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Asian North Americans’ Leisure: A Critical Examination of the Theoretical Frameworks Used in Research and Suggestions for Future Study

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to critically examine the theoretical frameworks employed in the existing research on Asian North Americans’ leisure and to offer insights into additional theories that might be used in future research on the topic. The study reviewed three major theoretical frameworks employed by previous research in the field of leisure studies: (1) assimilation and acculturation theory, (2) ethnicity-based theories, and (3) self-construal. The study also provides recommendations for alternative theoretical approaches that could be used in investigations of Asian North Americans’ leisure, including racial discrimination and stereotyping, the multiple hierarchy stratification perspective, transnationalism, and cultural and social capital.

The Asian population is rapidly increasing in North America. In the United States, Asians (Asian alone or mixed races) were the fastest growing racial group between 2000 and 2010. The U.S. Census Bureau anticipates the number of Asian Americans will double in the next half century, from 15.9 million in 2012 to 34.4 million in 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Moreover, there were approximately 5.01 million Asians who resided in Canada in 2011, and the population is expected to double by 2031 (Statistics Canada, 2010, 2011). Given this sharp increase in the number of Asian North Americans, if recreational agencies and practitioners are to be fully prepared for the future, it is important to achieve a greater understanding of Asian North Americans’ leisure patterns. The purpose of this article is to facilitate research on the leisure behaviors of Asian North Americans by critically examining the theoretical frameworks used in the extant research, and by providing recommendations for alternative future studies.

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1 According to the U.S. Census Bureau, “Asian” refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam. The Asian population includes people who indicated their race(s) to be “Asian,” “Asian Indian,” “Chinese,” “Filipino,” “Korean,” “Japanese,” or “Vietnamese” or provided other detailed Asian responses (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012).

2 This total is based on the number of respondents who reported themselves to be of “Asian origin” as a single or one of their ethnic origins in Statistics Canada (2010).
While the leisure behavior of Asian North Americans has received significant attention in the last 20 years (for a recent comprehensive review see Walker & Deng, 2014), to the best of our knowledge none of the existing studies have provided an in-depth evaluation of the theoretical frameworks used in this literature. Such critical examinations of theories are important, however, because they help in understanding the foundations of this body of knowledge. Moreover, a critical review of the theories used in previous research can reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the existing body of knowledge and facilitate further theoretical advancements in leisure studies (Floyd, Bocarro, & Thompson, 2008). In their critique of the contributions of theory to leisure research, Henderson, Presley, and Bialeschki (2004) claimed that “theory and empirical research must interact if the field of leisure research is to have the body of knowledge necessary to move forward” (p. 412). We argue that theoretically informed empirical research is also a prerequisite for developing meaningful practical guidelines for leisure service delivery if our field is to make a difference in the lives of the minority populations who are the subject of our study.

Before we proceed, it is important to note that due to a certain amount of conceptual ambiguity, the concept of Asia and its utility in scientific research are increasingly being questioned (Zhou, 2004). The term “Asia” was originally coined by ancient Greeks to distinguish themselves from people residing in the eastern and southern parts of Eurasia (Bowring, 1987). To date, researchers have used “Asia” to denote different geographic areas, and the term discounts considerable social, cultural, and political variations among the countries that make up the continent (Bowring, 1987). The term “Asian American” is also arbitrary. It was coined by the historian and civil rights activist Yuji Ichioka in the late 1960s to help unify various Asian nationalities in the United States and to reject the Western-imposed term “Oriental” (Zhou, 2004). Although Ichioka’s effort to create a strong and distinctive self-identification among Asians is admirable, the term does not clearly explain who Asians or Asian Americans are. Historically, the racial/ethnic group now generally recognized as Asian American first appeared in the Extra California State Census of 1852 (Hochschild & Powell, 2008). In this census, the term “Chinese” was used to denote a subset of the White population. However, subsequent censuses employed inconsistent taxonomies when distinguishing among different Asian nationalities, suggesting that government officials have struggled with clearly understanding and classifying this population group (Hochschild & Powell). What makes the situation even more complex is that some Americans of Asian descent do not identify themselves as Asian American or even as Asian. For example, Zhou (2004) noted that in a study of Vietnamese youth in San Diego, only 14% identified as Asian American, 53% described themselves as Vietnamese, and 32% described themselves as Vietnamese American. The problems associated with the term Asia and the considerable heterogeneity within the Asian population will be revisited throughout the rest of this manuscript.

**Theoretical approaches in the research on Asian North Americans’ leisure**

To understand the theories that have been used in the studies on Asian North Americans’ leisure, we reviewed manuscripts published in five major leisure journals from 1995 to 2015: *Journal of Leisure Research, Journal of Park & Recreation Administration, Leisure/Loisir, Leisure Sciences*, and *Leisure Studies*. First, from each journal’s online archive, we selected studies that explicitly stated Asian North Americans or a specific Asian nationality in North America.

