Factors Differentiating Water-Based Wildland Recreationists from Nonparticipants: Implications for Recreation Activity Instruction

Robert D. Bixler
Beverly Morris

ABSTRACT: An exploratory study was conducted comparing life experiences of participants and nonparticipants in canoeing and kayaking. The study sought to identify distinctions between the two groups beyond the obvious difference that participants know activity-specific skills. This information was sought by a park district in order to critically examine programming strategies designed to introduce youth to wildland recreation activities. Park staff believed that a different type of programming needed to be offered to children and youth from homes where the family was disinterested in outdoor recreation. They reasoned that a detailed understanding of the subtle socialization forces at work in families with positive attitudes toward wildland recreation might allow programmers to mimic these forces in programming. This strategy may increase the chances that program participants would later, as young adults, develop a sustained interest in wildland recreation activities.

Life history narratives were conducted with canoeists and kayakers and a contrast group of disinterested nonparticipants. Analysis consisted of identifying the differences in their experiences growing up, as well as how the two groups perceived themselves as differing from each other. Paddlers had accumulated a large number of varied outdoor experiences, while nonparticipants had few if any experiences with wildland environments and activities. Results suggested that introduction to wildland recreation activities involve not just the development of skills specific to the activity but also competence in related activities such as wayfinding, travel planning, swimming ability, physical comfort and interest in wildland environments, and tolerance for full-body contact with natural bodies of water. Several support or ancillary skills made either the activity possible (wayfinding and travel planning) or the activity seem safer (swimming). A wildland environmental socialization process, in which the person becomes comfortable and confident in wild environments, regardless of the activity in which they are participating, may be essential. Being in a supportive and enthusiastic social group provides positive social reinforcement and a buffer from ridicule by outsiders.

An "Outdoor Club" approach to programming in which an intact group of children regularly take trips with the same adults may be an optimal method to target youth from disinterested families. This strategy allows programmers to make sure the participants learn ancillary, as well as wildland recreation activity skills, and provide frequent outdoor experiences in a supportive social group. Additionally, park districts may also wish to work closely with organizations such as Sierra Club's Inner City Outings which already have some of the program elements identified in this research. In contrast, programs touted as introducing underrepresented populations to outdoor recreation that only involve a single contact should be viewed with skepticism.

AUTHORS: Rob Bixler Assistant Professor, Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management, 263 Lehtsky Hall, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634-1005. Beverly was a Post-Doctoral Research Associate, Cleveland Metroparks, 4101 Fulton Parkway, Cleveland OH 44144. Address correspondence to the first author. Partial funding for this project came from North Central Forest Experiment Station, Evanston, IL and Cleveland Metroparks Division of Marketing and Visitor Services

Introduction

Identifying meaningful distinctions between individuals involved in wildland recreation and those lacking interest can provide an enriched understanding of recreation socialization processes and guidance for recreation programmers and administrators. A key concern is the adequacy of instruction in wildland recreation activities for children and youth from families who have no previous experience with these activities. Many agencies provide programs that seek to introduce people to wildland recreation activities, striving to diversify participation. These programs should be judged effective only if they result in enduring involvement. The results of this study raise questions about the adequacy of wildland recreation activity curricula that are limited to the teaching of fundamental skills.

There are few known distinctions between participants and nonparticipants in wildland recreation. Most studies focus on demographic characteristics, citing race, gender, economic level, social class, and place of residence as significantly related to participation rates (Dwyer, 1994; Romas & Hoffinan, 1980; Walker, 1995). While these data raise awareness, they provide little specific information about which social forces are operating within demographic groups that are less active in wildland recreation activities. Nor do they provide guidance as to what should be accomplished with children from groups underrepresented in wildland recreation such that they will eventually develop the desire and skills to participate in wildland recreation activities independently as young adults.

