

The Role of "Outdoor Capital" in the Socialization of Wildland Recreationists

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Interviews were conducted with canoeists and kayakers to identify key socialization experiences that led to involvement in these activities. Nonparticipants were also interviewed as a comparison group. Family involvement, both direct and through delegation to institutions such as summer camps and scouting, were key factors. While there was tremendous variation in socialization experiences, canoeists and kayakers had "accumulated" large numbers of outdoor experiences by the time they had reached their teens. This "outdoor capital" provides a solid experiential foundation for adopting water-based wildland recreation activities.

This study, using comparative biographical methods, investigated the differences in socialization experiences between young adults who are, and are not, involved in canoeing or kayaking. Results illustrate the importance of many and varied childhood experiences in later adopting wildland recreation activities. Practitioners may want to mimic some of these socialization forces in programming for youth from families uninvolved in outdoor recreation.

Literature Review

How people do or do not become involved in wildland recreation activities is still unclear, although experiences during childhood seem to be important. Kelly's (1974, 1977) work on socialization suggests that about half of all recreation activities, whether outdoor activities or not, are learned during childhood. Scott and Willits (1989) provided longitudinal data showing that adults enrolled in high school in 1947 still exhibited many of the same patterns of leisure involvement 37 years later. O'Leary, Behrens-Tepper, McGuire, & Dottavio (1987) found that 83% of hunters began hunting before the age of 18. Other studies have found varying degrees of relationship between childhood introduction to an activity and later adult participation (Sofranko & Nolan, 1972; Yoesting & Burkhhead, 1973; Yoesting & Christensen, 1978). Using frequency of recreation participation data, Miles et al (1993) noted that

participation rates in some wildland recreation activities increase during parenthood, and speculated that parents are purposefully introducing their children to these activities during this period. While these studies document the significant relationship between childhood experiences and later adult participation, none of them attempted to identify the specific socialization processes which occur during childhood.

Scattered research suggests there are significant precursors to establishing interest in many wildland recreation activities. First, studies of adult risk recreationists indicate a high degree of personal involvement in the activity, suggesting multi-faceted involvement over a long period (Schuett, 1993). Decker, Purdy, & Brown (1986) found that exposure to hunting during childhood included accompanying other family members on hunts before the child was of legal hunting age, sharing hunting stories, helping clean game, and eating game. Dargitz (1988) found that urban youth, living with adults who fished, were significantly more likely to be involved in fishing, and reported enjoying fishing more than those without adult anglers at home. Brandenburg, Greiner, Hamilton-Smith, Scholten & Webb (1982) included opportunity for a recreational apprenticeship with a close acquaintance as a key component of a model explaining adoption of recreation activities.

Research has also documented the importance of childhood experiences in the development of attitude and skills which are, at least peripherally, important to being able to participate in some wildland recreation activities. For instance, studies of significant life experiences of prominent conservation leaders and environmental educators have consistently identified childhood play in natural environments as helping shape later interest in natural environments and conservation careers (Chawla, 1988; Chawla, 1997; Chawla & Hart, 1988; Palmer, 1993). Similar work has identified childhood play and unsupervised exploration as important in developing wayfinding competencies necessary for exploring unstructured environments (e.g. wildlands) (Bixler, Carlisle, & Floyd, 1995; Kaplan, 1976; Moore & Young, 1978). In contrast, three studies have documented the range of negative perceptions of wildland environments held by children or adolescents who have limited exposure to wildland environments (Bixler, Carlisle, Hammitt, & Floyd, 1994; Bixler & Floyd, 1997; Bixler, Floyd, & Hammitt, 1995).

The existing literature documents the importance of childhood as a period for adopting many recreation activities. It also suggests that seemingly unrelated outdoor childhood experiences are important for learning basic skills and developing attitudes that increase the appeal of the sociophysical environments in which wildland activities occur.

There are many possible approaches to begin documenting the specific socialization processes that are part of adopting a wildland recreation activity.

Life-span development and social-network strategies are two approaches. However, more exploratory work is needed before implementing these approaches.

In this study, the general concept of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1986) is transformed to the concept of "outdoor capital" which refers to the accumulation of outdoor experiences within social groups. These experiences result in the development of outdoor skills, vocabulary, values, social networks, accumulation of outdoor equipment and clothing, and outdoor-related references and even art.

Cultural capital is a concept traditionally used to explain achievement in economic life domains such as education, career attainment and social status, but it describes a non-economic process. Cultural capital has been used to study development of interest and skills related to high-brow cultural activities. Individuals growing up in a family and community with a high degree of cultural capital will accumulate knowledge, skills and experiences, objects, and social and institutional networks, that allow them to function more effectively in higher social strata. Used in research, measures of cultural capital have added to the ability of human capital and social class variables to predict educational and economic success (DiMaggio, 1982).