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3 It needs to be noted that a number of other studies on North Americans’ leisure were published in journals such as *Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health, Qualitative Health Research, Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, and *Educational Gerontology*, to name a few.
(e.g., Chinese Canadians, Korean Americans) were the primary focus of the investigation. As such, we did not include studies that mainly focused on comparing leisure patterns among several different racial and ethnic groups. In some cases, Asian international students constituted the whole or a portion of a study sample (e.g., Heo & Lee, 2007; Lee, Dunlap, & Scott, 2011; Lee & Scott, 2013; Li & Stodolska, 2006, 2007). We included those studies because some of the Asian international students appeared to be first-generation immigrants. Second, we identified each article’s main theoretical framework by reviewing its title, abstract, keywords, introduction, and literature review. A list of the studies reviewed in this article and their theoretical perspectives are included in the Appendix. The four most popular theoretical frameworks used in the 31 identified studies were assimilation and acculturation theory, ethnicity-based theories, leisure constraints, and self-construal. Since leisure scholars have already provided many in-depth reviews of the leisure constraint literature as it pertains to race and ethnicity (e.g., Schneider, Shinew, & Fernandez, 2014; Stodolska & Yi-Kook, 2005), this study will focus on the three other theoretical frameworks. The next section will critically review the manner in which those three theoretical frameworks were employed.

Assimilation and acculturation-based frameworks

Six out of the 31 studies on Asian North Americans’ leisure were based on the assimilation and acculturation frameworks of Gordon (1964) and Berry (1997). Gordon argued that immigrants to the United States experience seven stages or subprocesses of assimilation: cultural or behavioral assimilation (or acculturation), structural assimilation, marital assimilation, identificational assimilation, attitude receptional assimilation, behavior receptional assimilation, and civic assimilation. Acculturation was defined as the “change of cultural patterns to those of the host society” (p. 71) with the host society comprising the “middle-class white Protestant Americans” (p. 74). Berry (1997, 2006), on the other hand, considered assimilation to be one of four acculturation strategies (integration, marginalization, and separation were the other three). He defined acculturation as “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry, 2005, p. 698). To date, a number of studies have investigated the effects of assimilation and acculturation on Asian North Americans’ leisure (Deng, Walker, & Swinnerton, 2005; Kim, Scott, & Oh, 2005; Scott, Lee, Lee, & Kim, 2006; Walker, Deng, & Dieser, 2001; Walker, Halpenny, & Deng, 2011; Yu & Berryman, 1996).

Intuitively, assimilation and acculturation frameworks seem well-suited for analyzing the recreation behaviors of Asian North Americans. Zhou (2004) claimed that Asian Americans are the most assimilated non-European ethnic group in the United States. She noted that the majority of second-generation Asians have lost fluency in their parents’ native language, and 75% of second-generation Asians in Los Angeles speak only English at home. Moreover, Asian Americans intermarry extensively with Whites and other racial minorities. Among all newlyweds in 2010, 28% of Asians married with other races, which marked the highest intermarriage rate of any other racial group (Wang, 2012). Thus, Asian North Americans’ leisure behaviors could be understood with respect to the extent to which they assimilate or acculturate into mainstream North American leisure culture. For example, Zhang and Gobster (1998) showed that less acculturated, older Chinese Americans engaged in more passive pastimes such as walking and chatting, while the leisure activities of their more acculturated, younger counterparts were more likely to resemble that of “mainstream” Whites such as tennis, basketball, and jogging. Similarly, Scott et al. (2006) documented that compared to highly
acculturated Korean Americans, a leisure life among their less acculturated counterparts was more constrained by the lack of English skills.

However, assimilation and acculturation theories have some limitations in the investigation of Asian North Americans’ leisure. First, Gordon’s (1964) assimilation theory tends to oversimplify the complexity of intergroup contacts and the assimilation process by treating both the immigrants and the host group as culturally monolithic entities. In other words, it discounts considerable intragroup variations. Although one could argue that there are certain cultural similarities among people from, for example, China, Korea, and Japan, immigrants from these countries have unique cultural identities, socio-economic backgrounds, and histories of immigration to North America. Thus, leisure research that groups Asians into a single category and compares their behaviors to that of White North-Americans may fail to detect the true causal mechanisms behind any observable differences in leisure behaviors among the groups (Winter, Jeong, & Godbey, 2004). Second, the theories imply that White Americans’ cultural values and lifestyles are also uniform and that they are the norm that immigrants must cultivate and eventually adopt. Both theories are strongly biased toward what McDonald (2009) cogently identified as the “normalization” of Whiteness (p. 12), suggesting that ethnic minorities, including Asians, need to aspire to attain the leisure patterns of a vaguely defined mainstream White population. Finally, an overuse of assimilation- and acculturation-based theories in leisure research may alienate many Asian North Americans and may create a misconception that Asians of the third and even fourth generations have not been fully integrated into mainstream American society, regardless of their long history in the country. Thus, it can perpetuate the racial stereotype of Asian Americans as forever foreigners or strangers in American society. As Yi (2005) showed, it leads to significant levels of discomfort, and even perceptions of discrimination among second and third generation Asian North Americans who are stereotyped into participation in leisure activities considered to be “traditionally Asian” (e.g., Tae-Kwon-Do, table tennis).

