final goal of this study was to develop recommendations to increase the Hispanic enrollment and attendance at the center. Based on the information gathered in the course of the study, it is clear that a myriad of issues deserve consideration.

Efforts should be made to extend ownership of the center to other ethnic groups. Currently, the center is perceived by Hispanics as a place for African Americans. Efforts should be made to focus more attention on current Hispanic users and make their experiences as positive as possible so that they can become ambassadors for the center. For example, more needs to be done to make Hispanics feel their culture and history are honored at the center. For example, currently only African American historical figures are painted on the wall of the gym; the same could be done for other potential user groups, including Hispanics and Whites in order to make them feel that the center is their space as well. This step may be difficult to implement, however, since some of the African American stakeholders may feel that inclusion of others would diminish the history of the center and their sense of place.

In addition, cultural differences exist which need to be recognized and honored. Groups mentioned basketball, hip-hop, Black History Month, and the Juneteenth Celebration as activities that were geared toward the African American users. However, the center needs to help promote and honor other cultural activities and traditions. This may include celebrating Hispanic History Month or Cinco de Mayo. The center may also want to consider including a soccer program, which may be more applicable to the Hispanic population.

Another issue is that some of the staff insisted that language does not play a role in the limited number of Hispanics who use the center, but the study suggestions that language does play a role. Hispanic parents mentioned that the center should hire bilingual staff. The Boys and Girls Club appears to be willing to offer monetary assistance to hire bilingual staff.

The reputation of the center also needs to be improved among the Hispanic community. Although the staff cannot control a number of issues related to safety of the



neighborhood, they can work towards ensuring a sense of wellbeing for all participants. Current Hispanic center participants mentioned bullying as a barrier to participation and children dropping out once they had started to use the center. The staff must undertake steps to deal with this issue through better efforts to retain the limited number of Hispanic children who currently use the center. Although fights between children happen, the staff must ensure their safety by limiting altercations. This will require that time be devoted in staff meetings to address bullying prevention strategies, followed by ongoing supervision and setting of high staff expectations for performance in this area.

To help implement many of these suggestions, the center director needs to adopt and implement the Latino Outreach Initiative provided by the Boys and Girls Club. On the Boys and Girls Club website, the results from a 13-site Latino Outreach pilot project are listed and specific strategies are suggested for improving recruitment and retention of Latino's. These strategies include:

*Outreach.* Engages Latino youth and families through word-of-mouth referrals, face-to-face contact, community collaborations, special events, and enhanced programming.

*Programming.* Provides young Latinos access to interest-based and need-based programs to help them develop leadership abilities and strong decision-making skills.

*Leadership.* Offers organization including staff proper training and mentoring, especially in the area of cultural diversity from the Latino perspective.

*Sustainability.* Manages growth...through board development and cultivation of local Latino-owned business as funding sources. (Boys and Girls Club of America, 2011, para. 1).

Adoption of the Boys and Girls Club recommended strategies would address many of the concerns raised in this study. To facilitate implementation, the Boys and Girls Club has made available translated materials, outreach training, and/or diversity training. The outreach and diversity training involves empowering staff to increase the recruitment, experiences and retention of Latino individuals. For example, staff must know how

provide leadership care and discipline in accordance with the culture of individuals with whom they are interacting. Other ideas include teaming up with Hispanic organizations, passing out flyers and brochures at frequented locations, and seeking out constructive stories of Hispanics in the newspaper in order to share with current Hispanic users. The recreation center may also consider word of mouth recruitment and making their written materials available in both English and Spanish. Teaming up with Hispanic organizations is particularly critical as staff cannot be expected to increase Hispanic enrollment by themselves. Unsuccessful efforts have been made with a Hispanic student group based at the nearby university, but other local Hispanic leaders, churches, and businesses also need to be involved.

Finally, costs for enrollment and participation need to be managed. In particular more information needs to be made about scholarships or cost reductions available to families in need. The center does appear to make an effort to work with families with limited resources, but these efforts do not appear to be fully advertised.

### **Center Updates**

By the end of this project, the recreation center had undergone some major changes. For the summer program after the study was concluded, the director was able to hire four Hispanic workers. One of the Hispanic workers was asked to monitor African American employee relations with Hispanic children. This will hopefully provide more information on how cultural sensitivity may affect interactions with the Hispanic children. Additionally, another Hispanic employee works for the radio station; she is well-connected to organizations in the community. She will be attempting to enhance communication with the local Hispanic organization from the nearby university. The director hopes to get the organization involved in center programming. Moreover, a friend of mine, who is part of another campus Hispanic organization, is interested in having the organization volunteer at the center; this could increase the number of Hispanic role models for the children. Finally, the Hispanic employees may ease the Spanish-English gap. In addition, over the next few months, it is our goal to translate current advertising material, such as brochures, into Spanish.