Bourdieu (1986) argues that cultural capital is accumulated in three states: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Embodied cultural capital refers to attitudes and knowledge which are either implicitly or purposefully learned. Cultural capital cannot be transmitted instantaneously the way economic assets can be. Embodied cultural capital is assimilated through interacting with cultured people from a high social strata. Objectified cultural capital is material objects and media which can be transferred or purchased with economic capital. To actually use the objects in their intended way, the individual must have embodied capital either in person or by proxy. Institutionalized cultural capital is credentials or restricted memberships symbolic of cultural competence, from organizations that have widely-recognized cultural standing, independent of the persons receiving degrees or membership.

In this paper, we present data organized around the concept of "outdoor capital" in which families accrue wildland recreation-related knowledge, skills, and experiences that are transmitted to children. Children in social environments with a high degree of accumulated outdoor capital should tend to view wildland recreation as normative behavior and be able to quickly learn and perform a wide variety of wildland recreation activities.

Method

In-depth interviews lasting approximately one hour, were conducted with ten dedicated canoeists and kayakers, four casual water-sports participants, 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 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 the participants a description of outdoor experiences they had during childhood, teenage and early-adult years. Follow-up questions dealt with the social circles from which interest in wildland recreation evolved. A series of questions at the end of the interview focused on respondents' perceptions of 12 different motorized and non-motorized, water-based activities.

Results

Involvement in canoeing and kayaking among informants ranged from those heavily involved in water-based wildland recreation to those with absolutely no interest in such activities. Life histories of two informants are contrasted, followed by a discussion of different wildland socialization factors.

Life Histories

Brief life histories of two individuals interviewed illustrate the differences in accumulated experiences between those active or inactive in boating. Both the informants were unmarried males, 25 years of age, who grew up in stable, two-parent families in older suburbs of Cleveland.

Carl is an avid boater who described his parents as "outdoor-type people" and his white-collar father as being at heart "a farmer who is most happy out-of-doors." His mother grew up in a city, but was the "adventurous sort who is always willing to try anything." His parents were active members of a canoeing organization and took the children on extended trips, tent camping and canoeing together. Since his mother was a swimming instructor, Carl learned to swim at an early age, becoming a certified life guard and had many experiences swimming in pools, lakes and the ocean.

He became a Cub Scout, at a time when he believes Cubs were allowed to do things that today might be considered "a little bit dangerous." While his parents "pushed" him towards scouting, he felt it was also his choice to get involved. The only outdoor activity he was involved in that was not directly tied to parents or scouting was his rock climbing in junior high. He and his friends climbed in a nearby ravine and bought rock climbing equipment that they "kept hidden from our parents so that they wouldn't wonder where we were going." During family rafting trips, Carl admired the dexterity of the kayakers sharing the river, and became fascinated with the sport. By age 14, he had

purchased his own kayak and his parents bought him the accessories. In his teens, he continued to take extended canoeing trips with his parents and by 15 was teaching canoeing at a scout camp.

Carl credits his father as the source of his outdoor interests. If his father didn't have the needed skills, the two of them learned together. His scouting experiences were also important because "it was completely and totally done by us (scouts)." As an adult, he continues to be active in camping, backpacking, kayaking, and professionally instructs wildland recreation activities and leads commercial trips.

In contrast, Jim is uninvolved in wildland recreation of any kind. He grew up in a blue collar family. His father neither hunted nor fished but was "a bookworm, a real reader." His parents took the family on carefully-planned trips to amusement parks, zoos, Las Vegas and Florida. Closer to home, the family's outdoor activities were primarily picnics at local parks.

His only tent camping experience was in the backyard and failed when it started to rain. He believed he could successfully camp if he wanted to, but "I like to have my davenport, my television and my commode right there if I need it. I don't need to be out in the middle of nowhere I have nothing to prove."

He stated that as a child he was "hydrophobic" for a long time. Around age ten, his parents saw his lack of swimming skills as a safety issue and sent him for swimming lessons to a "German (type) instructor ... no systematic desensitization ... just threw me in the deep water." He maintains he is "an okay swimmer ... I know what I have to do in deep water even if I can't. It's not my favorite thing in the world, but it's good exercise." He really likes "to look at water, more than being in it."

He was never a Boy Scout and his canoeing experiences were limited to two trips during adolescence. These were commercial ventures on a river that was "two feet of water, no challenge" in "the middle of nowhere. There's no K-Mart or McDonald's." He currently does no "traditional hiking," but plays basketball and football.

