

**Profiles and Perceptions of Workplace Diversity  
Among Park and Recreation Professionals**

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**Abstract**

There are a number of studies about workplace diversity in the park and recreation field; however, few have focused on park and recreation employee perceptions of workplace diversity. The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions of workplace diversity among park and recreation professionals in the state of Illinois. Survey packets containing a cover letter and a link to a web-based survey were emailed to directors of park and recreation departments and park districts. Directors were asked to forward the survey link to their employees. Survey findings suggest that there is some employee diversity among park and recreation professionals in Illinois; however, it is not reflective of the increasing diversity in the U.S. workforce. Based on these findings it is recommended that park and recreation administrators offer more employee diversity training programs that focus on the value, benefit, recruitment, and retention of diverse populations. Future research should survey a national population of park and recreation professionals so that a national diversity profile may be projected.

**Key Words:** Diversity, diversity management, park and recreation department, park district, minorities, workplace diversity

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## Introduction

Major demographic changes have been occurring in the American workforce. These changes include increases in female and minority employees, as they will represent over 50 percent of all new entrants to the United States workforce in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (McCuiston, Wooldridge, & Pierce, 2004). By 2050, minorities, white women, and immigrants will account for 85% of the net growth in the nation's labor force (Goldstein & Gillian, 1990; Johnson & Packer, 1987; Judy & D'Amico, 1997; Fullerton & Toossi, 2001). There also will be increases in the racial and ethnic diversity of the elderly population (U.S. Department of Commerce & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1993; Fullerton & Toossi, 2001). The number of people with disabilities in the workplace has also grown particularly since the creation of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Bricout, 2003).

These demographic changes in the workplace illustrate the significant role that diversity will play in organizations' future success (Brown, 2005). Specifically, Brown encouraged organizations to make promoting diversity as a "business priority" (p. 111), which, in turn, will yield a positive return on investment, such as increased creativity and enhanced problem solving abilities. He further stated that regardless of whether one looks at diversity as a societal, workplace, or consumer marketing issue, these demographic changes cannot be disregarded.

As the United States population becomes more diverse, park and recreation professionals will need to develop programming and marketing strategies that attract and engage diverse groups. Similarly, administrators and staff members will need to communicate effectively with diverse groups within their communities to ensure effective customer service. In order to do this successfully, leaders in the field of park and recreation must reflect the

diverse communities they serve. As a first step, park and recreation administrators must assess worker diversity and the perceptions of diverse groups within their organizations.

The purpose of this paper is to provide information on workplace diversity to professionals who are in leadership positions in the park and recreation field. The primary purposes of this study were to increase the awareness of challenges that are associated with workplace diversity and provide suggestions to enhance diversity profiles in the field.

In this study, parks and recreation was used to include park and recreation departments *and* park districts. A park and recreation department is a local government agency which oversees the field of parks and recreational public works. Park districts are defined as a network of small parks that provide neighborhood-based public services such as indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, community centers, and a host of social and educational programs (Cairns, 1997). Park districts differ from park and recreation departments in that they have the ability to levy taxes by voter-approved park commissions, whereas park and recreation departments do not (Cairns, 1997). The state of Illinois is one of the few states in the U.S. with both park districts and park and recreation departments.

## Literature Review

Although there are a number of studies about workplace diversity in parks and recreation, much of the research has focused mainly on demographics and profiles of the professionals in the field. And although literature exists on the implications of an increasingly diverse workplace, more studies examining perceptions of workplace diversity among park and recreation professionals are needed.

Understanding the significance of diversity in parks and recreation was the focus of several studies (deLisle, 2005; Li, Absher, Graefe, & Hsu, 2008; Hollister & Hodgson,

1996). deLisle (2005) stated a need for park and recreation professionals to understand tolerance and value diversity in order to address the needs of the community. Li, Absher, Graefe, and Hsu (2008) acknowledged that “changes in racial and ethnic composition due to the increasing diversity in the United States are confronting managers of parks and recreation areas” (p. 87). They recommended that more research be done to fill the gap in the park and recreation literature as cross-cultural customer service grows.