### **Future Directions**

Many studies in the recreation field focus on predicting leisure behavior with the hopes of discovering why individuals choose not to participate in leisure activities. In this study, I attempted to understand what constraints restrict Hispanic participation. Although construction of place, ethnicity, discrimination, and marginality were considered, some of the studies related to the race and leisure have had difficulty developing appropriate constructs (Floyd, 1998; Philipp, 2000; Philipp, 1995; Shiner et al., 2004). The constraints literature may offer one way to organize ideas related to identifying issues related to participation and retention.

In 1991, Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey refined their hierarchical model of leisure constraints. The model was modified to incorporate the dynamic process through which people negotiate participation in leisure activities. For instance, when an individual encounters a constraint, he or she can let it outweigh their desire to participate in an event, or the individual can find ways around the problem. Crawford et al. (1991) give the example of gender roles and their relationship to the hierarchy model of leisure constraints:

When in the sixth grade, Godbey's daughter wanted to learn to wrestle. Most other girls did not "want" to wrestle, perhaps because they had been taught that it was not an activity they "ought" to do. For them, this intrapersonal constraint was the most powerful deterrent to participation. In the absence of this intrapersonal constraint, the girl was then faced with the interpersonal constraint of finding people with whom to wrestle. This obstacle was overcome when the physical education teacher identified a few smaller, lighter, sixth-grade boys willing to wrestle with a girl. Finally, the structural constraint of location was removed when a separate wrestling mat was provided after school for her (and eventually a few other girls) to practice wrestling. (p. 313).

Following the example, the same issues can be related to ethnic groups. Some Hispanic families did not "want" to attend the recreation center, perhaps because they were taught that African Americans and Hispanics are not supposed to interact with each other. The way Hispanics were treated in the neighborhood may have also helped create

this impression. For most of these families, the intrapersonal constraint limited enrollment at the center. Without the intrapersonal constraints, families were faced with interpersonal constraints. Finding companions to participate with was not a cause of concern in this study. In this case, interpersonal constraints were manifested in the form of bullying. Parents negotiated this constraint. Two Hispanic mothers saw the flip side and said it would build character in their children. These two mothers, however, kept track of their children, often asking staff to keep an eye on their children. Other parents coached their children to stand up for themselves, while others took no action but hoped the bullying would stop. This last group was the one that was more likely to have their children withdraw from the center. Finally, the structural constraints included lack of Spanish-speaking staff, proper advertisement of the center, and proper notice of the possible fee waiver.

The literature related to race and leisure behavior falls along the same lines as the leisure constraints literature. Researchers are interested in the reasons that either motivate individuals to participate or not participate in leisure activities. Researchers are also interested in how individuals negotiate the barriers they encounter. To facilitate this approach, Crawford's et al. (1991) hierarchical model of leisure constraints may be a useful tool. Despite criticism stating that the model focuses on the general population and not the specific racial and ethnic groups (Stodolska, 1998), there is still room for modifications.

One important limitation of the current study is that information was collected from the parents of children and did not include information directly from children about their own experiences at the center or their own ideas about why or why they did not participate at the center. Although parents provided important insights, and are often the primary decision makers with regard to their children's leisure choices, they may not be completely cognizant or fully able to express how their children feel about the center and participating there (Hill, Laybourn, & Borland, 1996). Additionally, interviewing children might have revealed how parents impacted their children's thoughts on the other ethnic groups. Since parents are often the primary socializing agents in a child's

life, the child might not have access to a wide array of information that has not already been filtered by the parents (Simpson, 2007).

Additionally, future research should analyze the role of intergroup contact in regards children's perceptions of their leisure participation. Future studies should in effect address the socialization of children which may lead to negative feelings toward out-group members. Finally, another avenue of study would focus on the usage of the public recreation center by those who are White or biracial. The center also experiences limited use among the White population. It would also be interesting to see if they held the same negative perceptions of the African American population such as the Hispanic population did.

### **Final Thoughts**

This focus of this research was about understanding the barriers limiting Hispanic families in regards to their participation at a public recreation center. Once these barriers were understood, my goal was to offer suggestions that might lead to increasing attendance of Hispanic children at the center. At the beginning of this project, I whole-heartedly believed that increasing Hispanic enrollment was a realistic and viable goal. I expected to be a change agent for the community and the recreation center. What I did not foresee was that changes in my attitudes and understandings would also occur during the course of this project. These changes humbled me, but also made me realize that the theories presented in the research do not do full justice to representing the real world and the complex relationships that exist within it.

