

Social Interaction in Adventure Recreation Participation¹

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Abstract: This study investigated the social interaction of white water kayakers and attempted to predict the level of enduring involvement of participants. It was hypothesized that social interaction would shift from classes and programs to peers of similar interests as level of involvement increased. The results did show that social interaction is a primary reason for participation and varies by skill level, gender and age. Using multiple regression analysis the hypothesis was not supported; however, ANOVAS showed significant main effects and interaction effects for gender, age and skill level for kayaking in specific types of groups. These findings support the importance of the social aspect of white water kayaking and reinforce the effect of skill level in understanding kayakers' preferences, which can then be used in formulating policy decisions for the management of public lands and waterways.

This study investigated the social interaction of white water kayakers in predicting the level of enduring involvement for participants. The hypothesis was that social interaction will shift from classes and programs to peers of similar interests as the level of enduring involvement increases.

Methods

The sample for this study consisted of 584 white water kayakers from the Nantahala Outdoor Center. This sample was comprised of former participants from the Nantahala kayaking program who had participated in varying levels of kayaking in the past year. The Nantahala Outdoor Center is one of the largest outdoor outfitters in the United States serving thousands of customers each year. This outfitter was chosen based on the following criteria: the extensive array of water-based programs and trips, willingness to participate in the study, the size of their business, ability to readily supply names and addresses of former participants, and professional reputation.

Data were collected by a mailed questionnaire. Questions pertaining to the social, psychological and behavioral aspects of white water kayakers were in the questionnaire. The social items included who they kayaked with: my friends, fellow paddlers of similar interests and skill, classes/programs, alone, in outings clubs, guides, teachers and mentors, and number of people in the group. In addition, other motivational items within a social context were used, e.g., meeting new people and talking to new and varied people. A pilot study checked for readability, content, reliability, and validity.

Results and Discussion

Response rate for the net sample of 548 subjects was 55 percent (n=301) after one mailing and a postcard follow-up. The sample consisted of 72 percent male and 28 percent female with

a mean age of the mid 30's, a mean level of education of slightly more than a 4-year college degree, and very active in outdoor recreation activities. Skill level was equally divided between novice, intermediate and advanced level white water kayakers. Skill level was assessed by self-report and also by class of water usually kayaked, class I - class VI.

Using multiple regression analysis, the hypothesis was not supported. Descriptive statistics showed that the social aspect of white water kayaking is very important for these participants. All three skill levels of kayakers rated the desire to be with friends and meet new people while kayaking as very important. Advanced and intermediate kayakers appear more eager to meet new people while kayaking than novice kayakers. Differences were found for the social items by skill level, age and gender. For example, kayakers paddle in groups of about six people; however, novice kayakers prefer slightly more than six (M=6.13) people in a group, while intermediate kayakers (M=5.44) and advanced kayakers (M=5.65) prefer less than six. This number appears higher than was anticipated, which may be attributed to the safety consciousness of kayakers due to the danger and risk in this activity. Kayaking with groups from outings clubs or organizations was more important for advanced kayakers than novice kayakers. This may be caused by more advanced kayakers working as instructors.

Two way ANOVAS were used to investigate the main effect of the mediating variables: age, gender and skill level with the social items. Significant differences were found among the kayakers for the social items ($p < .05$) by skill level for the following items, kayaking with: my friends, people in classes/programs, alone, with fellow paddlers, teachers/mentors, and with a guide. Significant differences were found with gender in kayaking with: my friends, alone, and with groups from outings clubs. Age differences were found in kayaking with fellow paddlers.

Post hoc Newman-Keuls procedures ($p < .05$) were employed to detect any further interaction effects with skill level. Interaction effects were found, for example, with skill level by gender in kayaking with teachers/mentors, with groups from outings clubs, and number of people in a group. For females, the number of people kayaking in a group increased as skill level increased from novice (M=5.55), to intermediate (M=6.24), and advanced kayakers (M=8.00). For males, almost the opposite was found—novice (M=5.08), intermediate (M=5.08) and advanced kayakers (M=5.24). Male intermediate kayakers prefer the smallest number in the group, which may be the optimal group size for honing new skills and perfecting paddling techniques. Interaction effects were found for skill level by age for kayaking with: fellow paddlers and with a guide. Overall, as age increased: the likelihood of using guides while kayaking for novice kayakers was not very high but decreased; was very low and stayed about the same for intermediate kayakers, and was very unlikely and

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decreased for the advanced level kayakers. Highly skilled kayakers appear the least likely to use guides; however, the older novice kayakers are less likely to use a guide than younger kayakers.

Conclusions

The findings from this study show that even though the level of enduring involvement can not be predicted from the social items in this study, continued research is needed in defining the construct of enduring involvement. The social aspect of white water kayaking is very important to participants and varies

by skill level, gender and age. Individuals in this study kayak in groups and appear very safety conscious. These results, however, support the fact that little is known about white water kayakers, and more investigation must be directed towards the fundamental areas of skill level, age and gender differences in hopes of predicting adventure recreation behavior. Due to the heavy usage of public lands for adventure activities, it may be premature for resource managers to make policy decisions unless this type of information is made available. The results of this study are also beneficial for private outfitters who use public lands and waterways for programming, marketing and staffing.