Hollister and Hodgson (1996) reported the increasing diversity in the U.S. population and noted demographic trends indicating the presence of African American, Latino, and Asian children within park and recreation organizations. Hollister and Hodgson posited that park and recreation agencies need a clear understanding of diversity and the experiences of their employees. They contended that the main challenge faced by park and recreation professionals will be how to integrate diversity concerns into the management of their agency. They further stated that developing and maintaining quality diversity-training programs will be an important step to prepare park and recreation professionals for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Roberts and Outley’s (2002) review of diversity literature in recreation and parks noted that the term diversity consists of many elements from age, gender, and education, to ethnicity and religion, and that the topic has been discussed for over a decade. They reported that by 2006, approximately 50% of current recreation professionals were expected to retire. Also reported was a decline in the number of incoming undergraduates majoring in parks, recreation, and leisure studies. Finally, they suggested that recruiting and retaining diverse staff should be a best practice for preparing the workforce in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Henderson (1997) reported how a group of park and recreation managers in North Carolina formed a new division in their state profes-

sional organization called the Culturally Diverse Programs Division. Division members stressed the need for diversity training across the organization from professionals, board members, and staff to volunteers. Henderson (1997) stated that “the success of future recreation programs will depend upon education, collaboration, social inclusion, safety, and involvement in addressing diverse populations” (p. 30).

A study of gender equity perceptions by Anderson (2000) found several differences in management positions and salaries among parks and recreation managers. The study, conducted with *American Parks and Recreation Society* members, revealed that 55% of females indicated they held middle management positions, while 35% of females held executive level positions. The numbers were nearly in direct contrast to the 36% of males who reported holding middle-management positions, while 56% held executive level positions. The study also revealed discrepancies in salaries between male and female employees, most notably at the middle management level.

Goldsmith (1994) examined park and recreation facilities usage by minority customers. He found that the most popular parks were secluded from diverse populations, with the visits being made primarily by semi-exclusive groups. Another key finding was that park staff did not mirror the changing demographics.

Lastly, a study by Allison (1999) identified how park and recreation agencies addressed diversity issues by investigating the perspectives of 18 professional female employees and employees of color. In-depth interviews were used to explore perceptions and experiences of interviewees regarding workplace diversity issues of gender, race/ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, class, and age. First of three themes to emerge from the data was that a discontinuity appeared to exist between organizational policies and practices and diversity issues. Second, institutional inertia described most diversity efforts, that is, many agencies

were not receptive to change and new programmatic initiatives. Most interviewees perceived that efforts for creating a diverse workplace were not an agency priority. Finally, interviewees recognized consistent inequitable practices in hiring, promotions, and job placement practices based on race and gender. Allison (1999) argued that park and recreation agencies must develop and support meaningful policies and practices to protect and enhance workplace diversity.

In summary, the issue of workplace diversity has gained considerable attention in recent years. Common recommendations from the research findings include the need for workplace policies that address diversity and the need to develop diverse programs which reflect our changing society. Another key recommendation was the need to raise awareness of current demographic trends in the U.S.

This exploratory study sought to contribute to the aforementioned recommendations by identifying diversity profiles among park and recreation professionals and their perceptions of the following common diversity variables: (a) age, (b) race, (c) disability, and (d) gender. Two primary research questions in this study were: (1) What are the diversity profiles of the park and recreation professionals in Illinois, and (2) What are the overall perceptions of workplace diversity among study respondents? In order to examine perceptions of workplace diversity the following four sub-questions were asked: (1) What are respondents' perceptions of organizational efforts toward workplace diversity? (2) What are respondents' perceptions of people with four diverse characteristics (i.e., age, race, disability, and gender)? (3) What are respondents' perceptions of the representation of people with the diverse characteristics? (4) What are respondents' perceptions of promotional opportunities for employees with diverse characteristics within their organization?

