

THE INFLUENCE OF PAST SUMMER CAMP
EXPERIENCES ON PRESENT
ADULT LIFE OUTDOOR ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION

OUTDOOR RECREATION LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT
NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many adults participate in some form of outdoor recreation within a given year. In a report published by *The Outdoor Foundation* found that nearly half of all Americans (141.4 million individuals) in 2015 participated in at least one form of outdoor recreation (The Outdoor Foundation, 2015). The purpose of this study is to find the effect of an outdoor summer camp experience has on the preference of outdoor recreation activities amongst adults. Specifically the study will target a sample of students currently part of Northern Michigan University's Outdoor Recreation and Leadership Management Major/Minor. Our target sample size will be between 100-150 people; (1.2-1.8% of Northern Michigan University's total student body).

Background of the Study / Theoretical Foundation

Specifically the study will target a sample of students currently part of Northern Michigan University's Outdoor Recreation and Leadership Management Major/Minor. The target sample size will be between 100-150 people (1.2-1.8% of NMU's total student body).

Currently there are studies that exist that identify the effect of childhood recreation experiences on adults but none that highlight the significance that reflect upon a summer camp experience.

Our Variables will be as follows:

- Independent Variable - Adults that went to summer camp as a youth and currently participate in outdoor recreation (not related to their recreation experience as a youth at summer camp)
- Dependent Variable - Adults that went to a summer camp and currently participate in outdoor recreation (Related to their recreation experience as a youth in summer camp)

Research Question

- Do outdoor-based summer camp experiences have an effect on adult outdoor recreation preferences?

Significance of the Study

This study will reveal if there is a correlation between outdoor summer camp experiences and outdoor recreation preferences as adults. If there is a influence of a summer camp experience on outdoor recreation preferences as adults it can benefit the community in multiple ways. First it would give summer camps that typically operate with minimal budgets an opportunity to pursue sponsorship from the outdoor industry. Secondly it would encourage parents who want to raise children with a passion for outdoor recreation to enroll them in a outdoor-based summer camp experience.

Assumptions

1. Respondents answer the questions on the survey truthfully, and honestly, based on their own true feelings, and past experiences.
2. Each subject that participates in this study did so voluntarily.
3. Several surveys that are returned will be nullified due to lack of summer camp experience.

Limitations

The following limitations have been identified as restrictions to the study being performed.

1. This study is limited by participants that have gone to summer camp as a child.
2. This study is limited to Outdoor Recreation Leadership management students at Northern Michigan University.
3. This study will be limited to 100-150 participants.

Definition of Terms

The following list of definitions has been included based on the importance of each term in clarifying concepts and theories presented within this study.

Outdoor Recreation: leisure pursuits engaged in the outdoors, often in natural or semi-natural settings out of town.

Outdoor Industry: A sector of outdoor recreation business that focus primarily on outdoor products and sales; typically focusing on profit.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Currently there is limited literature produced studying the effects of youth summer camp experiences on individuals preference of outdoor recreation activities as adults. However, there are currently studies produced examining the effects of summer camps in realm of physical, social, and intellectual effects. These effects of summer camp are examined below.

Parental Perceptions of Youth Development Outcome

In the United States over 10 million youth attend summer camps every year. In a report published in the Journal of Family Issues, researchers produced a study examining *Parental Perceptions of Youth Development Outcomes (2016)*. The correlation of summer camp experiences was examined between summer camp activities and choice of post-camp activities. The results of this can be seen in the below table in Table 6.

Table 6
New Camper Activities as Noted From Parent Postcamp Surveys (n = 2,779)

At camp my child learned how to do something s/he has never done before. S/he learned . . .	n	% ^a
Outdoor adventure (e.g., archery, spelunking, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, rock climbing, rope course)	1,131	40
Boating activity (e.g., boating, canoeing, funyak, kayak)	782	28
Craft activity/skills (e.g., pottery, sign language, starting a fire, tie a knot, whittling)	542	19
Water sport/activities (e.g., diving, swimming, water polo)	370	13
Arts (e.g., acting, creative writing, foreign language, painting, plays, singing)	310	11
Sports (e.g., baseball, basketball, dancing, football, gymnastics, karate, lacrosse, running, soccer, softball)	241	9
Social skills (e.g., getting along with others, having fun, helping each other, making friends, problem-solving skills, sleeping away from home)	175	6
Domestic skills (e.g., cooking, keep room/area clean)	150	5
Self-confidence/esteem (e.g., being a better person, challenge myself, independence, less self-doubt, maturity, not to give up, overcome fear of heights, respect)	113	4
Nonphysical games (e.g., board games, checkers)	98	4
About nature (e.g., learning about bugs or any type of animal, survival in woods)	93	3
Physical games (e.g., Frisbee, hopping, juggling, kickball, street hockey, tetherball)	79	3
Religion (e.g., scriptures, praying)	42	2
Health awareness (e.g., diabetes awareness)	29	1
Other responses	130	5

a. Responses were coded. Examples are given as to what the categories included. Total adds to more than 100% because multiple responses were given by many parents.

