

## “It’s a Race War:” Race and Leisure Experiences in California State Prison

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to use critical race theory to guide the exploration of leisure experiences of men in prison. Ten men reflected upon the time they spent in various California State Prisons, in specific reference to their perceptions of race and power behind bars. The analysis revealed that every decision in prison is made with survival in mind and race is central to determining survival strategies and who has access to power. The system of Racially Organized Prison Politics (ROPP) influenced each and every decision behind bars, including leisure decisions. The supportive themes of indoctrination, maintenance, and structural support were found to reinforce and regulate ROPP. Further research is needed to learn more about the influence of race on institutional support systems.

*KEYWORDS:* Race, prison, leisure, critical race theory

...it could go down at any time and usually when it does it’s racial. It’s not really whites on whites, Mexicans on Mexicans, blacks on blacks. You know what I’m saying? It’s basically a race war. Once something goes down, it’s a race war. (Mark)

Upon incarceration, prisoners are shoved, haphazardly, into an unfamiliar, highly controlled environment with little support to navigate this experience. They no longer make daily personal decisions and must rely on the prison system to feed, clothe, and protect them from other prisoners (Lee, 1996). Surprisingly, they still have exceptional amounts of free time that they must fill with chosen sanctioned activities, in addition to navigating their new identities within the prison setting. Instead of floundering and willingly accepting the regulations imposed by the prison staff, the participants in this

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study described a peer-imposed system of power that guided daily behavior. The prison setting provides the much-needed opportunity to explore the intertwining topics of race, power, and leisure in an institutional setting. Studying leisure experiences in a controlled environment provides an opportunity to learn more about why leisure decisions are made (Frey & Delaney, 1996) and the role of race in decision-making.

Using prison as a setting, critical race theory as a framework, and the tool of semi-structured interviews, we asked former prisoners to reflect upon their time spent in prison in an effort to generate greater understanding of their experiences. Constant comparative analysis resulted in the identification of patterns of data connected to a core dimension (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) we labeled Racially Organized Prison Politics or ROPP. The sub-categories of indoctrination, maintenance, and structural support all work together to maintain power and position as well as dictate leisure decisions, and are completely intertwined with the core dimension of ROPP (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). And though leisure was experienced differently within prison walls, rather than on the outside—free from the scrutiny of the prison staff and other prisoners; participants remembered the power and privilege derived from or afforded to whiteness on the outside and it had a lingering impact. We found the interconnected system of power and race, created and maintained by the prisoners, existed to promote, protect, and control themselves and others.

Within leisure scholarship, there is a lack of attention paid to institutionalized, structural and hegemonic power associated with both race and leisure. The complex relationship between ROPP and leisure provides researchers unique insight into the relationship between race and the prison experience.

### **Race, Leisure, and Prison**

Race is a socially constructed term and the definition is constantly under theoretical scrutiny. The scrutiny exists based on new research developments, or the context in which the term is being applied. Researchers have discovered that differences do exist between white and non-white groups as related to leisure experiences. These differences reflect power structures that are not neutral and are not inclusive (Killian, 2001). Phillip (2000) found that places of leisure have become identified as racial locations. Groups and individuals chose activities or leisure spaces based on who has historically participated in these activities or spaces and what groups they may encounter when they leave the comfort of their homes in order to participate.

Leisure provides researchers with space to learn more about our fluid personal identities, based upon the subjectivity of the self (Jackson, 2004). The self we present to the world shifts from moment to moment depending on the context and the power of the persons involved. Race plays a large role in the development and maintenance of our personal identity. Depending on the situation, race can be used to generate more power for oneself, such as when employing the privileges attached to whiteness (McDonald, 2008). Yet, race is fundamentally a social construct used to describe people even as it plays a large role in the creation of identity and the maintenance of power. As leisure scholarship continues to develop, reflection on the past indicates that research surrounding race has evolved. Kivel, Johnson, Scraton (this issue) indicate that leisure scholars have avoided investigating institutional racism as related to leisure in the past, focusing instead on individual differences. The political manner in which

leisure operates, often around discourses of race, allows researchers the opportunity to explore the influence that race and leisure may have in perpetuating oppression in society. Glover (2007) reminded us to reflect on the seemingly neutral policies associated with leisure programs that may in fact work to reinforce racial inequity. As leisure operates to oppress people, it can also work to provide opportunities for change and growth in society. In addition, Floyd, Bocarro, and Thompson (2008) noted that leisure researchers must use theories of race and ethnicity in reference to their studies to address the increasing diversity in North America. Addressing the limited understandings of non-dominant people requires the use of more research focused on race within the leisure field.