## **Method**

### **Process**

A directory that includes 328 park and recreation departments and park districts was obtained from the Illinois Parks and Recreation Association (IPRA) for this study. The directory was only available as a database and has not been published. The list contained contact information for directors of park and recreation departments and park districts. Researchers emailed survey packets containing a cover letter and a link to an on-line survey to the identified 328 directors. The directors were asked to forward the link to their respective employees and request they complete the survey. However, since it was the directors' voluntary actions to distribute the emails to their employees, the researchers could not track the number of employees in each agency who received the survey. Thus, the exact response rate for this study is not available. A total of 291 park and recreation professionals responded to the survey. 'Professionals' in this study were identified as full-time employees who held paid positions at their organizations and worked at one of the following employee levels (i.e., entry, supervisory, and administrative) in the field of parks and recreation in the state of Illinois.

### **Instrumentation**

One of the main purposes of this study was to assess the perceptions of workplace diversity among park and recreation professionals. To determine this, a two-part survey instrument was developed by the researchers. Part I included demographic items such as age, gender, ethnicity, disability, educational level, leadership layer, and number of years in the current position. Part II consisted of 20 Likert scale items (1=strong disagree, 4=strongly agree) which measured perceptions of workplace diversity. The survey items were based on the Workforce Diversity Questionnaire (Larkey, 1996), the validity of which has been tested

through confirmatory factor analysis and correlations with outside constructs. This scale also provides a set of internally consistent scales and has four subscales (i.e., *inclusion, ideation, understanding, and treatment*). Researchers modified items to reflect the park and recreation workplace, and focused only on four diversity variables (i.e., gender, race, disabilities, and age). The modified survey had four categories: (a) perceptions of organizational efforts toward workplace diversity, (b) 5 perceptions of people with diverse characteristics, (c) 4 perceptions of the representation of the diversity variables and (d) 4 perceptions of promotional opportunities for people with diverse characteristics.

Five of the 20 items measured perceptions of organizational efforts toward workplace diversity. Examples of these items are: (a) Our park district values workplace diversity, (b) The administrators demonstrate a commitment to building a diverse staff, and (c) Our park district makes efforts to provide workplace diversity training (education) programs.

Six items measured perceptions of how comfortable professionals felt working with people of different diversity variables such as age, race, disability, and gender. An example is "People in our park district are comfortable working with people of different races."

One item measured overall perceptions of how comfortable respondents were working with different people. Four items asked respondents' perceptions of the representation of diversity variables in their organization. For example, one question asked, "People with disabilities are represented in our park district." Four items examined perceptions of promotional opportunities for people with diversity variables in the workplace. For example, one question asked, "Promotional opportunity is fair regardless of gender in our park district."

To address the content validity, a panel of experts consisting of two faculty members in a university recreation program, one recreation graduate student, and two practitio-

ners (directors) reviewed the instrument. Since developing a standardized instrument to measure diversity was not the purpose of this study, no further testing of this survey such as factor analysis was conducted. In addition, key statements (i.e., comfortable working with..., promotional opportunities are fair regardless...) in each category were used redundantly for the sub-questions only focusing on the four diversity variables, so the need for a factor analysis was not perceived by the researchers. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the overall instrument (20 items) was .84. This indicates that the instrument was a reliable measure.

### **Data Analysis**

The survey data were automatically put into an Excel file by an on-line survey web site host and managed by a computer specialist at the researchers' university. After the data were forwarded to the researchers it was converted to SPSS 16 for data analyses. Basic descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviation were used, and *t*-tests were employed to examine gender differences on each item.

### **Findings**

This section contains summaries of respondents' diversity profiles. Overall perceptions of workplace diversity are identified and findings about specific research questions, including perceptions of: (a) organizational efforts toward workplace diversity, (b) people with diverse characteristics (i.e., age, race, disability, and gender), (c) the representation of diverse characteristics, and (d) the promotional opportunities for employees with diverse characteristics within their organization are presented.

### **Diversity Profiles Among Professionals in the Field of Parks and Recreation**

Among the total of 291 responses,

48.8% were male and 51.2% were female. Regarding race, 93.5% of respondents were White, followed by African American (3.8%), Hispanic (1.4%), one Asian (.3%), and one Native American respectively (.3%).