Critiques of the traditional assimilationist perspectives gave rise to alternative models of immigrants’ cultural changes (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Waters, 1994). For example, the concept of segmented assimilation suggested that because the United States is stratified socio-economically and racially, multiple “assimilation outcomes” are possible (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Portes & Zhou, 1993). While some immigrants acculturate to the values of middle-class White Americans, others adopt the values of the American underclass. Moreover, some immigrants may consciously preserve their ethnic traits and promote their ethnic group solidarity (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Stodolska and Alexandris (2004) provided evidence of these various adaptation paths among Asian immigrants. They found that some Korean Americans used recreational sport to foster acculturation to the White mainstream, while others participated in such activity exclusively with other Koreans to reinforce their ethnic identity, retain their traditional culture, and strengthen ties with other group members. In a third adaptation outcome, some Korean immigrants assimilated to the sub-culture of their ethnic community.

While segmented assimilation theory offered a more nuanced analytic approach to Asian immigrants’ leisure behaviors, this line of inquiry can be further enriched by incorporating other factors that influence the assimilation and acculturation process. For example, the existing studies have almost uniformly assumed immigrants’ agency—the ability to freely choose the cultural traits they either shed or adopt—and neglected any structural influences on their assimilation paths. As Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans, Chasiotis, and Sam (2011) argued, however, to understand which of the four acculturation modes is most likely to be realized, a person must also understand the societal attitudes and public policies that are subsequently put in place. Other structural factors that influence immigrants’ choices of acculturation strategies
include the size of the group at the place of settlement and the level of community support. For instance, studies have shown that immigrant children who receive high rates of social support from their family and local ethnic communities demonstrate better upward mobility (e.g., a higher likelihood of finishing high school and attending university) than do children with lower levels of cultural identity and fewer ties to their ethnic community (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut, 1996; Zhou, 1997; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). Thus, we postulate that future research on the relationship between acculturation and leisure behavior among Asian North Americans needs to take into closer consideration the societal context in which they operate.

**Ethnicity-based theories**

Ethnicity-based theories were another popular approach for investigating Asian North Americans’ leisure behavior. A common theme in this line of inquiry was to attribute unique characteristics of leisure among Asian North Americans to their distinct cultural traits and dynamics within ethnic communities. The theories and concepts included within this approach were ethnic identity (Stodolska & Yi, 2003), ethnic enclosure (Stodolska, 2007), and ethnic mobility trap (Stodolska, Marcinkowski, & Yi-Kook, 2007). Moreover, the unique leisure patterns among Asian North Americans have been attributed to their collectivist values (Heo & Lee, 2007) and to their culture rooted in Confucianism and Taoism (Liu, Yeh, Chick, & Zinn, 2008; Walker & Wang, 2008; Wang & Stringer, 2000).

Hofstede (2001) argued that compared to North American culture, Asian culture is more collectivistic, stressing group harmony and cooperation. Several researchers have used collectivism to explain Asian North Americans’ leisure patterns. For instance, Heo and Lee (2007) found that Korean basketball players emphasized team solidarity and collaborative style of play more than their White counterparts. The authors explained that collectivistic culture was responsible for Koreans’ unique style of play. Other studies used collectivism as a supplemental theory to explain Asian North Americans’ participation in pickup basketball and soccer games (Lee et al., 2011) and park usage patterns (Tinsley, Tinsley, & Croskeys, 2002).

Two philosophies or religions, namely Confucianism and Taoism, have also been frequently employed by leisure researchers to explain the recreation behaviors of Chinese North Americans (Liu et al., 2008; Walker & Wang, 2008; Wang & Stringer, 2000). Confucianism was developed by Kong Tzu. It emphasizes formalism, a collective work ethic, respect for scholarship, and a belief in the natural dominance of men over women (Mangan & Ha, 2001). Taoism (also known as Daoism) is another major Chinese philosophy/religion introduced by Lao Tzu and his followers (Day, 1962). Tao is the basic principle of the universe that transcends reality, the proper mode of human conduct, and mental state with a maximum efficiency and self-reward (Moneta, 2004). Both Confucianism and Taoism are dominant philosophies or worldviews that have significantly impacted Chinese society and culture.