Leisure researchers are beginning to focus on marginalized prison populations (cf. Pedlar, Yuen, & Fortune, 2008), but the focus is on rehabilitative efforts of the individual and the normalization of behaviors. Rehabilitation is not the focus of American prisons, especially with the continued privatization of prison. The work done by Canadian researchers has brought to light the needs of women prisoners re-entering mainstream society and the role that community plays in this process (Pedlar, Arai, Yuen, & Fortune, 2008). Yet, there is a lack of research on prison systems in the United States and the prison experience itself as an institution that impacts groups. The values held by a nation are reflected in their treatment of prisoners. We can learn much about how a marginalized group is viewed by learning more about prison experiences in different countries.

### Critical Race Theory & Prison

In an attempt to bring race, history, and context to a center position and to understand the hegemony prevalent in American society, legal scholars turned to critical race theory (CRT). CRT theorists operate with the understanding that only overt racism, primarily the exclusion of people, was addressed by the civil rights movement. Consequently, the subtle racism that encompasses American society is allowed to continue, supported by the legal system. CRT allows us to investigate race and power, especially in arenas that insist they are devoid of overt, formal racism. Striving for the seemingly simple idea of fair and equal treatment of all without investigating how power is distributed only results in a false sense of equality that CRT is dedicated to addressing within the legal system (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Pellar, & Thomas, 1995).

CRT allows us to explore the social systems at work on a deeper level rather than merely addressing discrimination based on skin color. Racial identity is not cloaked entirely in skin color, but also in culture, community, and politics (Crenshaw et al., 1995). The labeling and subsequent placement of people in undefined and unexplained social categories by researchers perpetuates hegemonic power structures as the reader must use stereotypes to assume what it means to be placed in each category (Kivel, 2000). CRT strives to bring race consciousness to the forefront in contrast to the accepted model of color-blindness, in an effort to combat the limited understanding of how racism exists within hegemonic power structures in American society. As legal studies and the law reinforce white privilege, CRT challenges the construction of race in both legal studies and American culture to understand how white privilege is maintained and how the subordination of minorities continues. Not only must understanding and knowledge be generated by CRT, change must also be supported (Cren-

shaw et al., 1995).

In an attempt to combat the unequal distribution of power surrounding race and the social construction of race, Hylton (2005) identified five main tenants utilized by CRT. First, race and racism cannot be isolated from power structures and are always impacted by outside influences. Second, CRT calls into question the use of color-blind policies, meritocracy, and so-called objective, race neutral policies. Third, CRT uses techniques of social justice to position the oppressed at the center of the discussion or research and not at the periphery. Fourth, topics examined by white researchers are viewed as truth in relation to race and results in a biased political viewpoint. Therefore, it becomes necessary to perform research from the viewpoint of the other. Fifth, it is useful to use CRT across disciplines, applying information learned to other forms of social sciences, resulting in a transdisciplinary way of exploring race. CRT belief holds that we live in an unequal society, with unequal distributions of power and resources. This distribution of power marginalizes minorities and their position in society (Hylton, 2005).

The greatest impact the legal system has is on those who have been or who currently are incarcerated. Prisoners are tried, convicted, and sentenced by judges and juries intent on following the letter of the law. Not only does the legal system determine the amount of time prisoners must spend behind bars, it also determines how the body is treated and managed while incarcerated. The legal management of the body in prison is not concerned with the exclusion of certain races. In fact, the opposite is true. In California, 28.8% of state prisoners are black, 38.6% are Hispanic, 5.9% are other, and 26.7% are white (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), 2007). The racial classification system utilized forces prisoners into one of four classification categories, effectively labeling a person as black, white, Hispanic, or other. As evidenced by the CDCR statistics, the legal system punishes minorities to a greater extent than the privileged whites. In addition, recidivism rates and the high occurrence of extended punishments for crimes committed while in prison contributes to lengthier and more frequent prison sentences. Conviction rates and the subsequent banishment of a now invisible population of minorities behind bars results in a forgotten segment of society. CRT's attempts to address race in the legal system has the potential to reveal the hidden populations of people deemed deviant by society and essentially thrown away and forgotten.