Respondents' age ranged from 18 to over 51 years old. Slightly over thirty-five percent (35.1%) of respondents were over 51, 27.5% were between the ages 41-50, 21.3% were 31-40 years old, and 16.2% were between 18-30 years old. In terms of leadership layers, 59.1% of respondents identified themselves as administrative level personnel, 25.1% as supervisory level, and 8.6% as entry level. Thirteen respondents did not answer this question. These two findings indicate that many respondents are mature in terms of age and administrative level. For example, approximately two thirds of the respondents (62.6%) were over 41 years old. Additionally, the study examined the respondents' average year of experience in the field of parks and recreation. The mean years of experience were 9.62 and the median years of experience were 7.58.

In terms of educational background, slightly over half of the respondents (51.9%) had a four-year degree, followed by those with a master's degree (29.9%), those with a two-year degree (8.2%), and those with a high school diploma (8.2%). Two respondents (0.7%) possessed doctoral degrees.

The number of respondents who reported having disabilities was fourteen (4.8%). Among them, seven respondents (2.4%) had a hearing impairment, three respondents (1.0%) had physical disabilities, and three respondents (1.0%) had a visual impairment. One respondent reported having a learning disability (0.3%).

For supplemental information purposes, respondents' perceptions of the majority race of their park districts were also examined. Of the 284 responses to this question, 92.1% perceived they were in white majority districts, 3.4% perceived they were in African American majority districts, and 2.1% perceived they were in Hispanic majority districts. Table 1 summarizes the profile of the respondents in this study.

Table 2 illustrates the diversity profile of the respondents within three leadership layers (i.e., entry, supervisory, and administrative levels). A total of 25 respondents identified themselves as entry level employees. Of the 25 entry level employees, 22 were White, two were African American, and one was Hispanic. Of the 78 respondents who identified themselves in the supervisory leadership layer, 73 were White, two were African American, one was Asian, and one was Hispanic. Of the 175 respondents who categorized themselves as administrators, 164 were White, seven were African American, two were Hispanic, and one was Native American.

In terms of the male to female ratio in each

Table 2: Diversity Profile within Three Leadership Layers

Leadership layers	Non-response	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Native American	Total
Entry	0	0	2	1	22	0	25
Supervisory	1	1	2	1	73	0	78
Administrative	1	0	7	2	164	1	175
Non-response	0	0	0	0	13	0	13
<b>Total</b>	2	1	11	4	272	1	291

Table 1

*Overall Diversity Profile among Professional in Illinois Park Districts (n = 291)*

Race	Frequency	Percent (%)
Asian	1	.3
Black	11	3.8
Hispanic	4	1.4
White	272	93.5
Native American	1	.3
Total missing	2	.7

Gender

Male	138	47.4
Female	145	49.8
Non-Response	8	2.8

Age Group

18-30	47	16.1
31-40	62	21.3
41-50	80	27.5
Over 51	102	35.1

Disabilities

Physical Disability	3	1.0
Hearing Impairment	7	2.4
Vision Impairment	3	1.0
Learning Disability	1	0.3
Mental Illness	0	0.0

Educational Level

High School	24	8.2
2 year degree (AA)	24	8.2
4 year degree (BA/BS)	151	51.9
Master's/Specialist degree	86	29.6
Doctoral degree	2	.7
Total Missing	4	1.4

leadership layer, it was found that there were more female employees within entry and supervisory leadership levels, while there were more male administrators than female administrators. More specifically, out of 25 entry level employees, there were only three male respondents, while there were 22 females within entry level leadership positions. Also, out of 78 supervisory leaders, 45 were female and 28 were male. On the contrary, there were more male administrators ( $n = 104$ ) than female ( $n = 68$ ) (Table 3).

### Overall Perceptions of Workplace Diversity

As presented in table 4, the overall mean score of perception of workplace diversity on all 20 items was 3.17 ( $SD = .52$ ), indicating that respondents had positive perceptions of their workplace diversity (3 = agree). Item 10 asked whether, overall, their park districts demonstrate diverse employee profiles. The mean score for this overall question was 3.04 ( $SD = .74$ ), which indicated that the respondents perceived that there exists diverse employees in terms of the four diversity variables (Table 4).