In-depth research about canoeists and kayakers consists primarily of studies of paddlers using spectacular wilderness lakes and wild and scenic rivers. Issues addressed in these studies include motivation, specialization, sensation seeking, social groupings, experience-use history and desire for solitude (Campbell, Tyrrell, & Zingaro, 1993; Ewert & Holland, 1989; Knopf, Peterson, & Leatherbery, 1983; McCool, 1978; Schutt, 1993; Schutt, 1999). Lacking contrast groups, these studies tell little about the nature of nonparticipants, many of whom might also have high sensation-seeking scores or desire for solitude.
Increasing the diversity of participants in wildland recreation will have benefits to both the participants and organizations that manage wildland areas (Dwyer, 1994). Participation in wildland recreation activities can contribute developmentally-important experiences for youth and help expand support for natural-resource parks beyond their traditional constituencies. From a developmental perspective, individuals who become involved in wildland recreation can develop a sense of comfort and competence in yet another physical environment and social milieu in addition to learning specialized skills and vocabulary (Driver, Brown, & Peterson, 1990). To the extent that wildland recreationists are attentive to the natural, historic and cultural/historic points of interest found in and near wildland areas they visit, much incidental learning can occur, benefiting the participants in school achievement (Chipinik, 1995; Jackson, 1987; Roggenbuck & Loomis, 1990). For some, participation in wildland recreation may play a role in their choosing a conservation-related career (Chawla, 1998).

While brief exposure to wildland recreation activities is of some value to children and youth, programmers should strive to offer instruction that provides a firm experiential foundation for eventual enthusiastic adoption of the activity in adult life. A minimal introduction of youth to a recreation activity usually involves teaching the necessary skills and providing opportunities for practice.

Unfortunately, it may not be that simple. Positive attitudes toward being in the environment in which an activity takes place may need to be developed. Limited and indirect evidence for this comes from landscape perception research which suggests that preference for thickly wooded wildland environments is limited to a small percentage of the population. Most individuals prefer orderly landscape scenes with moderate tree density and relatively free of underbrush (Appleton, 1975; Schroeder, 1986; Schroeder, 1989; Ulrich, 1986). The minority, who prefer more dense vegetation or prefer tall vegetation in fields instead of manicured areas, grow up in rural areas, are members of conservation and wildflower clubs or were involved in wildland recreation (Dearden, 1984; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Nassauer, 1993).

A related study, limited to middle school students in Texas, documented the types of negative perceptions held towards wildlands, at least for this age group (Bixler & Floyd, 1997). Wildland-related fears, disgust sensitivity and desire for modern comforts were related to lower preference for wildland recreation, interest in outdoor vocations and environmental education activities. Also, LaPage and Cormier (1977) identified the dirtiness of camping as a singular barrier to participation. These studies suggest that negative perceptions of wildlands are related to lower preference for the activities dependent on them.

Lack of ancillary skills may also limit participation. Using multiple regional and national data sets, Dwyer (1994) found that participation in a range of wildland recreation activities by African-Americans was significantly lower than that of whites, although both groups had low participation rates. Differences were greatest for water-based activities. It may be more than a coincidence that minority participation rates in swimming are also lower than whites resulting in their underrepresentation in careers and sports requiring swimming skills (Mael, 1995; Palinkas, 1985). One of the skills that may make canoeing or kayaking more appealing is well-developed swimming skills since these boats do tip over easily. But this is only an hypothesis since no studies could be found addressing the issue.

Earlier studies have documented the correlation between exposure during childhood and participation as adults, particularly with outdoor recreation activities (Scott & Willis, 1989; Sofranko & Nolan, 1972; Yoesting & Burkhead, 1973; Yoesting & Christensen, 1978). Yet little is understood about what experiences or combinations of experiences contribute to one becoming an avid participant in wildland recreation.

Current research-based understandings of the socialization of wildland recreationists is dependent on a few studies correlating childhood participation with adult participation. The details of what happens during the recreation activity socialization process can only be tenuously inferred from disparate studies, most of which were conducted for other purposes. This project starts the process of identifying, in a more holistic manner, the details of the socialization processes that contribute to canoeing and kayaking becoming part of a person's leisure repertoire.

Method

Interviews were conducted with ten dedicated and four casual canoeists and kayakers, and ten individuals not involved in these activities (n=24). Participants included six professionals working as outfitters, park naturalists, or in scouting. The remaining non-professionals were recruited at a canoeing event, and through a screening questionnaire given to seasonal employees working at a zoo in a large metropolitan area. Non-participants in water-based wildland recreation were recruited from a park district employee list or from the same pool of seasonal zoo employees. All participants were between 18 and 33 years of age with equal numbers of males and females. The questions were designed to elicit from participants descriptions of outdoor experiences they had had during childhood, teenage and early adult years. A significant life experiences approach favored by environmental education researchers studying the socialization experiences of conservation leaders was used (Chawla, 1998; Chawla & Hart, 1988; Palmer, 1993; Tanner, 1980). This method involves asking individuals with firmly established interests to explain how, over time, they believe they became involved in an activity or career. Questioning also encouraged informants to explain how they believe they are different from individuals who do not share their interests.
Each interview was conducted by one of two individuals. A majority of interviews were conducted by a medical anthropologist with no background in leisure and recreation research. The remaining five interviews were conducted by an individual with a graduate degree in recreation resource management. Recordings of the interviews were transcribed and then reviewed and discussed by the research team. Using a qualitative research software package, text were coded that illustrated relevant concepts that contributed positively or negatively to participation in outdoor activities, particularly canoeing and kayaking. The software package allowed retrieval of text illustrating socialization concepts sorted by whether informants were or were not active in water-based wildland recreation activities.