Important cultural differences exist that should not be erased by assimilation into "mainstream" American society. Courts and justice systems punish the body, according to Foucault (1975), but they are also erasing the culture and traditions of entire groups. It is necessary to question why the rate of incarcerated minorities is growing disproportionately to the overall population. What systemic disadvantages take place that result in a higher rate of crimes committed and the subsequent greater numbers incarcerated?

In addition, CRT is a strategy used by scholars to reveal hidden racism in American legal and social systems, as well as in the education system (Lynn, 2004; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Understanding the influence that race has on behavior and recreation choices can be extended to choices made while in prison. Prisoners are expected to behave appropriately behind bars and yet are given no choice as to who they must see and interact with on a daily basis. CRT provides researchers with a tool to analyze

systemic disadvantages and offers greater understanding of the impacts race has on leisure choices.

### *Racial Characteristics of Prison*

Prisons are tools used by both the federal and state governments to hold and punish those who have been found guilty of disobeying the laws of society. Sentenced to a specific period of time, prisoners are treated as isolated bodies, sent to prison to be punished. The prisoner is not incarcerated for his crime, but as Foucault (1994) said, for having a "criminal personality" (p. 387). On occasion, prisoners are allowed to work, or attend school or drug programs within the prison walls; however, most often, prisoners are simply held by the government until they have completed their sentence. In California, for example, 53.6% of prisoners are employed and the remaining prisoners are either ineligible or on a waiting list for employment (CDCR, 2007). Researchers found that income impacted incarceration on some levels; however, race did not prove to be a predictor (Arvanites & Asher, 1998). The idea that race has less of an influence upon incarceration rates than income gives further insight into the characteristics of the prison population. Generally, regardless of race, a prisoner may have a greater chance of coming from a low income background.

The CDCR (2007) is responsible for 33 state prisons, which are currently holding 158,437 prison inmates, 93.3% of whom are male. At this time, California does not utilize other racial categories beyond black, white, Hispanic, or other when describing their population. The average reading level is seventh grade and the average age is 37. Per 100,000 residents of California, 461.5 people are incarcerated. This large and growing transitional population of men behind bars has added to the growth of a prison sub-culture. The behavior that the prison sub-culture teaches is then brought to the general population by the release of prisoners back into society. Racial experiences in prison reach outside of the prison walls and into society once each prisoner is released.

### *Prison Sub-Culture*

Prisoners develop their own rules and values to cope with their time behind bars. The dominant ideology is that of survival at all cost. Values held by the prison sub-culture are often at odds with society's values as a whole (Santos, 2004). A prisoner is expected to act one way while in prison, and another when entrenched in mainstream society. Switching from one set of expected behaviors to another is difficult for some and frequently results in a return to prison. Prisoners are more influenced by other prisoners than by correctional officers and have developed a prison code to manage behavior (Schwaebe, 2005). The prison code is defined as "...inmates demonstrated solidarity and loyalty to fellow inmates by sharply distinguishing themselves from prison staff through a set of prescribed behaviors and attitudes" (Schwaebe, 2005, p. 615). The prison code, with its strict behavioral tenets, offers guidelines and orientation to prison life, and guidelines to dealing with correctional staff. Following the prison code also "...involves taking care of one's own problems and never cooperating with the law" (Santos, 2004, p. 100). In this case, the law includes correctional officers who staff the prisons. Once a prisoner learns and follows the prison code, he often is able to stay out of trouble and soon finds himself labeled as a "straight con."

## Methodology

Acknowledging that race is socially constructed, and in an effort to discuss race directly, this study was created along CRT guidelines (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Although by definition a prisoner is not “free,” he is still at liberty to choose from a limited amount of daily activities and with whom he associates. The time spent while incarcerated is not all scheduled time; prisoners are able to make personal decisions surrounding how they will fill their free time. These free-choices can reveal cultural attitudes towards race and leisure and thus warrants further exploration.