### Perceptions of Organizational Attitude and Efforts Toward Workplace Diversity

Five items (1, 2, 3, 4, and 6) asked the respondents' perceptions on organizational attitude and efforts toward workplace diversity in

their agencies (Table 4). The mean score of these items was 2.97 ( $SD = .57$ ), which is slightly below 3 (agree). In particular, item 6, "Our park district makes efforts to provide workplace diversity training (or education) programs," showed the lowest mean score ( $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = .69$ ) among all items. This result may indicate that park districts in the state make relatively little efforts to provide workplace diversity training (education) programs. Another item that was below 3 ( $M = 2.91$ ,  $SD = .58$ ) was item 4, "Our park district has helped employees understand the importance of workplace diversity" (table 4).

### Perceptions of People with Diverse Characteristics

A total of six items asked whether park and recreation professionals in Illinois felt comfortable working with people of different personal traits or characteristics (i.e., gender, race, age, and disability). Item 5, an overall perception item for this category, produced the mean of 3.30 ( $SD = .47$ ), which is above 'agree.' More specifically, the respondents answered positively for all six items (7: race, 8 & 20: gender, 11: disability. 12: age). The mean score of the five items was 3.32 ( $SD = .46$ ) (table 4).

In particular, the highest agreement was found with the item 12, "People in our park district are comfortable working with people who

Table 3: Gender Profile within Three Leadership Layers

Leadership layers	Non-response	Male	Female	Total
Entry	0	3	22	25
Supervisory	5	28	45	78
Administrative	3	104	68	175
Non-response	0	3	10	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>291</b>

Table 4: Mean Score of Employees perception on the dependent variables

Items #	Item	Mean Score	SD
<b>Overall Diversity Profile</b>			
Item 10.	Demonstrates diverse employee profiles	3.04	.74
<b>Organizational Attitude and Effort</b>			
Item 1.	Workplace diversity is important issue	3.13	.48
Item 2.	Park District Values workplace diversity	3.10	.53
Item 3.	Adm. Committed to build diverse staff	3.00	.59
Item 4.	Helped employees understand importance	2.91	.58
Item 6.	Effort to provide diversity training	2.70	.69
Subtotal		2.97	.57
<b>Overall Perception of Different People</b>			
Item 5.	Comfortable working with different people	3.30	.47
<b>Emotional Comfort Level with People with the Diversity Variables</b>			
Item 7.	Comfortable working with people of races	3.25	.50
Item 8	.Males comfortable working with females	3.35	.46
Item 11.	Comfortable working with disabled people	3.20	.53
Item 12.	Comfortable working with different age group	3.45	.44
Item 20.	Females comfortable working with males	3.37	.39
Subtotal		3.32	.46
<b>Representation of the Diversity Variables</b>			
Item 9.	Women are represented in all levels	3.36	.48
Item 13.	Different ethnicities represented	2.93	.61
Item 14.	People with disabilities represented	2.75	.67
Item 15.	Various age range work in the park district	3.39	.45
Subtotal		3.10	.55
<b>Promotional Opportunities for People with Diverse Characteristics</b>			
Item 16.	Promotions fair regardless of age	3.32	.42
Item 17.	Promotions fair regardless of disability	3.20	.52
Item 18.	Promotions fair regardless of race	3.27	.48
Item 19.	Promotions fair regardless of gender	3.33	.39
Subtotal		3.28	.45
Overall Mean Score		3.17	.52

are in different age groups,” with a mean score of 3.45 ( $SD = .44$ ). This indicates that the age differences did not usually cause uncomfortable feelings among the respondents in Illinois park districts. The second highest score was found with item 20 (“Female staff are comfortable working with male staff”) ( $M = 3.37, SD = .39$ ), followed by item 8 (“Male staff are comfortable working with female staff”) ( $M = 3.35, SD = .46$ ), then item 7 (“Comfortable with working with people of different races”) ( $M = 3.25, SD = .50$ ), and item 11 (“Comfortable working with people with disabilities”) ( $M = 3.20, SD = .53$ ) (table 4).