The contrast between the two is striking. Carl was raised in a family that had numerous outdoor experiences. The parents viewed outdoor and wildland activity as normal, valued activities. They taught their son skills and encouraged him to develop additional outdoor interests and skills beyond their abilities. In contrast, Jim was a member of a family lacking in outdoor experiences and found few opportunities to participate in wildland recreation.

Swimming

During the interviewing, it became obvious that the canoeists and kayakers were mostly swimmers and that many non-participants were either non-swimmers

or their swimming experiences were limited to pools. Strong swimming skills probably increase the appeal 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 a young age that they cannot 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." Some informants were taught to swim by their parents, 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 learn 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 boats that fell overboard. One guy drowned ... he didn't know how to swim." From another informant: "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 group of 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 have no idea how dangerous it is." A male kayaker stated "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."

Perception of Natural Bodies of Water

The experiences of swimming in pools and in natural bodies of water were perceived to be quite different. Many were less enamored of natural bodies of water; other swimmers preferred natural bodies of water. These statements are typical of the dialogue: "Yucky bottom? It didn't really bother me." "When I'm out on watercraft 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."

Parents and Other Relatives

Introduction to wildland recreation was frequently by the parents or other relatives by actually taking the child to natural areas, teaching them skills or telling stories about their own childhood experiences: "I learned camping from my dad. Survival in the woods - - my dad. Building traps, hunting, canoeing, boating, all from my dad." "Both my parents are very interested in nature and wildlife, but my mom in particular. She was always looking at plants with me when I was young." "I have real strong memories of going to Arizona. It was an uncle, we went out into the desert and looked for creatures. Hiked around, looked for petrified wood and animals in the deserts."

"I heard stories about my dad's dad in Ireland, who spent a lot of time outdoors."

Institutions

Institutions often expanded the range of activities a child was introduced to, particularly the traditional outdoor-oriented organizations such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and summer camps. Several girls participated in scouting activities through the Boy Scouts. These "closet Boy Scouts" were girls who had tried Girl Scouts, but for various reasons dropped out. "I was in Brownies for a week. I was a tomboy and all the girls wanted to do macramé 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."

Other institutions included school clubs and summer camps, which provided opportunities to go on backpacking, boating and skiing trips. Summer camp was enthusiastically mentioned by one individual as an institution that practically replaced her parents: "I went to boarding school when I was 13. I haven't spent two weeks with my parents since I was 13. I loved summer camp. We did all the activities." While some mention was made of school camping programs in the outdoors, these were never acknowledged by our informants as significant developmental influence.

Residential and Summer Homes

The childhood residential home selected by the parents provided a setting for childhood play and exploration. A few of the informants mentioned natural or undeveloped areas close to home that were available for play during childhood. For some informants, vacation homes were mentioned as a significant influence. These ranged from tent camping on a privately-owned wooded area to cottages on lakes.

Peers

Peers had either a positive or negative effect. Some informants reported ridicule from peers not involved in wildland recreation. This was a problem particularly in adolescence. "When you're a Girl Scout in high school, you're a geek anyway." Some of the informants used effective counter responses: "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?'"

Active wildland recreationists positively influenced their friends who might otherwise have had few experiences. One informant whose family was active in wildland activities and owned a summer cottage and much outdoor equipment said, "I remember doing outdoor activities with my parents and then in high school I organized it for my friends." Also, peers with

mutual enthusiasm for wildlands reinforced each other's interests. An informant who had parents with few outdoor skills but who were supportive of her interests, described in rich detail the experiences she and a friend had as children and adolescents planning bike trips to the parks: "We'd plan it for days in advance and we didn't care about getting wet and we didn't care about getting dirty ... Sometimes we would invite the boys to go with us, but we'd do all the planning for them." The girls also shared stories which expanded each other's outdoor horizons: "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. I never would have thought about snowshoeing until she told me what a good time she had snowshoeing ... she adventured with me."

Discussion and Conclusion

While there were many types of socialization forces identified in this project, the interviews suggest those active in wildland recreation had accumulated many direct and vicarious experiences during their childhood and teen years. Parental influences included: supporting involvement in scouts, choosing traditional outdoor summer camps for their children, telling stories of their outdoor experiences, owning property that was wild or near parks or other undeveloped areas, visiting relatives who involved the children in outdoor activities, teaching specific wildland skills, traveling substantial distances for summer vacations to parks, access to outdoor equipment and being interested in learning new outdoor activities along with their children. Positive peer influences included: sharing equipment with others, providing friends access to familial resources such as summer cottages and outdoor equipment, and having friends to plan and go on adventures. Institutions provided many opportunities to learn activities that required considerable investment in equipment and specialized knowledge. Choice of institutions often reflected the parents' outdoor values.