One major tenet of Confucianism and Taoism is a strong emphasis on the harmonious relationship between humankind and nature. They view the natural environment as the optimal context wherein individuals can learn about the intricacy of human relationships and achieve moral perfection and wellbeing (Guo, 2006). Confucianism encourages self-cultivation and experiential learning at quiet and solitary natural settings (Guo, 2006). Similarly, Taoism advocates moderation, softness, slowness, and balance (Liu et al., 2008; Wang & Stringer, 2000). Due to the influence of these two philosophies/religions, in traditional Chinese culture free time is often associated with passive, quiet, and preferably solitary activities, rather than strenuous and physically demanding pastimes (Walker & Deng, 2014).
Consistent with the fundamental tenets of Confucianism and Taoism, researchers have found that contemporary Chinese immigrants in North America not only preferred passive pastimes involving relaxation but also engaged in traditional Chinese leisure activities (Allison & Geiger, 1993; Kim, Kleiber, & Kropf, 2001; Walker et al., 2011; Yu & Berryman, 1996). This pattern was particularly pronounced among older and less acculturated immigrants who have been residing in their host country for shorter periods of time. For instance, in a study by Walker et al., Chinese Canadians participated mostly in media activities and scored highest on the relaxation dimension of leisure satisfaction. Yu and Berryman found that even among young Chinese immigrants, leisure tended to be passive, home oriented, and included a significant focus on Chinese-language media and music. Allison and Geiger’s study showed that elderly Chinese Americans engaged mostly in tai chi, mah-jongg, planting traditional Chinese herbs, cooking, and sewing. Their activities were filled with culturally meaningful content and based on traditions and habits brought from the home country.

While these studies have made unique contributions to the leisure literature, certain caveats are worthy of further elaboration. First, although Asian culture in general may be considered more collectivistic than the American culture, there exist significant cultural differences across and within Asian countries. For example, researchers have found Chinese culture is more individualistic than Japanese and Korean culture (Ueltschy, Laroche, Zhang, Cho, & Yingwei, 2009). Asian countries and specific subgroups within those countries also vary markedly in their adherence to the values of Confucianism and Taoism (Zhang, Lin, Nonaka, & Beom, 2005). For instance, India and Pakistan have been only modestly influenced by these two philosophies/religions (Yao, 2000). Thus, leisure researchers need to be circumspective of the considerable cultural variations within the Asian population and avoid hasty generalizations.

Second, much of the existing research on Asian immigrants’ leisure has been conducted under the assumption that migrants are carriers of some “unique” and “pure” traditional cultural elements. It is imperative to recognize that due to the effects of modernization and globalization, Asian cultures have undergone significant transformation (Hamamura, 2012; Kang, 2004; Tomlinson, 2003). Thus, Asian newcomers settling in North America have already been pre-exposed to the Western values of individualism and materialism. Such values are likely to have permeated many aspects of their social and cultural lives in their home countries for years or even decades prior to their migration to the United States or Canada.

Third, a challenge to future researchers will be finding a way to effectively operationalize these cultural traits, examine their evolution following immigrants’ settlement in the host country, and determine the extent of their long-term (perhaps intergenerational) effects on leisure behaviors of Asian North Americans. Moreover, we know little about how these values are being retained among immigrants of various ages, genders, and socio-economic statuses, and how they evolve when Asian immigrants are exposed to new worldviews in their adopted countries.

Lastly, we argue that an overemphasis on cultural traits when explaining the leisure patterns of Asian North Americans (and other minorities) may have led to cultural determinism and an unintentional neglect of other possible explanations. For example, it is noteworthy that 74% of Asian Americans and 71% of the Chinese population in Canada are foreign-born (Pew Research Center, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2011). These first generation immigrants are usually very work-oriented and employed in physically demanding blue-collar jobs. As a result, they have little time for leisure and are unlikely to engage in vigorous physical activities for pleasure (Kandula & Lauderdale, 2005; Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004). Although previous studies commonly have documented that Chinese North Americans tend to engage in less physically demanding leisure activities such as watching TV, walking, and viewing wildlife.
(Walker & Deng, 2014), these patterns may be attributable not only to their culture, but also to the unique priorities and living conditions among the first generation immigrants (Höglhammer et al., 2015).

**Self-construal**

The concept of self-construal was used on numerous occasions by Walker and his colleagues to examine various aspects of leisure behavior, including needs and motivations, among Chinese-Canadians. Self-construal describes "how a person thinks about herself or himself in relation to others" (Walker, 2009, p. 347). Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed two main types of self-construal: independent (or individualistic), where people endorse being unique, asserting oneself, expressing one's inner attributes, and promoting one's own goals; and interdependent (or collectivistic), where people endorse belonging, fitting in, maintaining harmony, restraining oneself, and promoting others' goals. Researchers have noted that self-construal can significantly impact Asian North Americans' leisure. For instance, Walker, Deng, and Dieser's (2001) study showed that Chinese Canadians were more likely than White Canadians to hold interdependent self-construal, and that self-construal mediated the effect of ethnicity on a number of outdoor recreation motivations. In a 2013 study, Hudson, Walker, Simpson, and Hinch developed a new model of leisure constraints and examined whether ethnicity and self-construal influenced the leisure constraints among a group of Euro-Canadian and Chinese immigrant skiers. Their findings showed that intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints varied by the respondents' ethnicity, participation, and type of self-construal.