Results

Each concept is described, followed by illustrative statements from paddlers, and contrast statements from nonparticipants where available. Throughout the text, the terms "canoeists and kayaker," "paddlers" and "boaters" are used interchangeably in the same manner that informants used the terms.

Preference for Outside Physical Activity

The first two concepts are broad orientations labeled "outside preferred" and "physical activities preferred." While these are presented as separate concepts, they were so intertwined they might be subsumed under one concept of "outdoor physical activity preferred."

Outside preferred refers to an individual identifying his/herself as someone who would rather be outside during leisure time, whether or not they are in a natural-resource setting. How the preference developed is unclear in some cases, but outside settings are seen as more dynamic than indoor settings by some informants. For example, Informant 7 plays volleyball both indoors and outdoors, but definitely prefers to play outside: "I enjoy volleyball especially when it’s played outdoors. When we started playing indoor, there was something about it that I just didn’t like as much."

Referring to outdoor recreation, Informant 5 states: "Camping or cycling involves being outside and that’s one of the main driving forces; I like to be outside." While these two statements describe current preferences, Informant 18 reflected on this same preference during youth: "I never went to the YMCA or boys’ and girls’ club. That was all boring. I always wanted to be outdoors."

No one interviewed expressed a completely negative view of being outside, but the definition of "outdoors" was open to interpretation. For example, when asked about outdoor activity, Informant 17 responded, "Outdoors at Disney (World) was always fun." "Would you consider going to an Indians’ baseball game outdoors?"Creating her own quantitative scale as a communication strategy, this same informant describes her level of interest in the outdoors as "Probably a five. It’s not like I’m totally environmentally crazed, and it’s not like I don’t think about the environment or nature at all. I like the outdoors and I like being outdoors, but only to an extent."

Some informants liked only certain aspects of being outside. Informant 22 viewed the outdoors as a lesser alternative: "You can’t stay inside all the time, but I don’t do too much outdoors."

The concept, "Physical Activity Preferred" involved awareness that physical activity provided the informants with benefits such as transportation, recreation, exercise, or competition. Most informants preferred physically active life styles, expressing a positive view often related to exercise and challenge:

We play basketball every day at lunch. I look stupid doing it, but I do it every day, mostly for health reasons. It’s good cardiovascular exercise. (Informant 9)

I think it is important to do all these things (outdoor recreation activities) with your children because you’re making them well-rounded, and you don’t want them to be couch potatoes. There is more to life than sitting on the couch watching TV. (Informant 20)

Outside activities that were also physical were considered optimal. Paddlers consistently paired the two concepts outside preferred and physical preferred:

When I was younger, it was more just going outside and doing it. I still love that aspect of just getting outside, but I really like the aspect of working hard, and I find that I now look for a combination, like when I go out to ice climb, I go out to climb hard, but also to be outside, because it’s a combination. Or when I go out to ski, it’s to be outside, but it’s also to get a workout and ski hard. (Informant 14)

Another informant expressed preference for exercising in outdoor settings because they are dynamic compared to built environments: "You could hike on a treadmill for twenty minutes or you could go to a place that has a trail and walk for a mile and do it that way, and that’s the part of it that I like, is that you always can see something different, walk the same trail, paddle the same river, three times in a row. Something’s different every single time, you’ll notice one new thing."

Unstructured Childhood Play and Exploration

The development of many wildland skills and attitudes may have had their genesis through unstructured childhood play in natural areas. Most paddlers had at least some experiences playing outdoors in wild or semi-
wild areas. These experiences may have provided opportunities to learn
wayfinding skills in unstructured settings, develop tolerance for irritants
associated with wildlands, and to observe, learn about and develop interest
in a range of natural phenomena. Female informants who played outdoors
during childhood were aware that their preferences were different from
other girls they knew. They often referred to themselves as tomboys:

Mostly on my street were boys and I loved playing with them.
We'd be climbing the cliffs, looking for frogs and snakes and
burning ants with the magnifying glass." (Informant 14)

I spent a lot of time in the woods. I had a pocket knife and used
to carve wood and we would just go out in the woods and do all
kinds of woody things. I was always doing stuff with the boys,
playing with the boys. I was always doing really tomboyish type
stuff, like playing in the trees. (Informant 15)

In contrast, the female informants with current low levels of outdoor
interest reported mostly traditional play with dolls and a limited home
range as Informant 22 describes: "My favorite childhood place was
probably my backyard. Just because I felt safe. We played Barbies. We would put
my cat in the baby carriage and take him for a walk down the street."