One area of concern was the notion of inclusion and exclusion in public and private recreation. In this particular city, few public recreational opportunities exist. The private settings have remained mostly affluent and White. Yet, this study focused on the public sector. This study addresses the only public recreation center in town that had its origins as a segregated African American high school. This study addresses the public recreation center which keeps getting their budget cut. Despite the cuts, the center is now feeling the pressure to share their space and limited resources with others such as Hispanics. This study is indicative of the bigger problem in the field of recreation. The

emphasis has shifted to the public sector, but problems of access to opportunity in the private sector has allowed for de facto segregation to occur. Because the public sector may serve lower income families, this becomes a battle of the haves and have-nots. Because ethnicity and income are so tied together, this is a necessary area for future study. However, the current frameworks in the field include items such as the marginality theory, which have focused primarily on predicting leisure behavior. Research has struggled to fully depict the power hegemony which is associated with leisure. Without a serious look at the power hegemony affecting leisure opportunities, it is difficult for this type of applied science to make any real progress.

Moreover, the research study helped me make sense of the time I had spent working at this recreation center before I began this study. I worked with the 6 and 7-year olds, but something seemed not quite right during my employment. I did not seem to fit. I blamed it on my personality, but as this study progressed, I began to see parallels between the study participants and myself. Staff member accounts noted how non-African American staff members were caught off guard when they first began working at the center. The non-African American staff members indeed mentioned their isolation at the beginning. I wish I had known that other staff members felt just as isolated as I did during their employment. I am not sure that it would have changed anything, but it would have lessened my feelings of being an outcast. This example is small, but it is indicative of the reasons why ethnic minority groups may choose to congregate with their in-group members. It provides relief that someone out there is just like them and lessens one's feelings of being isolated.

Additionally, in the accounts, Hispanics were portrayed as reserved and timid, whereas African Americans were portrayed as loud and aggressive. Well, in fact I *was* timid and reserved, and my co-workers did seem to be louder. Sometimes I saw some of the interactions as inappropriate with a hint of belligerence. However, I ignored it; I think this was because I was not ready to confront the subject of race and ethnicity, especially when it had negative repercussions for my identity.

My comfort zone with the African American population was brought into question during my study, which caused some pain. For some reason, the African American individuals I have met previously had never awoken this internal battle. Then I wondered if to minimize the social distance between us, they had chosen to modify their behavior just to make me feel comfortable, something that I learned about in the literature review portion of my research. I then wondered how many other Americans were receiving inaccurate doses of reality because “the other” had to accommodate to them.

Furthermore, the topics pertaining to race and ethnicity, specifically stereotypes, are more complex in the real world. It is not just the media and close family and friends which provide negative views of others; sometimes it is the way the system has been set up that makes intergroup contact uncomfortable. In this case, local government had discriminated against the African American population, which has resulted in resistance. The African American community has not only fought for the facility, they have used it as a source of cultural pride. However, the fact remains that despite African American and Hispanic differences, the public recreation center can potentially serve as a safe haven for the Hispanic population as well. In this particular county, 39% of Hispanic youth drop out of school (Intercultural Development Research Association, 2010), and teen pregnancy is also a cause of concern (Associated Press, 2009). Although Hispanic children may face some struggles in their enrollment at the center, in the long-run, their enrollment paves the way for future Hispanic families to utilize and benefit from the center as well.

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## APPENDIX A

## PARENT LETTER OF CONSENT

You have been asked to participate in research concerning Ethnic Integration in Recreational Settings, a study conducted by Mariela Fernandez, Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences Department, Texas A&M University, and it is sponsored by the Hispanic Leaders of Agriculture and the Environment. The purpose of this study is to understand why people are attracted to participate or not participate at the Lincoln Recreation Center.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to be audio taped during an interview. The initial interview will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes. We may contact you again once we have conducted all of the interviews to get additional feedback or information. This follow up will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes. You may refuse to be audio taped. The risk of participating is no more than experienced in daily life.

This interviews are confidential. The responses you provide will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Interview records will be stored securely and only Mariela Fernandez, Brandy N. Kelly, and Peter A. Witt will have access to the records.