Although self-construal has been an effective theoretical tool for analyzing leisure behaviors of Asian groups, Walker, Deng, and Dieser (2005) acknowledged three conceptual limitations of this approach. First, self-construal may have more than two dimensions, with some dimensions more predominant than others. Second, researchers have used self-construal to highlight differences across diverse cultural groups. Future studies need to focus more on "between-culture similarities" (p. 95). Finally, Walker et al. recommended that since the concept is constantly evolving, researchers should critically review its conceptualization and operationalization. Further research on the existence of multiple self-construal dimensions within Asian groups, whether the same self-construal is shared by various sub-groups of Asian North Americans, and how self-construal affects their leisure behavior is warranted.

**Theoretical recommendations for future studies**

There are a number of theories, frameworks, and concepts that can deepen our understanding of the leisure behavior of Asian North Americans that so far have not been frequently applied in the existing research. They include racial discrimination and stereotyping, multiple hierarchy stratification perspective, transnationalism, and social and cultural capital. This section reviews how these different approaches can add to the existing knowledge of the leisure practices of Asian immigrants in North America.

**Racial discrimination and stereotyping**

Although studies of Asian North Americans' leisure have been conducted for more than two decades, researchers have paid surprisingly little attention to the impact of racial discrimination and stereotyping. Existing research has mainly focused on racial discrimination and
stereotyping targeting African Americans and Latinos (Floyd & Gramann, 1995; Philipp, 1998; Sharai evska, Stodolska, Shinew, & Kim, 2010). However, many Asian North Americans routinely experience racism in leisure contexts. For instance, in Gobster’s (2002) study, 9% of Asian visitors to Chicago’s Lincoln Park indicated that they experienced discrimination, including verbal harassment, physical gestures, and assaults from other users, police, and park staff. Tirone (1999) also noted that the leisure activities of South Asian Canadian teens were frequently hindered by racist remarks from peers and indifference from activity leaders.

The paucity of research on Asian North Americans’ experiences with racial discrimination in leisure activities could be attributed to the prevalence of the “model minority” stereotype, one of the most common racial stereotypes of Asians in North America (Kawai, 2005). Asians are often viewed as exceptionally intelligent and socioeconomic achievers whose upward mobility is less hindered than other minorities by racial discrimination. However, the model minority stereotype is merely a misconception. It was originally created by White American journalists in the 1960s to downplay the importance of the anti-racism and civil rights protests initiated by African Americans and Latinos (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Zhou, 2004). By ascribing Japanese and Chinese Americans’ upward mobility to their hard work and discipline, these journalists implied that the best way to achieve the “American dream” was not to resist oppression but to focus on complying with existing social norms. Moreover, a closer examination of the socioeconomic levels of various Asian groups shows significant inter-group heterogeneity and debunks the myth of the model minority. The median household income of Indian Americans in 2011 was $92,418, whereas that of Bangladeshi Americans was $45,185 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Similarly, the educational achievement of certain Asian American groups has historically been well below the national average. From 2006 to 2010, 27.9% of Americans 25 years of age and older held a bachelor's degree or higher, yet the corresponding figures for Cambodian Americans, Laotian Americans, and Vietnamese Americans were 14.5%, 12.1%, and 26.3%, respectively (Ogunwole, Drewery, & Rios-Vargas, 2012).

Despite its arbitrariness, the model minority stereotype exerts a considerable negative impact on the lives of Asian North Americans. According to Chu and Feagin (2008), many Asian Americans experienced internal and external pressures to conform to this stereotype and tried to embody unrealistic and unobtainable expectations about socioeconomic achievements. This circumstance often negatively affected Asian Americans’ mental and physical health, leading to depression, alcohol and drug addiction, and even suicide (Chu & Feagin, 2008; Kisch, Leino, & Silverman, 2005). It is also possible that the model minority stereotype impacts Asian North Americans’ leisure since ethnic minorities often use free time activities to construct and express their identities (Lee et al., 2011; Stodolska & Tainsky, 2015) as well as to resist existing social norms (Shaw, 2001). To the best of our knowledge, however, limited research has been conducted in this area.

Another racial stereotype particularly relevant to the present discussion is the negative view of Asian males’ masculinity and physicality. Asian men are often perceived as more feminine and physically weaker than men of other racial groups (Wong, Owen, Tran, Collins, & Higgin s, 2012). Lee and Scott (2013) documented that some Korean Americans frequently experienced this stereotype, expressing that other racial groups presumed Asians to be inferior basketball and soccer players. The researchers found a unique racial hierarchy in the recreational sports context that negatively impacted the leisure experience of Korean Americans. However, the study focused exclusively on Korean Americans, so the significance of racial stereotyping to other Asian groups’ leisure experience remains unexplored.

In sum, further investigation of the impact of racial discrimination and stereotyping on Asian North Americans’ leisure is strongly recommended. Leisure scholarship is uniquely
positioned to serve as a powerful vehicle for leisure service improvement and positive social change (Arai & Kivel, 2009; Stewart, 2014). As Stewart suggested, this line of inquiry needs to move beyond descriptive approaches focused on differences in leisure patterns across racial and ethnic groups. Instead, it should recognize oppression that racial and ethnic minorities experience in leisure context and provide insight into social and political actions that enhance social justice. Such transformative research is likely to contribute to Asian North Americans’ quality of life and psychological well-being.