The majority of the above activities It is clear that there was an effect of summer camp activities on youth. As adult The purpose of the proposed study is to explore if these post-camp activities carry into adulthood.

What Research Tells Us About The Benefits of Summer Camp

School ends, and summer starts. Parents begin to pack their children's belongings in duffel bags ready to send them off for the time of their lives. Summer camp is know to be “life changing” and is know to change you as a person inside and out. It builds self esteem, independence, friendships, spirituality, and leadership skills. These skills can be lifelong lasting and stick with you into your adulthood. Stated in an article by Stephen Fine (page 2), Stephen found just that.

“Camp directors and camp staff all work towards the development of positive values and overall strength of character within campers. There is little evidence to indicate any immediate changes in understandings towards core values, consequences attached to personal choice or decision-making as a direct result of attending camp. However, research conducted with camp alumni in later life has indicated that camp experiences figure prominently in the long-term as the basis underlying successful networking, ethical conduct, and positive parenting” (Stephen, 2005, p. 2)

All of the qualities that camp is supposed to shape you in was clearly seen in the research as going to summer camp benefited individuals in their later lives, being positive and effective parents being one of them.

Link between Childhood Nature Experiences and Environmental Perception as Adults

There have been studies conducted to see if there is a direct connection between childhood nature experiences and environmental perception as an adult. One of the most recent studies was a journal published in 2006 by the University of Cincinnati, in this journal *Nature and the Life Course: Pathways from Childhood Nature Experiences to Adult Environmentalism*, researchers found that there was a direct correlation between Childhood nature experiences and environmental perception as an adult.

“Model testing and cross-validation procedures using structural equation modeling suggest that childhood participation with nature may set an individual on a trajectory toward adult environmentalism. Specifically, childhood participation in “wild” nature such as hiking or playing in the woods, camping, and hunting or fishing, as well as participation with “domesticated” nature such as picking flowers or produce, planting trees or seeds, and caring for plants in childhood have a positive relationship to adult environmental attitudes.” (Wells, 2006)

This study gives us great insight to the topic of environmental perception, and is a great comparison to our topic of adult life outdoor recreation participation.

Social Benefits of Summer Camp

There have been multiple studies produced on the social benefits of attending summer camp. The most recent study highlighting the positive social effects of a summer camp experience was published in 2010. In this study, *Oncology Summer Camp: Benefits of Social Comparison*. The study concluded:

“The results of this study demonstrate that disease-specific summer camps provide adolescents with a community of similar peers who are an appropriate comparison group for self-evaluation. In turn, these social comparisons are related to improved psychosocial outcomes. The benefit of social comparison at an oncology camp should not be overlooked by researchers and health care professionals who plan, staff, and refer children to these programs.” (Meltzer 3)

Thorough examination of produced studies, it is clear that there is a link between summer camp experiences and social well-being.

What are The Benefits of Going to Summer Camp

Summer camp has lasting effects on campers. The strongest effects of summer camp are felt just after the summer is over; however, how long do these effects last? Found in an article written by the Army and Navy academy in 2015 it states that camps effects may accelerate growth in domains after camp is over and the individual is out of the camp environment.

“Campers and their parents both reported growth from the time they started camp to the day it ended. Even better, both groups reported that the personal growth was maintained six months after camp had ended. Growth was seen in four major areas, being Independence, leadership, peer relationships, and social comfort”

The researchers concluded that the positive development that occurred during camp was due to the experience of being at camp itself, not just natural growth over the summer. “Growth at camp significantly exceeded growth attributable to maturation alone,” and “camp may spark and

perhaps even accelerate growth in certain domains long after immersion in the camp environment is over”.

Conclusion

Through examination of literature it is proven that summer camp has an impact on youth outdoor activity preferences and social health. The summer camp experience for the vast majority of youth has overwhelming evidence that it improves environmental perceptions (Wells 2006), social skills (Meltzer 2005), and maturity (Army and Navy Academy 2015). It is important to recognize that there are no published studies examining the effects of a youth summer camp experience on adult outdoor recreation activity preferences. Knowledge in this realm can help those working within the outdoor industry to better understand the assumed correlation.

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