Sometimes, childhood exploration was limited by the type or layout of
the neighborhood. Informant 9 states: I went from going to school, to in
front of my house, to behind my house." A similar restriction was reported
by Informant 17: "We were pretty much confined to our backyard. I guess
that would have been my favorite place because that would have been my
only place."

Informants not currently strong on outdoor interests sometimes
reported a childhood dominated by organized sports. Parents were often
the impetus, although the informants often spoke of these activities in the
same positive way as paddlers describe their experiences:

I did softball, basketball, cheer leading. In the real early years
we did some gymnastic, baton type stuff, but that was early, before
even junior high. I did softball summer leagues through high
school. My parents just generally wanted to get us involved in any
type of organized thing, including organized sports. (Informant 17)

Organized sports are a great thing for kids. I played organized
softball when I was a kid for two years. I was very bad at it, but I
played and even though I felt bad because I would let the team
down sometimes, it was nice to be part of a team. (Informant 9)

Tolerance for Weather Extremes

Tolerance for weather extremes is related to preference for the out-
doors and appears to develop both through childhood play and exploration
outdoors and role models. Most informants did not let rain, snow or cold
deter them or keep them from having valued outdoor experiences since
accommodations could be made for bad weather. They also tended to be
aware that they were different from others in this regard:

People always say, "It's rainy today, we can't go anywhere." I
don't wake up with those types of feelings. There's a blizzard, I'm
out buzzing around. (Informant 2)

Weather, you just got to dress for it, you got to know what
you're up against. You make the necessary arrangements or the
changes in order to do what you really want to do. (Informant 12)

Weather extremes were not just viewed as something that could be
compensated for with clothing. Facing the vagaries of weather somehow
connected some informants more directly to elemental nature and even
enhanced the experience:

Somehow my desire to be outside and my desire to be more
with nature, that's something I like about these trips. It's like you
become in harmony, everything matters, the rain matters, the
clouds matter. It's not quite that insulation we have against what's
going on out there. There is something you get from being
outside, away from everyone else, with the elements. That's why
we do it, where you're part of it, you're not protected from it.
People who really work hard to control their climate are absolutely
fooled by the whole prospect of camping. Those are the people
who always like the air conditioning on in their house and don't
want to put a sweater on in the winter, would rather turn up the
heat. (Informant 4)

The role of a supportive social group was evident in the development
of attitudes towards weather conditions. Some parents played a role
in helping develop a tolerance for varying weather conditions: "My father is
a very positive kind of guy; if it's any type of weather he's out and about and
doing things and saying, 'Isn't it great?'" (Informant 2) Another informant
(7) describes similar interactions:

My parents, they're very outdoorsy people. We've always
done things outdoors. It's like my parents' philosophy, rain or
shine. Tomorrow will be a better day, you wait and see and if it is
still raining, but we always had fun and that was never a factor.

Informants without an active interest in water-based wildland recre-
ation were more likely to see weather as a constraint. Describing his only
childhood tent camping experience Informant 11 states: "We were sup-
posed to make fires to keep warm and all that kind of stuff. It rained for a lot of it. I didn’t really like it." Informant 12 describes a similar experience: "I tried tent camping in the backyard when we were kids and it rained, I just wanted in the house. I’m not the outdoors type."

Wayfinding in Unstructured Environments
Exploration during childhood play provided many learning opportunities including developing and practicing wayfinding skills in wildland areas. These experiences led to a feeling of competency and possibly even a tolerance for being temporarily lost. Informant 1 describes her rural home this way:

There was a creek and a large undeveloped wooded area, very hilly. I would hike, sort of fantasize about different places where I might be exploring. I spent a lot of time in the woods, just roaming around, either alone or with kids. There was enough space then that I could do that and explore and build forts.

Other informants living in suburban or urban areas had less access to large tracts of land, but found opportunities for exploration while visiting relatives:

Most traveling was done to see relatives. It was a very rural area. I think I picked up a lot of outdoor or animal or country related things from that. The area was very rural, with a lot of woods and most of my uncles were into fishing and hunting.