**Multiple hierarchy stratification perspective**

Asian ethnic communities are very diverse and differentiated by multiple sources of social stratification. Thus, an investigation of their leisure activities requires a holistic analytic perspective that acknowledges the intersectionality of race with various other factors (Floyd, Walker, Stodolska, & Shinew, 2014). The multiple hierarchy stratification theory (Markides, Liang, & Jackson, 1990) could offer a particularly useful lens for examining how various markers of (dis)advantage shape the recreation of Asian North Americans. The theory was developed in the field of gerontology to explain how the combination of different status characteristics promotes and inhibits individuals’ access to a myriad of social resources such as housing and health coverage. It posits that young White adult males with high levels of education and income occupy the highest echelon in the status hierarchy and have superior access to recreational resources compared to elderly minority females with lower levels of education and income. The majority of the previous studies distinguished advantaged and disadvantaged statuses using dichotomized demographic variables such as age, education, gender, income, and race or ethnicity. As such, the perspective generated most robust findings when the highest status stratum (the combination of all advantaged statuses) was compared with the lowest status stratum (the combination of all disadvantaged statuses), and the middle strata provided less powerful explanations (Floyd & Stodolska, 2014). While this theory has been frequently employed to examine participation in various leisure activities (e.g., Lee & Scott, 2011; Lee, Scott, Floyd, & Edwards, 2016; Shores, Scott, & Floyd, 2007), it has yet to be applied to explorations of the leisure experience of Asian North Americans. The multiple hierarchy stratification perspective can promote a better understanding of how Asian North Americans’ leisure behavior is shaped by the intersection between their racial/ethnic identity and other status characteristics.

Moreover, incorporating the multiple hierarchy stratification perspective into the research of Asian North Americans’ recreation behavior could expand this theoretical perspective and provide new insights into the broader body of leisure literature. For example, while previous studies have tended to use a dichotomized variable for racial and ethnic statuses (Whites versus Blacks), making it a trichotomous variable by creating another category for Asian groups would provide a much-needed complexity to this stratification process. Incorporating an additional race and ethnicity category for Asian North Americans would create another point of reference within the perspective and allow for comparing their access to recreation resources to that of Whites and Blacks.

Environmental factors such as the availability and accessibility of recreational resources in Asian North Americans’ residential areas can also be incorporated into the multiple stratification hierarchy perspective as one of the markers of (dis)advantage. Research has documented that people who live close to parks and trails are more likely to engage in recreational activities and have lower obesity rates and fewer chronic diseases than those who live farther away (Kaczynski & Henderson, 2007; Scott & Mowen, 2010). However, many Asian North
Americans, especially of the older generation and lower socio-economic status, reside in poorer communities and urban areas where parks and green spaces are scarce (Zhang & Gobster, 1998). This residential condition can stymie Asian North Americans’ participation in leisure time physical activities and nature-based outdoor recreation (Zhang & Gobster, 1998). Thus, a lack of available and accessible recreational resources within their residential area is another critical factor to be considered when understanding Asian North Americans’ sedentary leisure patterns. By all accounts, it is problematic to overlook the intersectionality between race and other factors or treat the Asian population as a culturally and demographically monolithic group (Winter et al., 2004). More research on the intersectionality of Asians’ racial and ethnic identities and other factors would reveal important intricacies in their leisure behaviors and make a valuable contribution to the leisure literature.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism refers to immigrants’ regular and sustained social, cultural, economic, and political interactions across borders that are fostered by the technological and transportation advancements of the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Al-Ali, Black, & Koser, 2001; Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999). It is based on the premise that many contemporary immigrants no longer focus on assimilation to the host country, but frequently travel back to their home countries and maintain strong economic and social links with their communities of origin (Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Szanton-Blanc, 1994; Nagel, 2002; Portes, 1997). Over the last 20 years, the concept of transnationalism has received significant attention from researchers in the fields of geography, sociology, anthropology, ethnic and migration studies, political science, economics, and global studies. The body of research that has developed had dealt with issues pertaining to transmigrants’ identity formation, economic and political practices, and shifting cultural representations (Lazăr, 2011).

Although transnationalism has been one of the dominant perspectives in the field of migration studies for decades, Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller (2003) argued that the perspective needs to be more selectively and rigorously utilized in empirical research. Since the notion of transnationalism can be defined broadly, it could falsely categorize any migrants who maintain cross-border connections as transmigrants. Moreover, the extent of transnational engagements among Asian immigrants is likely to vary by generation, country of origin, socio-economic status, and the politics of their home and host countries. For instance, it has been documented that middle-to-upper-class migrants from Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China have extensively engaged in transnational enterprises (Chee-Beng, 2007; Nyíri & Breidenbach, 2005; Orellana, Thorne, Chee, & Lam, 2001), while working-class migrants from certain Southeast Asian countries are less likely to be involved in transnational activities and more inclined to pursue other adaptation strategies (e.g., segmented assimilation, acculturation; Rumbaut, 1994).