Study participants responded to ads placed in local newspapers seeking men who had spent at least six months in a California State Prison. We then conducted semi-structured University Institutional Review Board mandated phone interviews with 10 men of various racial identities (five white, two Black, two Hispanic, and one Asian). Each participant was interviewed once, for approximately one hour. With the exception of two interviews, in which the participants requested that they not be recorded, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. During the two interviews that were not recorded, copious notes were taken by the first researcher, including the use of key phrases and terms. Often, the participants were asked to verify a statement or the meaning of their words during the note taking process. As more phone interviews were conducted, information provided by each participant verified the trustworthiness of previous interviews. In fact, 12 interviews in total were conducted, but two of the original participant’s information did not corroborate with the experiences of the other ten men. It soon became clear that these two participants did not meet the requirements of this study and had spent time in a different type of setting. As such, their data were removed.

We asked participants to think back to their time spent in prison and to reflect on both their race and leisure experiences. Participants were asked specific questions about race in the prison environment. They were asked to describe a typical day in prison and to talk about the people with whom they associated. They were also asked if they chose to overtly “display” their race while in prison and how their race influenced their daily decision making. Stories were then elicited and/or probed from these questions. Participants discussed prison sentences that ranged from nine months to ten years and the majority of participants had been released from prison within the 2 years prior to data collection. Several of the participants had been incarcerated more than once and were able to describe numerous descriptive events in which they believed race played a large role.

Interviews were conducted following grounded theory techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), which allowed the researcher to begin data analysis immediately. This data analysis resulted in the development of richer data as the interviews progressed and as the interview questions were adapted to elicit more information concerning race and the prison experience. Once the interviews were transcribed, the first author coded the transcriptions using open and axial coding. During our focused coding, we were able to identify a central theme or core dimension, which interconnected all of the smaller themes that were identified from the data. These themes, also called categories, are comprised of related data that “stand in relationship to the core” and support the main phenomenon described by the core dimension (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 14). The relation of these categories grew together to create the core dimension

of *Racially Organized Prison Politics*, which illustrates the impact of race in the prison system.

### Findings

Our findings demonstrated that the core dimension of Racially Organized Prison Politics were impossible to avoid while incarcerated. Participants described a system of prisoner enforced rules that guided daily behavior and decision making solely along racial lines. ROPP was supported by three other main themes including indoctrination, maintenance, and structural support. This section outlines and describes these themes to expose the extent to which race was utilized as a mechanism of social control by the prisoners over other prisoners.

#### ***Keeping Race Central: ROPP***

Within the California prison system, prisoners exist in an environment that places great emphasis on skin color and racial identity. In fact, the prison that a prisoner is incarcerated in is determined by the time to be served, the type of crime, and the racial identity of the prisoner, as categorized by the State of California. Participants in this study often referred to "politics" when discussing the culture and management of the prison. This language was always used in conjunction with racial terms and therefore we expanded the term "politics" into the new dimension of ROPP. It is impossible to exist independent of the system of ROPP while incarcerated in the California prison system. Therefore, the findings of this study are organized around the major themes of indoctrination, maintenance, and structural support, which work together to inform leisure decisions, under the system of Racially Organized Prison Politics. The complex relationships between these themes demonstrated and reinforced the hegemonic power structures at work in the prison setting.

Racially Organized Prison Politics had an influence upon every decision, regardless how seemingly minute, while in prison. Mark, a white man, described ROPP as, "All kind of rules, all types of rules. Couldn't walk in certain areas. Couldn't say certain things. You know, you couldn't really associate with other races like that." ROPP was a tool used by the prisoners to maintain and control daily behavior of the other prisoners based on the visual indicator of skin color. As Lance, a black man, described:

They call it respect. And they would say something out of anger, just a moment of anger, say something they shouldn't and get people mad about it. And what would happen is if one race said it against another then it involved everybody. This is the way politics are in prison.

Since ROPP was guided solely by race, each participant was categorized upon entering prison, not only by the prison, but also by the other prisoners. This created clearly identifiable group memberships and allegiances.

#### ***Indoctrination***

As the system of ROPP consisted of the rules that regulate daily behavior in prison, it was impossible to spend a night in prison without learning of the rules and becoming indoctrinated into the system. Once each participant entered the prison system, it was necessary for him to be labeled as a certain race, establish respect, and learn the rules.

Clemmer (1958) stated that prisoners' social relationships are often determined by their experiences on the outside. Participants in this study refuted this assertion and instead described being classified entirely based upon race. They were not able to draw on friendships or other such experiences from the outside in order to maintain a day-to-day existence in prison.