No description of exploration of wild unstructured environments was found among those not active in wildland recreation. It is possible that they did not have these experiences or if they did, they were not memorable or deemed important enough to mention.

Travel Planning Skills
Travel planning skills are important for anyone wishing to reach a destination and the longer or more complex the trip, the greater the need for planning. Travel skills were well developed among paddlers and even many of the nonparticipants. Travel as children with parents or scouts provided opportunities to develop this ability. If the parent or other adult did not directly teach the child information gathering and problem solving steps for planning a trip, numerous opportunities occurred where the child could learn through observation, as Informant 12 describes: "My parents would make plans to go certain places and we really couldn't deviate from that — having a certain time schedule and certain expenses." Informant 6 describes a less rigid schedule but one with many learning opportunities:

I had to have been maybe six or seven years old when we went out west for two months. Got in the car and put a canoe on top. We literally took off for two months and just went everywhere.

Travel experiences also came from participating in scouting as Informant 3 recalls: "We got to go places, go to the Smoky Mountains or to Kentucky. And just being out, away... It was a great adventure for us."

In contrast, some individuals reporting no current outdoor interests may not have traveled much as children due to lack of parents’ interest or economic barriers. Sometimes the entire extended family lived in the informant’s neighborhood as Informant 9 states: "There really was no travel involved in visiting my family."

Supportive Social Group
A persistent theme in all interviews with paddlers was the existence of a supportive social group in the informants’ lives. Even with unstructured play experiences, parents and peers supported or, at least tolerated playing outdoors and provided opportunities through the location of their home or choice of weekend trips. Informant 18 gave almost complete credit to his father: "My dad. Learned camping from my dad. Survival in the woods - my dad. Building traps, hunting, canoeing, boating, all from my dad."

Other informants provided different perspectives on parental influences:

Both my parents are very interested in nature and wildlife, but my mom in particular. She had a science background — she was always looking at plants with me when I was young. We’d just kind of crouched down and looked at plants, touching and feeling them. (Informant 1)

"I have real strong memories of going to Arizona. It was a once-removed uncle kind of situation, but we went out into the desert and looked for creatures. Hiked around, looked for petrified wood and creatures in the desert." (Informant 3)

If parents and relatives did not provide outdoor opportunities then that role was often taken over by institutions, particularly the traditional outdoor-oriented institutions such as Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts and summer camps. Several instances were mentioned in which girls participated in scouting activities through the Boy Scouts. These "closet Boy Scouts" included girls who had tried Girl Scouts but for various reasons dropped out:

I was in Brownies for like a week. I was a tomboy and dealing with all the little girls, they wanted to do macrame and I wanted to go out and play in the mud. My brother was in Boy Scouts and..."
my dad was the leader and my mom was the den mother so I hung out with the guys. I did a lot of camping with them. (Informant 24)

There is also evidence that there is interaction among peers who contributed either positive or negative social support. Some informants involved in outdoor activities, particularly in scouting, reported negative peer pressure from uninvolved friends. This was a problem, particularly in adolescence, as Informant 4 explains: "When you're a Girl Scout in high school, you're a geek anyway." Membership in the Boy Scouts was also an issue:

Someone comes up to you and sees you in a (Boy Scout) uniform and says, 'Oh, man, I had no idea,' and starts to give you a hard time and you say, 'I was in Australia over Christmas break because of it. Where were you?' It kind of stops conversation with that. (Informant 6)

Peers who had access to outdoor experiences provided positive opportunities for their friends. Informant 14, who was introduced to outdoor activities by her parents at their lake-shore cottage, remembered "doing outdoor activities with my parents and then in high school I remember me being the one organizing it for my friends." Peers can also reinforce each other's interests. Informant 4 describes planning bike trips to the parks with a girl friend: "We'd plan it for days in advance. Sometimes we would invite the boys to go with us, but we'd do all the planning for them." The two girls also expanded each other's perspectives through sharing experiences:

She belonged to her school's outing club. I remember her telling me about some of the things she did with them, things (I had never really done). For instance, snowshoeing. I never would have thought about snowshoeing until she told me what a good time she had snowshoeing — she adventures with me.

Negative social support or lack of social support for developing outdoor activities was described by some informants who were nonparticipants: Informant 17 describes pressure to stay clean and ladylike: "My mom was very, you know, you must be prim, you must be proper, dress nicely, don't get dirty. Getting dirty was bad."