Despite these challenges, the transnational perspective can offer a useful lens for analyzing the leisure behavior of contemporary Asian immigrants in North America. For example, Li and Stodolska (2006) found that Chinese graduate students at a U.S. university prioritized academic achievement in order to maximize the outcomes of their study abroad. Thus, they mainly engaged in leisure activities as a temporal escape from the pressures of study or to further their academic-related goals. Huang, Norman, Ramshaw, and Haller (2015) revealed that second generation Chinese Americans’ transnational leisure consisted of four main types: ethnic events and festivals, ethnic social clubs and organizations, ethnic media and pop culture, and Internet-based activities. The interviewees were described as “being in between
two cultures” (p. 118) and participated in both contemporary and traditional ethnic pastimes. To date, transnationalism has received relatively little attention from leisure researchers. Given that the majority of Asian North Americans are first generation immigrants (Pew Research Center, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2011) who, due to the ubiquitous nature of travel and technology, maintain close connections with their communities of origin, transnationalism offers a useful theoretical perspective for examining the dynamic and fluid leisure experience of this group. A study of transnational leisure activities such as involvement in ethnic clubs and associations and supporting various political, social and cultural causes, undertaken with extrinsic motives (e.g., engendering political change in the home country) and pursued within the bounds of restrictions imposed by certain Asian countries, would constitute a particularly interesting, innovative, and fruitful area of inquiry.

**Cultural and social capital**

Cultural and social capital are also promising perspectives that can be applied to research on Asian North Americans’ leisure. Cultural capital describes one’s inclination to certain cultural practices, as well as the ability and knowledge necessary to properly use and appreciate different cultural products (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital denotes the relational resources embedded in individuals’ social networks that can be used in the pursuit of a particular interest (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). A number of leisure studies have used the concepts of social and cultural capital (Erickson, Johnson, & Kivel, 2009; Glover, 2004; Mulcahy, Parry, & Glover, 2010; Steinbach, Green, Datta, & Edwards, 2011), but researchers have not yet employed them in the investigation of leisure behavior of Asian North Americans or Asian immigrants.

Existing empirical evidence suggests that cultural and social capital play an important role in Asian North Americans’ leisure behaviors. Asian immigrants bring distinctive cultural capital from their home countries and continue to engage in traditional cultural pastimes for years and even generations after arrival (Allison & Geiger, 1993; Huang et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2001). Their participation in traditional leisure activities is often facilitated by the social capital obtained from members of their ethnic enclave (Stodolska, 2007). On the other hand, some Asian immigrants participate in new leisure activities that they did not know before their emigration or leisure activities rarely accessible in their home country (Li, Sotiriadou, & Auld, 2015). Thus, cultural and social capital are expected to provide useful theoretical explanations for the unique leisure patterns of Asian immigrants.

Nevertheless, several conceptual and methodological issues with cultural and social capital are noteworthy. First, acquisition of cultural and social capital is largely influenced by the characteristics of the social structure such as power relationship, intergroup conflict, class stratification, and ideology (Mulcahy et al., 2010). To offer meaningful implications for recreation practices and policies that alleviate social inequality, researchers need to be cognizant of those structural characteristics that maintain oppression and marginalization (Haluza-Delay, 2006). Second, much of the existing research conceptualized cultural and social capital differently and broadly (Arai, 2006; Vryonides, 2007). Moreover, there seemed to be lack of clarity regarding which variables can effectively operationalize the two concepts (Vryonides, 2007). This conceptual ambiguity demands a circumspective operationalization of the two concepts.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to critically examine the theoretical frameworks that have been used in past research on Asian North Americans’ leisure, and offer insights into additional
theories and frameworks that could be used in future research on the topic. To this end, we highlighted three theoretical frameworks employed by previous studies in the field. They included assimilation and acculturation theory, ethnicity-based theories, and self-construal. We also recommended that future leisure research examine Asian North Americans’ leisure activities in light of racial discrimination and stereotyping, the multiple hierarchy stratification perspective, transnationalism, and cultural and social capital.

The U.S. Census Bureau expects the Asian population in North America to double in the next 25 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), with the sharp increase mainly fueled by growing numbers of Asian immigrants. While the existing research has focused primarily on the leisure behaviors of Chinese, Korean, and to some extent Japanese North Americans, other Asian groups (e.g., people from India, Pakistan, and Southeast Asian countries) have received only scant attention (e.g., Tirone & Goodberry, 2011; Tirone & Shaw, 1997). Given the wide spectrum of income and education levels across different Asian groups, the leisure literature will benefit from focusing more on those underinvestigated Asian populations. Moreover, little is known about the leisure behavior of Asian astronaut families (i.e., families where only women and children migrate while the fathers stay abroad; Chiang, 2008; Waters, 2002), Asian adolescents who arrive in the United States and Canada unaccompanied, and Asian migrants who resettle back to their home countries. Future research on these Asian groups may require new theoretical lenses and methodological approaches due to their unique cultures and mobility patterns. While much remains to be explored in this field, we hope this article will help future researchers broaden their analytic perspectives.