Several of the participants were not aware of how they would be expected to negotiate the prison system. These participants had to learn from other prisoners. Timothy, a white man, learned about ROPP his first day in the system. He said:

They kinda like give you the rules. Most everybody gets to know what you can do and what you can't do after a few hours of going through the process. They just tell you stuff like you'll have your own sinks; every race will have their own sinks. Or they'll have their own telephones. Like you get in a lot of trouble if you are a white guy and you use a black phone. Or a Mexican phone, I mean you'll get in a fight over something like that.

He quickly became aware of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. The rules had already been created; it was up to the participant to decide to follow them in order to have the most uneventful time in prison as possible. Ken, an Asian man, also learned of ROPP his first day in prison. Ken was immediately labeled as Asian by his looks and was approached by another Asian. He was never asked his race. It was simply assumed by his skin color and appearance that he was Asian. As Ken described, "The leader of the Asian group or whatever, came up to me and introduced himself and said let me tell you where you're gonna sleep, where we eat, what we do, and how it works here."

Mark, a black man, learned about ROPP by listening to others. He further explained how people are grouped and how he learned of the rules he would have to abide by during his time in prison.

Basically, people talk all day. All they do is talk. So you just listen, be silent. Listen to all the stories, war stories people tell. I'm always just hearing stories, talking about this and that, this and that. Plus, there's always a rep, there's a rep for each race, each race will pretty much inform you when you get to your new house basically. Where you're gonna be staying, there's a rep who will come and get you and pretty much tell you the house rules.

Mark was prepared and knew that he would have to find the dorm representative when he arrived at prison. He knew that he would only be allowed to use certain facilities and was ready to learn the dorm rules. He was labeled immediately upon entering the prison as a black man and was approached by other blacks. Listening provided Mark the opportunity to learn the rules and made his transition into prison life easier.

The indoctrination into ROPP that each participant experienced upon entering the prison system was extremely important in determining his day to day activities and associates. Without learning and abiding by the rules of the prison, violence and mayhem would rule their individual prison experiences. Once the rules were learned, it was necessary to become educated about how the rules were interwoven into daily life.

### *Maintenance*

Once each participant was indoctrinated into the system of ROPP, he would then have to learn how the system was maintained. It was not only necessary for the rules of ROPP to exist; the rules had to be reinforced and upheld. To that end, ROPP itself was a system of self and peer-imposed segregation. As ROPP was a system created by prisoners, it also created an atmosphere of segregation within the prison system. Ken explained the experience he had while in prison. "In the California prison system, I mean, everything, absolutely everything is decided upon and based upon your ethnicity. For instance, myself being Asian, I only associated basically with the other Asians."

Ken also believed that the racial politics and self-segregation were "ridiculous," yet he and the other participants did not try to exist outside of the rules of ROPP. Upon entering the system, they learned that they would have to follow the predetermined rules previously created and maintained by the prisoners. To exist as peacefully and as inconspicuously as possible within the prison system, regardless of agreement or not with ROPP, one still followed the rules. Mark, a black man, stated, "You couldn't mix with others ... That's one thing I hated about incarceration. That's how they keep you like, it's like the 1800s or something. It's all segregated." Mark expressed great disgust for the existence and rules of ROPP. Yet, he had no choice but to live within these rules, as the violent consequences were too great. Hassine (1999) experienced this as well and noted that whites and blacks segregate themselves while in prison.

The exception to this was that of the white participants, who carried the privilege of whiteness from the outside into the prison system. They were still expected to know and to enforce the rules of ROPP for other groups, but white men experienced more flexibility when navigating through the prison system. Historically, prisons were racially segregated by state law and this carried over into job assignments as well (Jacobs, 1979). White participants were more likely to hold a job and were able to enjoy the benefits of working while in prison. For example, Dante, a white man, worked in the prison library. He was able to work in an air-conditioned environment that brought relief from the heat of the desert. He would not have experienced that relief without the privilege of working. White participants were also able to navigate among the racial groups with less fear of the consequences. For instance, Dante talked about his ability to associate with the Hispanics who controlled the prison. Dante's whiteness and the privilege attached to it provided him with the freedom to interact with members of the racial group that enforced the racial rules of prison.