### **Perceptions of the Representation of People with Diverse Characteristics**

Four items (9, 13, 14, & 15) asked whether the respondents perceived that people with diverse characteristics (i.e., age, race, gender, disability) are represented in their park districts. The mean score of the total of these items was 3.10 ( $SD = .55$ ), which indicates ‘agree.’ While the mean scores for item 15 (age,  $M = 3.39, SD = .45$ ) and 9 (gender, mean = 3.36,  $SD = .48$ ) were above 3 (agree), the item 13 (race,  $M = 2.93, SD = .61$ ) and 14 (disability, mean = 2.75,  $SD = .67$ ) showed relatively low mean scores. Overall, the respondents perceived that the representation of people of different races and with disabilities were not as visible as the representations of different age and gender groups (table 4).

### **Perceptions of the Promotional Opportunities for Employees with Diverse Characteristics**

Table 4 represents a total of four items (16, 17, 18, & 19) which asked if the respondents think promotional opportunities are fair for people with the diverse characteristics. The respondents provided positive answers for the four items. More specifically, the highest agreement was found with item 19 (gender,  $M = 3.33, SD = .39$ ), followed by item 16 (age,  $M = 3.32, SD = .42$ ), item 18 (race,  $M = 3.27, SD = .48$ ), and item 17 (disability,  $M = 3.20, SD = .52$ ). Although

all scores are above ‘agree,’ it may be noted that the study results show slightly, but relatively lower, scores for people with different races and with disabilities than those for people with other diversity variables. This result is consistent with the results in the previous section.

### **Discussion**

This study revealed the diversity profiles among park and recreation professionals in Illinois. In terms of race, respondents were predominantly white ( $n = 93.5\%$ ). According to U.S. Census data (U.S. Census, 2005-2009), in Illinois, 71.9% of the population were White, 14.7% were African American, 14.6% were Hispanic, 4.2% were Asian, and less than 1% were Native American. Further, the same U.S. Census data (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009), showed that 74.5% of the U.S. population were White, 15.1% were Hispanic, 12.4% were African American, 4.4% were Asian (4.4%), and .1% were Native American. Thus, the current racial profile in this study of Illinois park and recreation professionals did not reflect current racial demographic profiles in Illinois or the United States.

In terms of gender diversity among respondents, an even distribution was identified with a gender ratio of males at 49.1% to females at 50.9%, closely reflecting current gender ratios in both Illinois and the U.S. (males at 49.2% to females at 50.8% in Illinois, and males at 49.3% to females at 50.7%, in the U.S.).

In this study, the ages of the respondents were relatively high, and 60.1% of the respondents ( $n = 175$ ) reported themselves as administrators. Although data for age distribution among the field of parks and recreation professionals in Illinois are not available, this pattern of age distribution may be a limitation for generalization since there was proportionally high number of administrators in this study. Therefore, it should be noted that the results of this study may only be valid for the respon-

dents of this study.

Among the 175 respondents who identified themselves as administrators, 93.7% were White and 59.4% were male. That is, the respondents in administrative positions were predominantly white and mostly male. Among respondents who identified themselves as entry level, 88% were White and 88% of those were female. That is, White females were the dominant population in the entry level positions in this study. At the supervisory level, 35.9% were male, which is a higher percentage compared to that in the entry level. However, females were still the majority gender (64.1%) at the supervisory level. These results may possibly indicate that although there are many more female employees at the entry level, fewer numbers of female employees are either promoted to or hired as administrative level professionals. While there are no previous data available regarding the racial distribution among professionals in the field of parks and recreation, the findings of the previous study (Anderson, 2000) concerning male to female ratios in each position level are consistent with the results of this study. Anderson reported that there were more females in supervisory positions and less number of females in administrative positions. However, these study results do not reveal information on whether there exists discrimination in hiring and promotion process based on employees' racial and gender status.

Only 4.8% of respondents reported having some type of disability. This is low compared to the average percentage of people with disabilities in Illinois and the United States. According to the Center for Personal Assistance Services (2008-2009), 10.4% of Illinois residents ages 18 and over reported having a disability. The U.S. Census Bureau (2005-2007), shows approximately 12.3% of people between the ages of 16 and 64 had certain types of disabilities. Therefore, the employee disability profile of parks and recreation in Illinois did not reflect the current disability profile in the United

States.