References


### Appendix. Studies on Asian North Americans' leisure, their theory, Asian nationality, and published journals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Theoretical Framework</th>
<th>Journal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1996 Yu &amp; Berryman</td>
<td>The relationship among self-esteem, acculturation, and recreation participation of recently arrived Chinese immigrant adolescents</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Acculturation</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1997 Tirone &amp; Shaw</td>
<td>At the center of their lives: Indo Canadian women, their families and leisure Racism, indifference, and the leisure experiences of South Asian Canadian teens</td>
<td>India, Pakistan, &amp; Bangladesh</td>
<td>Exploratory</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1999 Tirone</td>
<td>Ethnicity, acculturation, self-construal, and motivations for outdoor recreation</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Acculturation &amp; Self-construal</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2001 Walker et al.</td>
<td>Ethnicity, acculturation, self-construal, and motivations for outdoor recreation</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Exploratory</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2003/2004 Walker &amp; Deng</td>
<td>Comparing leisure as a subjective experience with the Chinese experience of rùmí</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Exploratory</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2003 Stodolska &amp; Yi</td>
<td>Impacts of immigration on ethnic identity and leisure behavior of adolescent immigrants from Korea, Mexico, and Poland</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Ethnic identity</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>2004 Winter et al.</td>
<td>Outdoor recreation among Asian Americans: A case study of San Francisco bay area residents</td>
<td>Asians</td>
<td>Acculturation, motivation, &amp; Leisure constraints Segmented assimilation</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2004 Stodolska &amp; Alexandris</td>
<td>The role of recreational sport in the adaptation of first generation immigrants in the United States</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Segmented assimilation</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2006 Walker et al.</td>
<td>Ethnicity, gender, and the theory of planned behavior: The case of playing the lottery</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Planned behavior</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>2006 Li &amp; Stodolska</td>
<td>Transnationalism, leisure, and Chinese graduate students in the United States Leisure constraints and acculturation among Korean immigrants</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Transnationalism</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>2006 Scott et al.</td>
<td>Leisure constraints and acculturation among Korean immigrants</td>
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<td>Acculturation &amp; Leisure constraints</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>2007 Heo &amp; Lee</td>
<td>&quot;I don't want to feel like a stranger&quot;: Korean students who play basketball seriously</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Serious leisure &amp; Collectivism</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>2007 Li &amp; Stodolska</td>
<td>Working for a dream and living for the future: Leisure constraints and negotiation strategies among Chinese international graduate students</td>
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<td>Leisure constraints and negotiation</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>2007 Stodolska</td>
<td>Ethnic enclosure, social networks, and leisure behavior of immigrants from Korea, Mexico, and Poland</td>
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<td>Ethnic enclosure</td>
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<td>Study Number</td>
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<td>Country</td>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>Stodolska et al.</td>
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<td>Ethnic mobility trap &amp; Enclave economy</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Walker</td>
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<td>Intrinsic motivation</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Spiers &amp; Walker</td>
<td>The effects of ethnicity and leisure satisfaction on happiness, peacefulness, and quality of life</td>
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<td>Quality of life</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Walker &amp; Wang</td>
<td>The meaning of leisure for Chinese/Canadians</td>
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<td>Exploratory</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Stack &amp; Iwasaki</td>
<td>The role of leisure pursuits in adaptation processes among Afghan refugees who have immigrated to Winnipeg, Canada</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Exploratory</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Walker et al.</td>
<td>A prospective panel study of Chinese-Canadian immigrants’ leisure participation and leisure satisfaction</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Leisure satisfaction</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Tirone &amp; Goodberry</td>
<td>Leisure, biculturalism, and second-generation Canadians</td>
<td>India, Pakistan, &amp; Bangladesh</td>
<td>Biculturalism</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Lee et al.</td>
<td>Korean American males’ serious leisure experiences and their perceptions of different play styles</td>
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<td>Serious leisure</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Exploring the experience of intergroup contact and the value of recreation activities in facilitating positive intergroup interactions of immigrants</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Intergroup contact theory</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Lee &amp; Scott</td>
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<td>Intergroup contact theory</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Hudson et al.</td>
<td>The influence of ethnicity and self-construal on leisure constraints</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Leisure constraints &amp; Self-construal</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>2015</td>
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<td>Transnational leisure experience of second-generation immigrants</td>
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<td>Transnationalism</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Kono</td>
<td>Meanings of leisure in coping and adjustment after hurricane Katrina among Japanese and Japanese American Survivors in New Orleans</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Exploratory</td>
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</table>

*Note:* Studies that did not specify a guiding theory for their investigation were categorized as either conceptual or exploratory. Coding for journals: (1) *Leisure Sciences*, (2) *Journal of Leisure Research*, (3) *Leisure Studies*, (4) *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, (5) *Leisure/Loisir*. 

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