### *Structural Support*

ROPP was a system created and maintained by the prisoners to monitor the behavior of other prisoners. All decisions, leisure or otherwise, were influenced almost entirely by ROPP. However, the prison bureaucracy also influenced leisure decisions in prison by maintaining a neutral position on this matter. As McDonald (2008) described, white privilege is allowed to flourish by the appearance of normalcy. All of the participants agreed that ROPP was accepted as part of the prison culture and in fact was endorsed by prison staff by either ignoring the rules or ensuring that white participants navigated the system more easily. Adopting neutral strategies as described by Glover (2007), the staff reproduced racial inequality.

The prison staff, in the opinion of the participants, supported the use of race as a method for controlling prisoners and supporting white privilege. Timothy, a white man, experienced this first hand. He felt that the white prison staff would ensure that white prisoners were treated differently.

...everyone had to work out. You know push ups, jumping jacks and it was actually a pretty intense, military style work out. And some of the correctional officers would actually walk around and make sure the white guys were doing their exercises.

To maintain white privilege, prison staff ensured the white groups conducted their workouts so that if there were an altercation between races, the whites would be able to dominate.

The prison bureaucracy played a role in the maintenance of the system of ROPP. However, Schwaebe (2005) found that prisoners were more influenced by other prisoners than by prison staff. Prisoners changed their behavior to survive, often in reaction to a system such as ROPP. Yet, order in prison was also maintained by “subtle interplay of relationships” between the prison staff and the prisoners (Bottoms, 1999, p. 210). The balance of rules and power between differing groups within the prison and the prison bureaucracy resulted in a power structure highly influenced by race. Participants had no choice but to live within the system and to decide which rules they would follow and which, if any, they would ignore. Alex found that when one race had more members than another, power shifted into the majority’s favor. Yet, Dante’s experience of being allowed to keep to himself, as only a white man would be allowed, demonstrated that whites were still able to benefit from their privilege even if they were in the racial minority.

### *Leisure Decisions*

Once each participant became familiar with the basic system-imposed rules of ROPP, they would begin to navigate the prison system and make decisions related to their leisure time. Each prisoner had free time during each day that was his alone to fill. Other than work responsibilities or a drug or education program that required attendance, there were many hours of free time to manage. However, decisions made had to fall within the system of ROPP. As such, the participants believed that race did influence their free time decisions.

Several leisure decisions made while in prison revolved around leisure as a service. Lance spent a great deal of his free time drawing on white handkerchiefs. He would sell his artwork to other prisoners. It was acceptable for Lance to associate with people from other races because he was performing a service and he possessed white privilege. As long as money or goods exchanged hands, he was allowed by ROPP to speak with those of other races to determine what they wanted drawn and how much they would pay for his service. Lance used his leisure time to provide a service that was desirable to other prisoners. Money made the difference in the interaction and it became acceptable for Lance to associate with different races to conduct his business.

Lance’s experience as a white man selling a product was extremely different from the situation Timothy described about a Hispanic man who earned money tattooing. This man was able to tattoo other Hispanics and whites, but Timothy observed this man tattooing a black man. Once the Hispanics learned of this, they beat the tattoo

artist. It was unacceptable for him to tattoo blacks. ROPP dictated that it was acceptable for Hispanics and whites to interact for the purpose of tattooing, but Hispanics were expressly forbidden from interacting with blacks and this man was punished, regardless of whether or not money was changing hands. Several other instances of this type existed in the larger data set supporting Phillip (2000) who found that places of leisure could be identified as racial locations. There is a degree of welcomeness associated with these leisure places. For example, in this study, it was mentioned that black prisoners were not welcome to watch a Hispanic television. This welcomeness is only one tactic prisoners use to control each other through leisure decision-making. The result is a continued marginalization of certain groups as they are prevented from exercising choice when making decisions.

In Paul's experience as a white man, he found that whites could give something to a person of another race, but he could never take anything from another race. This runs contrary to the experience of Mark, a black man, who was not able to give or receive goods from any person other than another black. White privilege allowed Paul to speak to people who were from other races to give something away, but determined that it was not acceptable for him to take something from someone of another race.

## Discussion

The use of ROPP by the prisoners, and the prison's staff support of this system by maintaining neutrality, created a sanctioned use of racial marginalization within prison walls. The classification of others based solely on skin color forces people into visual identification categories. They then must follow the rules of ROPP or face violent consequences. This study provided us with much information in relation to the management of the physical body while in prison and the nature of punishment in relation to race. Finally, implications of this research are presented, along with opportunities for future research.