You will receive a \$25 Wal-Mart card to Target. Disbursement will occur once the interview is complete. The findings in this study may be useful to the Lincoln Recreation Center's efforts to attract additional children to the facility. Centers like the Lincoln Recreation Center offer the community many benefits, in particular for kids. Such facilities are established to keep kids off the streets, but redirect their energies in meaningful positive way.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any recording will be stored securely and only Mariela Fernandez, Dr. Peter A. Witt (Mariela's advisor) and other researchers involved with the study will have access to the recordings. Any recording will be kept for 3 years then erased.

Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question, or request to have the tape recorder turned off at any time. You may also decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your current or future relations with Texas A&M University or the Lincoln Recreation Center. If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Mariela Fernandez by telephone at (956) 536-6441 or by email at MFernandez2686@tamu.edu.

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems, or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study.

I agree to be audio taped:         yes         no

I want my REAL NAME used with recordings and publications:  yes     no  
(otherwise a fictional name will be supplied) If yes, print name \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

## PARENT LETTER OF CONSENT IN SPANISH

Se le ha pedido participar en una investigación sobre la integración étnica en sitios de recreación, un estudio realizado por Mariela Fernández, Departamento de las Ciencias de Recreación, Parque y Turismo, Universidad de Texas A & M. El estudio está patrocinado por los Líderes Hispanos de Agricultura y el Medio Ambiente. El propósito de este estudio es entender por qué personas son atraídas a participar o no participar en el Centro de Recreación de Lincoln.

Si acepta participar en este estudio, se le pedirá ser audio grabado durante una entrevista. La entrevista inicial durara aproximadamente 30 a 60 minutos. Podemos contactar lo de nuevo una vez que hemos llevado a cabo todas las entrevistas para obtener comentarios adicionales o información. Este seguimiento tomará aproximadamente 20 a 30 minutos. Usted puede negarse a ser audio grabado. El riesgo de participar no es más que el riesgo que encontraría en su vida cotidiana.

Las entrevistas son confidenciales. Las respuestas que usted de serán privadas. Ningún identificadores a este estudio se incluirá en cualquier tipo de informe que puede ser publicado. Registros de la entrevistas se almacenará de forma segura y sólo Mariela Fernández, Brandy N. Kelly, y Peter A. Witt tendrán acceso a los registros.

Usted recibirá una tarjeta de Wal-Mart de 25 dólares. Desembolso se producirá una vez finalizada la entrevista. Las conclusiones de este estudio pueden ser útiles para los esfuerzos del Centro de Recreación de Lincoln para atraer a niños adicionales a las instalaciones. Centros como el Centro de Recreación de Lincoln ofrecen a la comunidad muchas ventajas, en particular para los niños. Esas instalaciones se establecen para mantener a los niños fuera de las calles, pero redirigir sus energías en forma positiva significativa.

Su participación es voluntaria. Puede negarse a responder cualquier pregunta, o solicitar que la grabadora de cinta este desactivada a cualquier momento. También puede decidir no participar o retirar en cualquier momento sin afectar a sus actuales o futuras relaciones con la Universidad de Texas A & M o el Centro de Recreación de Lincoln. Si tiene preguntas con respecto a este estudio, puede comunicarse con Mariela Fernández por teléfono en el (956) 536-6441 o por correo electrónico a MFernandez2686@tamu.edu.

Si opta por participar en este estudio, usted será audio grabado. Cualquier grabación se almacenará de forma segura y sólo Mariela Fernández, Dr. Peter A. Witt (consejero de Mariela) y Brandy N. Kelly tendrán acceso a las grabaciones. Cualquier grabación se mantienen durante 3 años, luego borrado.

Este estudio de investigación ha sido revisado por el programa de protección de sujetos humanos y/o la Junta de revisión institucional en la Universidad de Texas A & M. Para problemas relacionados con la investigación, o preguntas con respecto a sus derechos como un participante de la investigación, puede ponerse en contacto con estas oficinas en (979) 458-4067 o irb@tamu.edu.

Por favor, asegúrese de haber leído la información anterior, haga preguntas y reciba respuestas a su satisfacción. Se le dará una copia del formulario de consentimiento para sus registros. Mediante la firma de este documento, usted consiente a participar en este estudio.