As a second part of this study, perceptions of diversity in the respondents' workplaces were examined. Overall, the respondents reported positive perceptions of their workplace diversity. However, there were discrepancies in the perceptions of some diversity variables between male and female. These were anticipated results because of the unbalanced gender profiles in the three leadership levels (i.e., entry, supervisory, administrator) between male and female employees. Therefore, additional statistics were obtained to examine more detailed information about the perceptions of each gender.

First of all, for the overall perception of diverse employee profiles (item 10), a significant mean difference was found between male (3.16) and female (2.94) ( $t = .011$ ), which indicated that male and female employees showed slightly different perceptions of diversity in their workplace. Differences between male and female respondents were found with one item in each of the first three subcategories (i.e., organizational effort (item 3), different people (8), representation of the diversity variables (13)). In particular, in the fourth subcategory (promotional opportunities), female respondents reported significantly low mean scores than male respondents did on all of the four items. It is interesting that both males ( $M = 3.39$ ) and females ( $M = 3.17$ ) responded positively that they perceived fairness on promotional opportunities for people with the diversity variables. However, the levels of their perceptions on the fairness were somewhat different. In particular, among the four diversity characteristics (i.e., age, disability, race, and gender), perceptions by males and females showed the most significant mean difference on the promotional opportunity. That is, male respondents possessed more positive perceptions about the promotional opportunity regardless of gender, and female respondents showed relatively less positive perceptions about the

opportunity. This difference may imply that the possibility of actual difference on promotional opportunities between genders cannot be excluded based on this study result (Table 5).

Among the four subscales of diversity variables in this study (i.e., organizational efforts, people with disability variables, representations of the diversity variables, and promotional opportunities), the only subscale that showed a mean score below 3 was the perception of organizational efforts toward workplace diversity. Although it is close to 3 (agree), it may be an area for improvement. In particular, relatively low scores on the items 4 (2.91) and 6 (2.70) may suggest that more organizational efforts that would promote workplace diversity and the importance of diversity in their organizations may be needed.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In sum, administrators in the field of parks and recreation in Illinois perceive that workplace diversity is important in their organizations, and they may need to make more efforts to provide diversity education and training for their employees. All staff would benefit from a stronger diverse workplace with diversity awareness being an important value in their agencies. If parks and recreation departments and park districts are to be used as a way to build a diverse community, parks and recreation employees need to be in a position to understand diversity and educate other members, as well as have more representation of the growing diversity in the United States.

Although the respondents, overall, agreed there is some level of diversity in their agencies, there is still some work to be done in this area. For example, white females are represented in the entry level and supervisory level positions, yet white males are the dominant employee group in administrative roles. Also, employees from minority groups and those with disabilities seem to be underrepresented in parks and recreation departments and park dis-

tricts in Illinois. Thus, more efforts to recruit and retain these diverse groups are needed.

As illustrated in the literature review, the creation of the Culturally Diverse Program Division by a group of individuals in North Carolina presents a good model for other states to follow. For example, park and recreation professionals in other states may form a diversity committee and provide educational opportunities, including workshops, conference presentations, and diversity training courses within their state's professional park and recreation association.

The relatively low score on 'the organizational efforts toward workplace diversity may indicate that more organized ways of diversity education and training programs for employees is needed. An effective strategy that would promote diversity education and training program for agencies has been suggested by McArthur (2010). She recommended a four-step process for managing diversity in an agency. The first step is to recognize the economic consequences of diversity to the business. For example, when lacking diversity in their organizations, they may lose productivity, there may be employee turnover, and potential employment law mistakes may exist. To avoid these consequences, they need to first recognize this possible deficiency and acknowledge the need to develop effective strategies for increasing and managing diversity. The second step is to develop specific strategies for managing diversity. This step suggests that leaders and employees must communicate about the need for diversity management and form a diversity council (or committee). During this step, if funds are available, funding may be allocated for the formation of a diversity council or committee, diversity assessment, and employee training. Thirdly, the council or committee should establish an action plan (goals and objectives), conduct the initial diversity assessment, and provide actual diversity training programs. Lastly, the diversity strategies should be evaluated as an on-going process.