### *Privilege and Punishment*

Prison exists to hold and punish individuals, based on legal requirements and court sentences. The prison's responsibility is to hold and punish the body, in an effort to prevent and reduce crime. The mind is addressed through rehabilitation; however, rehabilitation is often a low priority as prisons become overcrowded. The management of the body takes precedence over rehabilitation when there is limited space and resources. ROPP allows for the discipline and control of others by groups within the prison setting. ROPP reinforces the prison (and punishment) experience and does not require anything from prison staff. A willingness to look the other way as these men are being punished, and the control of individuals by a group mentality contributes to the greater punishment of incarceration and reinforces tenets of white privilege.

Punishment is political and often in judgment, the legal system is punishing the body for far more than the actual crime (Foucault, 1975). Morality, considerations of future behavior, and speculations as to why the crime was committed all impact punishments. Punishment is only physical in the sense that prisoners are locked up; courts go to great lengths to ensure that the physical body is not harmed or tortured. Prisoners disciplining one another physically may be seen as an extension of the punishment for crimes committed. Continued marginalization based on race, and additional pun-

ishment of prisoners outside the guidelines of the court, as supported by ROPP has implications both inside and outside of the prison walls.

Power produces knowledge (Foucault, 1975), reminding us that those holding power within the prison and are also the ones with knowledge of how best to navigate the system. Power and knowledge go hand in hand; one informs the other. Therefore, white participants in this study, holding the privilege and power of whiteness, had more knowledge than other participants about navigating ROPP and how to benefit from the system. However, whiteness is not equal or uniform and is an elastic concept (McDonald, 2008). The power gained from whiteness does not automatically result in the best prison experience possible. The interactions of other social factors (e.g., age, ability, and sexual orientation) work together to determine the privilege attached to whiteness. Yet, the overall impact of whiteness on the prison institution cannot be denied.

The prison system itself produces and reinforces the undesired behavior that initially caused prisoners to be imprisoned (Foucault, 1975). Prisons also do not positively impact the crime rate or prevent recidivism, and the prison experience has lingering effects on the family of the imprisoned. These consequences of the prison system that is meant to punish and then release a reformed man back into society are greater than the system can address.

### *Social Justice Implications*

This study provided a look at how ten men viewed race in prison in relation to their leisure experiences. Participants were required to exist within a racially charged environment and their interviews provided a glimpse into the structural and interpersonal constraints impacting their leisure time decisions. This information detailed a unique social system where race was highlighted, in accordance with the guidelines surrounding critical race theory. Regardless of the fact that whites are only 26.7% of prisoners, they enjoyed greater freedoms, power, and benefits from both the other prisoners and the staff. The prison situation described by participants in this study was one where race was always a concern, as illustrated by the existence of ROPP. Participants discussed and emphasized race in a frank and descriptive manner. This facilitated the engagement of critical race theory and its use as a tool to question power in society and the prison system. In turn, the research also presents opportunities for social justice that works towards change.

We can no longer deny that race exists (Glover, 2007) and impacts the daily experiences of prisoners. The prison itself is a racialized location, but the laws that govern the facility are professed as race neutral. Yet, CRT calls the neutrality of these laws into question. Discrepancies between policies and reality have resulted in a system that allowed ROPP to develop and flourish. CRT requires that for change to occur the laws must directly address race and not continue to reinforce white privilege. The court system must critically evaluate its sentencing policies and investigate the role that whiteness plays in the life situations which results in a prisoner standing before the court. Participants in this study generated information that revealed a prison experience colored by race. Race-neutral policies of the State of California prisoner classification system results in a racially biased system where whiteness benefits.

Social justice requires both liberation and transformation (Hylton, 2005). Use of

a critical lens to examine social markers which lead to varied treatment within a system that professes to value neutral policies is required if social justice is to be achieved. To achieve both social justice goals and CRT goals, evaluations of color-blindness should occur. We know that "Color-blind policy initiatives subsequently expunge race while preserving the social, political, economic and cultural status quo" (Glover, 2007, p. 196). Also, Hylton (2005) believed that color-blindness encourages racial disadvantages. This is true in many environments, including the CDCR, where the promotion of color-blind policies has proven to be problematic. Transformation of the legal system is only possible if color-blind policies are abolished.