Estoy de acuerdo en que el audio grabado: \_\_\_\_\_ si \_\_\_\_\_ no

Quiero que mi nombre REAL utilizado con grabaciones y publicaciones: \_\_\_\_\_ si \_\_\_\_\_ no  
(de lo contrario se suministrarán un nombre ficticio) En caso afirmativo, imprima su nombre: \_\_\_\_\_  
**Firma del participante:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Fecha:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Firma de la persona obteniendo consentimiento:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Fecha:** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

## CITY OFFICIAL'S LETTER OF CONSENT

You have been asked to participate in research concerning Ethnic Integration in Recreational Settings, a study conducted by Mariela Fernandez, Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences Department, Texas A&M University, and it is sponsored by the Hispanic Leaders of Agriculture and the Environment. The purpose of this study is to understand why people are attracted to participate or not participate at the Lincoln Recreation Center.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to be audio taped during an interview. The initial interview will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes. We may contact you again once we have conducted all of the interviews to get additional feedback or information. This follow up will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes. You may refuse to be audio taped. The risk of participating is no more than experienced in daily life.

This interviews are confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Mariela Fernandez and other researchers involved in the study will have access to the records.

Although there is no direct benefit to you, the findings in this study may be useful to the Lincoln Recreation Center's efforts to attract additional children to the facility. Centers like the Lincoln Recreation Center offer the community many benefits, in particular for kids. Such facilities are established to keep kids off the streets, but redirect their energies in meaningful positive way.

Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question, or request to have the tape recorder turned off. You may also decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your current or future relations with Texas A&M University or the Lincoln Recreation Center. If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Mariela Fernandez by telephone at (956) 536-6441 or by email at MFernandez2686@tam.u.edu.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any recording will be stored securely and only Mariela Fernandez, Dr. Peter A. Witt (Mariela's advisor) and other researchers involved with the study will have access to the recordings. Any recording will be kept for 3 years then erased.

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems, or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tam.u.edu.

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study.

I agree to be audio taped:         yes         no

I want my REAL NAME used with recordings and publications:  yes     no  
(otherwise a fictional name will be supplied) If yes, print name \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX D

## EMAIL REQUEST FOR INTERVIEW FROM CITY OFFICIALS

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am currently a graduate student at Texas A&M University, majoring in Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences. I am doing my thesis on the Lincoln Recreation Center, particularly why the center has a limited number of Hispanic children attending even though Hispanics now live in the community.

I believe your insights can provide further understanding to the matter. It is the end result to be able to use the project to attract more Hispanics to the Lincoln Recreation Center. Therefore, I would like to know if you would be able and willing to hold an interview at your convenience. Interviews should last 30 minutes to an hour. They will be digitally recorded in order to review at a later date.

I will contact you by telephone at the end of the week to see if we can schedule a meeting. Thank you for considering my request, and I hope we can spend some productive time together in the near future.

Sincerely,

Mariela Fernandez  
2261 TAMU  
College Station, TX 77843  
mfernandez2686@tamu.edu  
(956) 536-6441

## APPENDIX E

## TELEPHONE SCRIPT

Hello, this is     (name of person calling)     calling from the Lincoln Recreation Center. Is this the parent of     (name of child)     ?

(Wait for parent to confirm identity.)

The reason we are calling you today is because you were selected as a potential participant in a research project. The project looks at the reasons why people are attracted to participate or not participate at the Lincoln Recreation Center. If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed wherever you feel most comfortable; for instance, in your home or at the Lincoln Recreation Center. The interview should take about 30-60 minutes to complete, and you will receive a \$25 gift card to Wal-Mart.

Participation is voluntary. However, the findings in this study may be useful to the Lincoln Recreation Center's efforts to attract additional children to the facility. Centers like the Lincoln Recreation Center offer the community many benefits, in particular for kids. Such facilities are established to keep kids off the streets, but redirect their energies in meaningful positive way.

Should we sign you up to participate?

## APPENDIX F

## GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PARENT WHO ENROLLED THEIR CHILDREN

1. How would describe your experiences with the LRC, including and not limited to staff, programs, other attendees, and so on?
2. What is it about the Lincoln Recreation Center that convinced to bring to the Center child? What factors went into you choosing the Lincoln Recreation Center for your child?

Recreational Activities

3. As for your family recreational activities, how do you and your family spend your time?
4. Can you tell me how your ethnicity has impacted your recreational activities?

Questions about Child

5. How does your child spend his or her time outside of school, including summers, weekends, nights, and afterschool?
6. As for your child, who does he or she play with?

Neighborhood

7. Who lives in your neighborhood?
8. Why did you choose to live in this neighborhood?

Attracting Hispanics to the LRC

9. The current Lincoln Recreation Center supervisor wants to attract more Hispanic children to participate in their programs. Are there any issues that you think will dissuade Hispanics to not use the Center?
10. What recommendations would you have for the supervisor in order to bring in more Hispanics?
11. If more Hispanics came to the center, how would you feel?
12. What would be the benefits of more Hispanics here?