Also, these individuals mentioned amusement parks as major travel destinations in childhood. While this was not a negative influence, there was no evidence of interest in their families in wildland recreation or parks. These families may have been outdoor neutral:

We've been to California. When we were there we visited Disney World and like the theme parks. We never went to Yellowstone Park or anything like that. In Florida we went to Disney World, beaches and theme parks, to Busch Gardens in Florida. I am trying to think if we went to any national parks. (Informant 10)

Water-Related Issues

Without having even mentioned water, boaters could be distinguished from most of the nonparticipants by play experiences, attitudes of parents and peers and travel experiences. But many of these concepts would also distinguish land-only wildland recreationists from nonparticipants. This establishes a two-tiered system of skills and attitudes. The first tier covers development of general comfort and competencies in wildland environments, the second, illustrates the attitudes and skills related to water which are important in distinguishing paddlers from all other recreationists.

Interest in Water Activities

Both paddlers and nonparticipants expressed an overwhelming preference for viewing waterscapes. Boaters also stated a positive attitude for water when describing their favorite places, past or present, or indirectly by describing their concept of what an ideal home and setting would be. These quotes from paddlers suggest their interest in water is more intense than nonparticipants:

I will stay down by the water and my wife thinks it's crazy, but sometimes I'll want to sit there and I'll just watch the water and see how it's moving around. It's more of an interest in the water. Hiking along those (creeks) and seeing the water, seeing how it affects the rocks and things like that, it's always been kind of fascinating to me. (Informant 5)

I think my favorite places are probably like woody areas with big lakes in them. I like lakes. I like to see the water. I don't know why. I think it's tranquil. (Informant 16)

The lake, the parks. I like to be by water. I am very water oriented. If I can find a stream I will sit at the stream. Anywhere near water, it's important. (Informant 24)

Some informants preferred only certain types of interaction with water. Informant 12 was strictly a viewer of waters: "No, I'm not into the water too much. Lakes, great, I like to look at them more. I like to sit there and appreciate them."

Swimming Skills

All boaters perceived themselves to be competent swimmers and some had formal certifications including life saving and water safety instructor certifications. In contrast, nonparticipants were a mixture of swimmers and non swimmers. Strong swimming skills probably increase the appeal, or at least reduce the fear of paddling unstable boats such as canoes and kayaks.
Motivation for learning swimming skills frequently came from parents who wanted the child to learn to swim for safety and recreational reasons. Some informants started swimming at such an early age that they can not recall any details: "I was practically born in the water." "Started swimming lessons before I could walk." "I don't remember ever not being able to swim." Parents or peers taught some informants how to swim while others had formal swimming lessons. Many informants credited their parents' concern for their welfare as the motivation for swimming lessons:

I think it was my parents' desire that I learned to swim because my dad works in shipping and we were always around water. We'd go on the tug boats... You would hear stories of people that work on the boat that fell overboard. One guy drowned... he didn't know how to swim.

Another informant, quoting her mother to illustrate her point about the relationship between swimming and comfort while boating states: "My mother said 'I want you kids to learn how to swim because I didn't know and now I'm afraid and I'm trying to do things like sail in a boat and I'm scared to death.'"

Among the avid canoeists and kayakers there was a respect for the dangers of water. One kayaker thought it "incredibly bizarre" that whitewater rafting is so popular because she is "sure they (inexperienced tourist types) have no idea how dangerous it is." A male kayaker states that: "Doing whitewater kayaking you have to know how to swim and you have to be able to work with the current to get somewhere if you do come out of your boat. You have to have a healthy fear of the water."

Informant 11, who had no exposure to wildlands or water clearly states: "I can't really swim that well. I'm not really a water person," although he qualified this when talking about the possibility of his doing some water activities: "... if you go somewhere where it is clear water and safe."

**Tolerance for Full-Body Contact with Natural Bodies of Water**

Swimming in a swimming pool and swimming in natural bodies of water are perceived differently. The paddlers had more experiences swimming in lakes, rivers and oceans than nonparticipants. The swimmers in the nonparticipant group swim mostly in swimming pools. The acceptability of natural bodies of water quality depends on the activity involved, whether it is by the water, in the water or on the water. One of the concerns among informants was whether the water with which they might have contact was "clean" or "dirty." The informants defined "clean" water in terms of its appearance, smell and the invisible or inferred characteristics (chemistry, microbiology). Nonparticipants expressed general concern about the cleanliness of natural water bodies. In contrast, paddlers tended to discuss the characteristics of natural water bodies in greater detail, but even they were uncomfortable with water quality. Informant 18 states: ". . . it felt like it was cleaner because it was a little clearer." While Informant 24 describes how he decides whether to swim in a lake: "If I can see around the edges of the lake, if it looks clean to me, I'll swim in it. But if I see stuff floating around, I won't." Detailed comments about water quality came strictly from paddlers:

They were just little things, but they were leeches and they were fairly gross. There was scum down there, but I certainly wanted to keep my feet out of it. (Informant 12)

I went in. It was pretty disgusting. I mean I was basically crawling through algae. (Informant 6)

Paddlers used cost-benefit reasoning in speaking about the "disgust" factor in being in water environments. Some aspects of the water are unpleasant but these are outweighed by the rewards of paddling:

When I'm out on water craft clinics with my dad I have no problem jumping into the water. I don't mind that, but I just don't like that part when you have to go from shore out to open water. Once you get past the stones there is slippery algae and I just don't like that. (Informant 2)

Nonparticipants had little to say about disgust-evoking qualities of natural bodies of water except general concerns about pollution. Whether their perceptions of natural bodies of water is a constraint on participation was unclear and requires further investigation. Due to lack of experience, they may simply be unaware of these unpleasant qualities of natural bodies of water.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

An umbrella concept that emerges from this project is "environmental socialization." Minimally this process involves repeated experiences resulting in practical knowledge of the physical environment, conceptualization of self in terms of the environment in which rewarding actions take place, and the development of primary and ancillary skills and competencies that allow rewarding activities to be carried out efficiently.

Frequent experiences with wildland environments provide numerous direct and implicit learning opportunities. Much of the knowledge gained is probably tacit or "taken for granted." For instance, through unstructured play and exploration, children come to know wildland environments in minute detail. Travel planning and the ability to image and explore unstructured environments result from access to, and experience in, wild environments during late childhood and adolescence.

Some of the informants were so avidly involved in paddle sports that they describe themselves as "water persons" referring to the environment
where the activities take place. Additionally, because the developing person is part of outdoor-oriented social groups, he or she is learning the vocabulary, dress, and social norms of these groups and will be able to join other similar groups with little social effort or risk. Skill development, an aspect of environmental socialization that is often the only focus of activity instruction, occurs through both direct instruction and observation of other members of the social group. At least for wildland recreation, environmental socialization may be a sequential and dynamic process that occurs across several life stages.

Because of the apparent complexity of developing an interest in wildland recreation, administrators of programs providing instruction in wildland recreation should take a dim view of simplistic activity instruction. In urban wildland interface settings, potential participants in activity instruction classes will have had little previous outdoor experiences. Single-contact programs with inexperienced participants are unlikely to be effective in establishing independent and sustained participation in a wildland recreation activity.

An optimal introduction to water-based wildland recreation activities should result in the development of several outdoor-related attitudes and ancillary skills. These include a positive attitude towards participating in outdoor physical activities, feeling comfortable in and fascinated by wildland environments, having well-developed travel planning and wayfinding skills, as well as adequate swimming skills and tolerance for full-body contact with natural bodies of water.

Organizations wishing to diversify the demographic profile of wildland recreationists and making the developmental benefits of wildland recreation more widely available should consider programming that mimics the beneficial socialization factors identified in this study. To do this successfully will require a long-term relationship between recreation leaders and at least some children and youth in a community. This may seem daunting to agencies used to programming that consists of short contact programs, but Inner City Outings, a program of the Sierra Club, achieves some of these goals on a "yard-sale" budget using volunteers and working with after-school programs established by other community organizations.

Interest in wildland recreation is partly a function of unstructured play in the outdoors during childhood. Much implicit learning and development of curiosity about nature occurs during play, and, in addition, the child begins the process of habituating to environmental irritants common to wildlands. Parks, nature centers, museums and day-care centers should strive to provide wild play areas, supervised by caring, outdoor-oriented adults. Kirkby (1988) has provided a detailed example of a naturalistic play area and Wilson and colleagues have designed environmental education curricula and site plans for preschools (Wilson, 1993; Wilson, 1994; Wilson, Klimer, & Knauerhase, 1996). Unfortunately, despite well-defended calls for high-quality wild play environments for children dating to the 1970s (Hart, 1983; Moore & Young, 1978; Moore, 1989; Rivkin, 1997, Titman, 1994) there have been few applications by agencies (Wilson, 1996).