We now know that race is used as a tool for survival within prison walls. ROPP exists to generate power and maintain privilege and the State of California must critically evaluate the prison system and its basic structure if transformation is to occur. Prisoners themselves may have created the system of prison politics, but the CDCR allows prisoners to enforce these rules by ignoring the system of ROPP and allowing it to become a normal part of prison sub-culture. Looking the other way while ROPP flourishes provides prisoners the opportunity to use race as a tool to generate more power for themselves. Within the current structure, social justice is not possible.

The privilege of whiteness does not begin and end inside the prison system. In keeping with the tenants of CRT, it is important to begin with the color-blind legal system. These color-blind policies actually encompass two groups: one comprised of those who are absent of color and the other of those who are marked by color. Until the privilege of whiteness is eliminated at the stage of arrest and punishment within the court system, it will not be reduced within the prison system. The systemic problem of raced individuals disproportionately experiencing lower incomes, less education, being arrested more often, and sentenced to prison at greater rates than whites is not a problem that can be treated from within prison walls. Liberation from these systemic problems is necessary if change is to be achieved.

Information we learned from the participants tells us about the impacts of whiteness as demonstrated through leisure experiences. We must work backwards from prison to the court system to the home to completely address white privilege in prison. The prison system is working to normalize behavior through punishment (Foucault, 1975); however, the message sent is the standard of white behavior for all prisoners, even though this goal is unreachable as the visual markers of whiteness cannot be achieved. In addition, ROPP feeds into Foucault's concept of surveillance. Prisoners themselves are observing and monitoring the behavior of others and imposing control through this surveillance. The monitoring of leisure decisions is used as one form of social control and works to reinforce the theory of surveillance.

Aspects of racial identity are constantly expressed simply by staying within one's designated racial group. Prisoners need prison supported programs to help them adjust and develop coping mechanisms (Adams, 1992). In addition, the use of three static categories when describing race does not allow for growth and diversity when thinking about race. The CDCR reduces identity construction into a tight space, only offering the option of "other" to those who cannot be forced into categories of black, white, or Hispanic.

As Frey and Delaney (1996) advised, greater understanding around prisoners and their leisure time will help prison officials better monitor the prison. To prevent

violence, understanding that leisure decisions are made based upon race and noticing a shift away from race-based decisions may indicate a potential problem or situation requiring prison officials to respond. In prisons, problems of under-stimulation are likely to be more serious in overcrowded facilities where many prisoners are idle. A boring, monotonous, prison routine not only deprives prisoners from activities to distract from personal concerns and difficulties, but also creates additional stress by reinforcing negative feelings such as emptiness, despondency, and despair (Adams, 1992). The recent removal of recreation equipment and programming from California prisons only adds to the stress of prison life. To transform the institution, social justice changes for prisoners require that quality of life issues, such as recreation, be addressed and not eliminated.

### *Future Research*

Leisure researchers investigating the prison experience have focused on the rehabilitation of individual prisoners (Williams, 2005), the normalizing effects of leisure on rehabilitative efforts (Pedlar, Yuen, & Fortune, 2008), and social inclusion back into local communities after prison (Pedlar, Arai, & Yuen, 2007). The focus on rehabilitation, the post-prison experience, and the individual all result in a lack of attention to the institutional structure that governs behavior. This study only begins to look at institutions as racialized entities. Continued research into prisons, in addition to groups that exist within and influence the structure, reveals the racialized society that exists, and the role leisure plays in maintaining this system. Further, investigation of prison policies in the United States explores alternative ways to sentence and house prisoners, while at the same time, allowing racial freedom. Abolishing ROPP polices is the first step in creating an atmosphere of equality within California's prisons.

McDonald (2008) called for researchers to look at "the various ways whiteness is asserted and resisted via leisure practices and contexts" (p. 26). In addition, white value systems are imposed through recreation (Glover, 2007). Therefore, a critical exploration of the life experiences of both men and women who become incarceration must be undertaken, including the role of leisure. Researchers have looked at women's prison experiences in Canada (Pedlar, Arai, Yuen, 2007; Pedlar, Yuen, Fortune, 2008) but the American focus on punishment rather than rehabilitation creates starkly different prison environments. The daily occurrence of institutional oppressions that result in a large discrepancy in the racial demographics within incarcerated populations must be addressed. Greater understanding of the role that leisure does (or does not) play prior to incarceration may reveal inadequacies in social support of all citizens. Any future research must employ the idea of change. Change within the system is reinforced by critical race theory and is necessary for a de-marginalization of society.

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