## APPENDIX G

## GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PARENT WHO ENROLLED THEIR CHILDREN

## Spanish Version

1. Cómo describiría su experiencia con el Centro de Recreación de Lincoln, incluyendo y no limitado a los trabajadores, programas, otros asistentes y así sucesivamente?
2. ¿Que acerca del Centro de Recreación de Lincoln hace que usted traiga a su hijo? Que factores fueron incluidos cuando usted escogio el Centro de Recreacion de Lincoln para sus hijo?

Actividades recreativas

3. ¿En cuanto a sus familias actividades recreativas, cómo dedican ustedes su tiempo libre?
4. ¿Puede decirme cómo su etnicidad ha impactado sus actividades recreativas?

Preguntas acerca de su niño

5. ¿Cómo pasa su hijo su tiempo fuera de la escuela, incluyendo los veranos, los fines de semana, y noches?
6. Con quien juega su hijo o hija?
7. Han surgido discusiones de etnicidad o raza con su hijo?

Barrio

8. ¿Por qué elogio vivir en este barrio?
9. ¿Cuál es la composición racial del barrio?

Estereotipos

10. Ahora hablemos acerca de los hispanos (o los negros). ¿Sabe de los estereotipos que se le han dado a hispanos y negros?
11. ¿Qué piensas sobre estos estereotipos? Cree que representan incorrectamente a los grupos?

Atraer a los hispanos al Centro de Recreación de Lincoln

12. El supervisor del Centro de Recreación de Lincoln quiere atraer a más niños hispanos a participar en sus programas. ¿Existen algunos problemas que puede disuadir a los hispanos a no utilizar el centro?
13. ¿Qué recomendaciones tiene para el supervisor a fin de atraer más hispanos?
14. Si más hispanos llegaron al centro, ¿cómo sentiría?
15. ¿Cuáles serían los beneficios de más hispanos en el Centro de Recreación de Lincoln?

APPENDIX H  
GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PARENT WHO DID NOT ENROLL THEIR  
CHILDREN

1. Are you aware of the Lincoln Recreation Center?
  - a. If yes: Did you ever consider having your child go the Center?
  - b. If no: show pictures of the LRC and ask: Based on the photos, would you consider your children going to this center? Why or why not?

Recreational Activities

2. As for your family recreational activities, how do you and your family spend your time?
3. Can you tell me how your ethnicity has impacted your recreational activities?

Questions about Child

4. How does your child spend his or her time outside of school, including summers, weekends, nights, and afterschool?
5. As for your child, who does he or she play with?
6. Have discussions of ethnicity or race come up with your child?

Neighborhood

7. Who lives in your neighborhood?
8. Why did you choose to live in this neighborhood?

Attracting Hispanics to the LRC

9. The current Lincoln Recreation Center supervisor wants to attract more Hispanic children to participate in their programs. Are there any issues that you think will dissuade Hispanics to not use the Center?
10. What recommendations would you have for the supervisor in order to bring in more Hispanics?
11. If more Hispanics came to the center, how would you feel?
12. What would be the benefits of more Hispanics here?

APPENDIX I  
GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PARENT WHO DID NOT ENROLL THEIR  
CHILDREN

Spanish Version

1. Está familiarizado con el Centro de Recreación de Lincoln?
  - a. Si la respuesta es sí: Alguna vez consider este sitio para su hijo?
  - b. Si la respuesta es no: Ensene fotos del sitio y pregunte: Basado en estas fotos, consideraria usted este sitio para su hijo? Por que?

Actividades recreativas

2. ¿En cuanto a sus familias actividades recreativas, cómo dedican ustedes su tiempo libre?
3. ¿Puede decirme cómo su etnicidad ha impactado sus actividades recreativas?

Preguntas acerca de su niño

4. ¿Cómo pasa su hijo su tiempo fuera de la escuela, incluyendo los veranos, los fines de semana, y noches?
5. Con quien juega su hijo o hija?
6. Han surgido discusiones de etnicidad o raza con su hijo?

Barrio

7. ¿Por qué elogio vivir en este barrio?
8. ¿Cuál es la composición racial del barrio?

Estereotipos

9. Ahora hablemos acerca de los hispanos (o los negros). ¿Sabe de los estereotipos que se le han dado a hispanos y negros?
10. ¿Qué piensas sobre estos estereotipos? Cree que representan incorrectamente a los grupos?