The development of travel and wayfinding skills is often ignored by programmers (Bixler, Carlisle, & Floyd, 1995). A common practice of recreational programmers is to lead program participants everywhere just like overprotective parents. An extensive cross-cultural literature on sex differences in spatial abilities documents that individuals who are led everywhere and not given a chance to explore and make wayfinding decisions on their own, will develop only limited wayfinding abilities (Nerlove, Munroe, & Munroe, 1971 Hart, 1978; Saegart & Hart, 1979). Other research projects have documented a poor understanding of maps among the public. Map learning in schools rarely includes giving students the chance to practice wayfinding activities in the actual environment represented by the maps being studied (Muir, 1985). Recreational programming must include opportunities for participants to read maps, plan highway, trail and waterway routes and make in-the-environment wayfinding decisions. Leaders must step aside at times and provide opportunities for participating youth to practice leading the group.

If children and youth are to develop a preference for water-based wildland recreation activities, they also may need help developing swimming skills and becoming comfortable while in natural bodies of water. Swimming skills provide confidence that a capsized canoe will not be life threatening. But even some people with strong swimming skills may be repulsed by the idea of any contact with natural bodies of water (Bixler & Floyd, 1999). Opportunities for supervised swimming in lakes, rivers or oceans should be part of the experiences recreation programmers offer youth. Part of such experiences should include helping participants make appropriate interpretations of the lack of clarity of the water and the presence of harmless plants and animals. Inner-tubing trips down rivers may also be a useful tool for the same reasons.

Additionally, programming should capitalize on vicarious learning. Storytelling can be a powerful tool in building interest in wildland recreation. Several informants mentioned hearing adventure stories from family members or peers that broadened their awareness of the range of wildland activities. Programmers should be cautioned not to overemphasize stories about risk-taking. A leader who relates lots of high-adventure stories may alienate youth who are not risk-takers.

Clearly, some aspects of participating in wildland recreation are often interpreted in a negative manner. Programmers can help prepare beginning participants for the inevitable unpleasantness of wildland exploration. For example, many kinds of physical activity will result in sore muscles. Leaders should anticipate this effect in young canoists on their first trip by suggesting that sore arm muscles are a "good kind of soreness." Minimizing negative reactions to insect bites and the heat and cold are more dependent on repeated experiences in wildlands, resulting in habituation, but leaders can also help shape interpretations of these events.
This research project compared the experiences of nonparticipants and participants in paddle sports. The results suggest that instructional strategies should include social support and the teaching of ancillary skills and that a sequence of experiences with wildlands needs to occur across several life stages. The ideas identified in this study should be further evaluated and refined through replication using different methods and study populations. There is also need for detailed investigations of single concepts identified in this study.

References


Organizational Culture Profiles in Local Government Authority Recreation Services: Some Australian Evidence

Sue Colyer
Geoff Soutar
Paul Ryder

ABSTRACT: This paper reports on organizational cultural profiles of four local government authorities in Western Australia. The results were extracted from a larger study of organizational effectiveness in which organizational culture was examined as a separate component and for its contribution to the effectiveness of recreation services. A competing values model of organizational culture was used to measure recreation workers perceptions of the cultural values in their respective municipalities.

Cultural profiles were developed for 4 cities to show the different emphasis each placed on the values of the four cultural dimensions: group, developmental, rational and hierarchical cultural values. The competing values model, based on the work of Quinn and Spreitzer (1991), has been shown in the literature to be a useful tool to provide comparisons of organizational culture of different organizations, not easily achieved by qualitative approaches. This model is deceptive in its simplicity of application, yet powerful in its ability to depict the dominance of specific sets of organization cultural values as perceived by organizational members. The cultural profiles of the four cities are discussed and the differences described as a means of demonstrating the how cultural values may influence the effectiveness of a recreation service. Each profile provides a snap shot of an organization to show the prevailing cultural emphasis, from which it is possible to determine if the organization is operating from the most effective domain. The discussion around the concept of organizational culture, and the competing values model for measuring it, is used to draw the attention of parks and recreation practitioners to consider the role of organizational culture in the effectiveness and success of their agencies.

Organizational culture is enduring and difficult to change. Yet in this time of short term contracts, rapid and constant change, managers of parks and recreation services need to be aware of the importance of organizational culture and its latent impact. Some suggestions are offered for applying the competing values model to measure organizational culture. The results may be used to identify the dominance of the different values for comparison against a desired perspective or in other situations that will be influenced by the prevailing underlying assumptions about the best way to achieve success for the organization. Some strategies for introducing