Childhood play experiences in natural environments were explored with informants because of the consistent findings in socialization studies of conservation leaders that outdoor play was a significant formative experience. Play experiences also reflect the concept of outdoor capital in both an embodied and objectified sense. Parents either chose a more natural place to live or a home near a natural area, or took regular trips to parks. Any of these choices would allow their children to accumulate unsupervised play and exploration experiences. Data from this study were less than conclusive, failing to mirror the findings of other studies on the importance of childhood play. Some wildland recreation enthusiasts had play experiences in natural areas and recalled them with positive feelings, but others did not. This area needs further investigation. Informants who were boaters had different styles of participation

in their favorite sport. The informants who described canoeing primarily as a means to experiencing riparian environments and wildlife did have memorable childhood play experiences, but they were also all in their early thirties. Canoeing as a means of observing nature may tend to emerge later in life, with younger adults focusing on skill development, taking trips, and risk taking. It is also possible that water-based wildland recreationists, lacking childhood play experiences in wildland environments, are less likely to evolve from skill- and risk-oriented canoeing or kayaking toward boating as a means to natural-area experiences.

Both boaters and nonparticipants had varying levels of perceived swimming abilities, but only the non-participant informants contained non-swimmers. Informants tended to describe their parents' motivation for wanting them to learn to swim in terms of "drown proofing." Non-participants in water-based wildland recreation had done little or no swimming except in swimming pools, while the wildland recreationists reported childhood swimming in some combination of pools, lakes, ponds, rivers, and oceans. Swimming seems to be an important prerequisite for developing a lasting interest in recreation activities that involve maneuvering a watercraft that is easily capsized. Swimming skills represent embodied outdoor capital to the extent this skill provides confidence in wildland boating and institutionalized outdoor capital in the form of Red Cross swimming certification.

Strong swimming skills may not be sufficient. Most informants viewed natural water bodies differently than swimming pool. There was indication that harmless fish, insects, mud and algae were either feared or disgusting to nonparticipants. These differences suggest that both the perception of adequate swimming skills (psychomotor skills) and tolerance for full-body contact with natural bodies of water (environmental socialization) are necessary prerequisites for being an active canoeist or kayaker. Developing a positive attitude towards natural bodies of water is probably a function of parents or peers helping a person make appropriate interpretation of the things in natural bodies of water and repeated contact with water through swimming and wading.

The family was often the source of much learning about wildland environments. While only some families had backyard wild areas for play, most families of water-based wildland recreationists were involved in frequent trips to parks, vacations that tended to involve visiting natural resource-based parks, and visiting relatives who either lived in rural areas or took their visiting nieces or nephews to their favorite natural areas. There was some evidence of parents sharing outdoor adventures with children through telling about outdoor experiences they had growing up. The notion of multi-generational

accumulation of outdoor capital was evident in discussions of visits with grandparents (or aunts and uncles) who consistently involved the informants in outdoor activities to their farm, wooded area or visits to rivers or oceans during family visits.

The introduction to canoeing or kayaking was either by the parent, a peer, scouts or camping. Participants consistently reported encouragement from their parents, and sometimes had friends who were also enthusiastic about the activity. Institutions such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts or summer camps were where canoeing or kayaking were typically learned. Parents sought institutions that reflected their outdoor values and their desire for their children to be exposed to additional wildland recreation activities. Belonging to scouting programs or attending summer camp are examples of institutionalized outdoor capital.

This project strongly suggests that adults who are enthusiastic about wildland recreation have had a large number of outdoor experiences growing up. Nonparticipants have few wildland experiences. The amount of accrued outdoor capital during childhood seems to be predictive of involvement in wildland recreation activities as adults. Unfortunately, outdoor capital provides little help in defining the style of participation in a wildland recreation activity.

In terms of application, the data supports current educational strategies of teaching canoeing or kayaking skills (paddle strokes, portaging) and safety, but only for children from families with outdoor capital. In contrast, the results present a disquieting look at the effort which may be needed to effectively introduce youth from families with no outdoor capital to wildland recreation activities. For canoeing and kayaking, it may be necessary to help youth develop: excellent swimming skills and comfort in being in natural bodies of water, tolerance for the negative aspects of wildland environments through frequent contact with wildlands, trip planning and wayfinding skills plus the usual skills necessary to canoe or kayak. Helping these youth to establish a peer group that is enthusiastic about these activities may also be an essential strategy to counter negative peer pressure.

Partial support for this project came from the USDA Forest Service North Central Forest Experiment Station (contract 23-95-33).

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