Atraer a los hispanos al Centro de Recreación de Lincoln

11. El supervisor del Centro de Recreación de Lincoln quiere atraer a más niños hispanos a participar en sus programas. ¿Existen algunos problemas que puede disuadir a los hispanos a no utilizar el centro?
12. ¿Qué recomendaciones tiene para el supervisor a fin de atraer más hispanos?
13. Si más hispanos llegaron al centro, ¿cómo sentiría?
14. ¿Cuáles serían los beneficios de más hispanos en el Centro de Recreación de Lincoln?

## APPENDIX J

## GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR FORMER PARKS BOARD MEMBER

1. How long did you serve as a parks board member?
2. Did you have to any interactions with the Lincoln Recreation Center at that time?  
For example, you were involved in making decisions about the center.
  - a. If no, skip to next question.
  - b. If yes, can you please describe the interactions?
3. The Lincoln Center has gone from being the A&M Consolidated Negro School to the offices of the Parks and Recreation Department to a community center. As someone involved with the city and as a resident, do you think the image of the LRC has been influenced by its prior status?
4. As of right now, the Lincoln Recreation Center is seeing a bit more diversity than it once did, but it is somewhat limited despite the fact that the demographics of the community have become more diverse. Do you know if this is occurring with some of the other facilities/programs in College Station, TX?
  - a. If it is occurring: Why do you think this is?
5. The neighborhood surrounding the Lincoln Center has seen more Hispanics in the past decade, but the numbers are still limited at the center. Are there any factors that might dissuade Hispanics from attending?
  - a. If yes: What factors do you think might stop some Hispanics from coming to the Center?
6. What recommendations would you have for the LRC Supervisor to attract more Hispanics to the LRC?
7. If the current Lincoln Recreation Center supervisor took the steps necessary to include Hispanics, would the City of College Station have enough resources to install programs directed at the Hispanic population?
8. What would be the benefits of more Hispanics attending the LRC?
9. What would more Hispanics attending the LRC mean to the City of College Station?

## APPENDIX K

## GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR THE FORMER PARKS AND RECREATION DIRECTOR

1. How long have you been the director for the City of College Station Parks and Recreation Department?
2. Did you work in College Station or Bryan before this?
3. What can you tell me about the racial composition of users throughout your time with the City of College Station Parks and Recreation Department?
4. What can you tell me about the racial composition of Bryan versus College Station?
5. What can you tell me about being a minority and working in the Parks and Recreation Department?
6. Particularly, I'm looking at the Lincoln Recreation Center. Although diversification is increasing every year, the center still has a large percent of African Americans utilizing it and a limited number of Hispanic users even though Hispanics have now moved into the locale. Can you name possible reasons for this?
7. What can you tell me about the diversity in the other programs in College Station?
8. The current LRC supervisor will like to attract more Hispanics to the center. What do you think might stop some Hispanics from coming here?
9. Does the history of the facility have anything to do with it?
  - a. If yes: What steps can be done to change this?
  - b. If no, skip to the next question.
10. Does an African American supervisor as well as African American staff have anything to do with it?
  - a. What does the supervisors and staff members look like in other programs?
11. Does staff composition have a role in attracting more Hispanics?
12. If the current Lincoln Recreation Center supervisor took the steps necessary to include Hispanics, would the City of College Station have enough resources to install programs directed at the Hispanic population?
13. What recommendations would you have for the LRC Supervisor to bring more Hispanics children?
14. If more Hispanics came to the center, what benefits would this have on the community?
15. What would more Hispanics attending the LRC mean to the College Station Parks and Recreation Department?



## APPENDIX L

## GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THE RECREATION CENTER SUPERVISOR

1. How long have you worked for the Lincoln Recreation Center?
2. What did the racial composition look like when you first started working?
3. What does the racial composition look like today?
4. Why is it important to recruit more Hispanics to this facility?
5. What benefits will Hispanic children receive?
6. The Lincoln Recreation Center has a small number of Hispanic children using the Center doors. Would you say these children intermingle with the rest of the LRC attendees?
  - a. If answer is no: Why do you think this occurs?
  - b. If answer is yes: Would you say there is lots of interaction between the children or is it limited?
    - i. If limited: Would there be a way that staff can create more opportunity for interaction?
7. The goal of this project is to have more Hispanics attend. Can you see any possible items that will dissuade Hispanics from attending?
8. Does the history of the Lincoln Recreation Center have a role in Hispanics not attending the center?
9. What role do you have as an African American supervisor trying to recruit more Hispanics children to the Lincoln Recreation Center?
10. Have steps been taken to include the Hispanics at the center?
  - a. If steps were taken, what were they?
    - i. What would it take to implement these steps?
11. What is the composition of the LRC staff?
12. Are there any bilingual personnel?
  - a. If limited bilingual individuals, would it be hard for the Lincoln Center to hire a bilingual individual?
13. Whenever job postings go up for the Lincoln Recreation Center, do you see a lot of Hispanic applicants for the Lincoln Recreation Center?
14. Are there any marketing ploys being used to attract Hispanics?
15. Would the Lincoln Center have enough resources to install programs directed at the Hispanic population? Programs may include items such as a Cinco the Mayo celebration.
16. Currently, the Juneteenth Celebration takes place all day at the Lincoln Center. Would the Hispanic population receive the equivalent, for example, in a Cinco de Mayo celebration taking place there?
17. What would more Hispanics at the LRC mean to the Black community?
18. How do you anticipate parents of current users-both Hispanic and Black- would react if there were an influx of Hispanic children?
19. What would having more Hispanics at the LRC mean to the City of College Station?
20. What do you think the users of the LRC will look like in 10 years?