Table 5: Overall Mean Score and Comparison of Gender Difference(s) on the Dependent Variables

Items #	Item	Male	Female	t-score	F
<b>Overall Diversity Profile</b>					
Item 10.	Demonstrates diverse employee profiles	3.16	2.94	2.57	.011*
<b>Organizational Attitude and Effort</b>					
Item 1.	Workplace diversity is important issue	3.20	3.07	1.61	.109
Item 2.	Park District Values workplace diversity	3.17	3.03	1.40	.164
Item 3.	Adm. Committed to build diverse staff	3.11	2.90	2.70	.007**
Item 4.	Helped employees understand importance	2.98	2.85	1.50	.135
Item 6.	Effort to provide diversity training	2.73	2.66	.75	.453
Subtotal		3.03	2.90	1.50	.135
<b>Overall Perception of Different People</b>					
Item 5.	Comfortable working with different people	3.35	3.26	1.25	.212
<b>Emotional Comfort Level with People with the Diversity Variables</b>					
Item 7.	Comfortable working with people of races	3.31	3.18	1.82	.070
Item 8	.Males comfortable working with females	3.45	3.23	2.86	.005**
Item 11.	Comfortable working with disabled people	3.17	3.23	-.78	.439
Item 12.	Comfortable working with different age group	3.50	3.38	1.83	.069
Item 20.	Females comfortable working with males	3.37	3.35	.29	.788
Subtotal		3.40	3.27	1.82	.070
<b>Representation of the Diversity Variables</b>					
Item 9.	Women are represented in all levels	3.41	3.29	1.31	.190
Item 13.	Different ethnicities represented	3.03	2.84	2.12	.035*
Item 14.	People with disabilities represented	2.72	2.76	-.38	.702
Item 15.	Various age range work in the park district	3.36	3.33	1.70	.090
Subtotal		3.13	3.06	1.50	.135
<b>Promotional Opportunities for People with Diverse Characteristics</b>					
Item 16.	Promotions fair regardless of age	3.43	3.21	3.15	.002**
Item 17.	Promotions fair regardless of disability	3.31	3.09	2.49	.013**
Item 18.	Promotions fair regardless of race	3.37	3.17	2.35	.020*
Item 19.	Promotions fair regardless of gender	3.46	3.19	3.62	.000**
Subtotal		3.39	3.17	2.72	.006**
Overall Mean Score		3.23	3.10	1.38	.168

Specifically, the education and training programs for parks and recreation agencies can focus on: (a) diversity as a value of the field of parks and recreation, (b) effective communication between employee groups, (c) improved recruitment, retention, and promotion of women, minorities, and persons with disabilities, and (d) the benefits associated with a diverse workforce, which include the ability to serve a larger target population effectively and a more productive, creative work environment. In addition to staff training within their agencies, park and recreation employees may work with other departments and local government agencies to offer diversity awareness training. This can include partnerships and collaboration among agencies to improve the diversity in their workplace. For example, organizations can invite personnel who are responsible for diversity training at another agency and ask them to share their diversity strategies and ideas.

One of the study limitations is that about 60% of the respondents were administrators. Thus, the overall perception on the diversity may not be an accurate representation of all employee levels of parks and recreation professionals. That is, there would be possible perception differences among the professional levels. Therefore, further studies may examine perceptions on diversity among different professional levels. The potential difference in opinion of these employee groups may cause communication problems between them and/or impact future recruitment and retention efforts. Again, this is an area that should be an important agenda for parks and recreation professionals.

Another study limitation may include the lack of information about the reliability of this survey. Although the purpose of this study was not to develop a standardized instrument to measure diversity perception, a more systematic way to test its reliability and validity needs to be conducted. Thus, in future studies, researchers may work on the development of a

standardized instrument to specifically measure workplace diversity in parks and recreation.

Lastly, survey items contained the term park districts. Such terminology may have produced confusion to those who work in park and recreation departments. In the future, the instrument should contain item revisions so that the term park and recreation agency is used in place of park district.

A future research recommendation is to conduct a similar study using a larger population for more accurate results. A similar study could also include recreational departments as well as park districts. A longitudinal study is also recommended to determine whether professionals' perceptions on diversity change over time.

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