## APPENDIX M

## GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS

1. When did your family first move to College Station?
  - a. Did they ever mention why they chose College Station as a place to live in?
  - b. Did they ever mention why they chose this neighborhood as a place to live?
  - c. Did they ever share stories with you about how life was in College Station as Hispanics?
  - d. Do you know who was living in this neighborhood when your family settled in?
2. Can you share with me stories of this community as you were growing up? (i.e. What kids were playing together? What were they playing?)
  - a. Did neighbors get along?
  - b. Were there any changes in who was living in this area (i.e. older versus younger generations, Hispanics/Blacks)?
3. How do you think the rest of College Station residents see this community, in the past and now?
4. Now, are you familiar with the Lincoln Recreation Center?
  - a. Did you or your family every use the center at one point?
5. How would you describe the Lincoln Recreation Center?
6. How do you think the community sees the Lincoln Recreation Center?
7. The goal of this project is to have more Hispanics attendees at the Lincoln Recreation Center. Can you see any possible items that will dissuade Hispanics from attending the center?
8. If more Hispanics came to the center, what do you think it would mean for the community?
9. How do you anticipate parents of current users-both Hispanic and Black- would react if there were an influx of Hispanic children?
10. What recommendations would you have for the LRC Supervisor to bring more Hispanic children?

APPENDIX N  
BACKGROUND INFORMATION FORM

- 1) Are you: Mother of child \_\_\_\_ Father of child \_\_\_\_
- 2) Your Race: African-American \_\_\_\_ Hispanic \_\_\_\_
- 3) Number of children living with you: \_\_\_\_
- 4) Age and sex of each child: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Your Marital Status: Single, Never Married \_\_\_\_ Divorced/Separated \_\_\_\_  
Widowed \_\_\_\_ Married/Living together \_\_\_\_
- 6) Your Occupation: Homemaker \_\_\_\_  
Work Full Time \_\_\_\_ Type of work: \_\_\_\_\_  
Work Part Time \_\_\_\_ Type of work: \_\_\_\_\_  
Student \_\_\_\_
- 7) Your Education: 1-8 grade \_\_\_\_ 9-12 grade \_\_\_\_ Vocational or some college \_\_\_\_  
College graduate (4-year) \_\_\_\_ Graduate school/Professional degree \_\_\_\_
- 8) Your Spouse/Partner's occupation: Homemaker \_\_\_\_  
Work Full Time \_\_\_\_ Type of work: \_\_\_\_\_  
Work Part Time \_\_\_\_ Type of work: \_\_\_\_\_  
Student \_\_\_\_
- 9) Your Spouse/Partner's education: 1-8 grade \_\_\_\_ 9-12 grade \_\_\_\_  
Vocational or some college \_\_\_\_ College graduate (4-year) \_\_\_\_  
Graduate school/Professional degree \_\_\_\_
- Optional: Family annual income:  
Below \$15,000 \_\_\_\_ \$15,000-\$29,999 \_\_\_\_ \$30,000-\$44,999 \_\_\_\_ \$45,000-\$59,999 \_\_\_\_  
\$60,000-\$74,999 \_\_\_\_ \$75,000-\$89,999 \_\_\_\_ \$90,000 or above \_\_\_\_

## VITA

Mariela Fernandez received her Bachelor of Science degree in Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences from Texas A&M University in 2009. She entered the Youth Development program at Texas A&M University in August 2009 and received her Master of Science degree in August 2011. Her research interests include race and ethnicity and barriers to leisure participation. She plans to publish journal articles on these topics, focusing on this public recreation center.

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