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Understanding the Influence of Gender and Ethnicity on Evaluations of Outdoor Leader Effectiveness\(^1\)

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of gender and ethnicity on evaluations of leader effectiveness involving a short-term wilderness education programme in the United States. Data were obtained from adolescents (ages 15 to 19, \(n = 503\)) participating in the Student Conservation Association’s national Conservation Work Crew summer programme (CWC). There were two objectives: 1) to determine how the CWC experience differs for female and male participants, and those from varying ethnic backgrounds, and 2) to examine the impact of crew leaders in mediating the perceived quality of the experience. Although the majority of participants rated the experience favourably, females gave the SCA experience a more positive evaluation (on average) than males, and white participants indicated higher ratings than non-whites. As predicted, the perceived quality of the crew leaders mediated the relationship between gender and ethnicity, and the impact of this outdoor experience on participants. Results of this study highlight the importance of not only recognising differences across ethnic and gender lines among programme participants, we must also emphasise effective communication skills if outdoor leaders are to be effective with a diverse audience. Results also emphasise the need to better understand the role of leaders in providing quality wilderness experiences.

Keywords: effective outdoor/wilderness leadership, gender and ethnicity, outdoor recreation, conservation education, diversity, environmental education, LISREL analysis

Rationale

The demographics of wilderness use have changed dramatically over the last ten years. More young women and individuals from various ethnic backgrounds now pursue wilderness opportunities then ever before (Henderson & Roberts, 1998). With this growing population of non-traditional wilderness users comes a challenge to rethink traditional notions of outdoor leadership and the need to better assess components of effective leadership development programmes. Understanding the mediating role gender and ethnicity play in determining leader effectiveness has begun to emerge as a critical component with many American researchers (Pinch, 2003; Clemmensen, 2002; Warren, 2002; Wittmer, 2001). Researchers investigating youth participating in outdoor education and recreation programmes have been challenged to...
evaluate the impacts of wilderness experiences. Such programmes for youth, designed to promote the personal growth of participants, need to recognize these changing demographics if they are to continue providing quality experiences. Moreover, because leaders can directly influence such experiences, the design of effective outdoor programmes may be contingent on our ability to understand how leaders affect positive outdoor experiences and environmental education with diverse participants.

The objectives of this study were to:
1) Determine how a short-term North American wilderness education and recreational experience differs for female and male participants, and those from varying ethnic backgrounds, and
2) examine the impact of crew leaders in mediating the relationship between gender/ethnic differences in participants on perceived quality of the experience. We begin by reviewing the existing literature.

**Previous Research**
Research has examined the impact of environmental education programmes (Vaske & Kobarin, 2001; Cason & Gillis, 1994; Driver & Johnson, 1983; Kellert, 1998; Ross & Driver, 1986), yet few systematic investigations exist that explore the influence of gender and ethnicity on the evaluation of conservation related service learning programmes. The mediating effects of gender and ethnicity regarding outdoor leader effectiveness has not been the focus of previous research.

**Gender**
The influence of gender has received attention in the study of outdoor recreation literature over the last twenty years (Pinch, 2003; Warren; 2002; Wittmer, 2002; Roberts, 1998). While there have been numerous studies focused on girls outdoors (Culp, 1998; Pate, 1997; Stemmermann, 1993), research pertaining to diverse adolescent females involved in outdoor programmes remains incomplete. For example, little is known about the meaning of girls' outdoor experience (Henderson & Roberts, 1998) and findings have not always provided new insights into the influence of gender on outdoor experiences. Because gender refers to the socially learned behaviours and expectations associated with being female or male (Henderson, 1994), the way people interpret gender roles and identity is based on their personal experience and socially learned expectations that define behaviour. Therefore, in better understanding an individual's behaviour as attributed to more than one's biological sex, the process of individual and social construction becomes more meaningful. Within this context of gender relating to outdoor recreation and wilderness experiences, the influence of ethnicity and culture has received little attention in the literature (Henderson & Roberts, 1998; Roberts, 1998).

A theme prevalent in the outdoor leadership literature is the need for programmes designed to help adolescent girls become more confident and seek greater opportunities (Pipher, 1994; Stemmmermann, 1993). Culp's (1998) qualitative study of 34 adolescent girls, for example, investigated constraints on outdoor recreation participation and probed the effectiveness of outdoor programmes abilities to engage girls in outdoor activities. Results substantiated the notion that different gender socialisation processes influence female and male perspectives on natural environments and their participation in outdoor activities. While there seems to be a growing body of literature focusing on women in outdoor recreation, there is little attention focused on the experiences of adolescent girls.

**Ethnicity**
Researchers have explored a variety of theories regarding the lack of participation among American people of colour in outdoor nature based activities including assimilation, discrimination hypotheses, and sub-cultural influences (Floyd, 1999). The challenge has been to understand how ethnic identity relates to a set of culturally-based recreational preferences and behaviours, and reinforces the idea that comprehending ethnic identity is an im-
important factor in successfully serving the public – particularly visitors to wilderness areas. Simply providing an opportunity and a programme is not sufficient for participation to occur. Allison (1993) maintains that an understanding of various perceptions and values held by ethnic minorities is central to our understanding of their outdoor involvement. The dimensions of access to programmes and services (e.g., availability, affordability, and acceptability), for instance, must all be considered when developing strategies to foster programme participation among racially and culturally diverse participants (Allison, 1993). Furthermore, although the associations between ethnicity and gender as these pertain to outdoor recreation and environmental programs have been explored independently, researching their inter-relationships has only recently begun to receive attention (Floyd, 1999; Rodriguez & Roberts, 1999; Henderson, 1998; Roberts, 1996). The area of outdoor leadership becomes a focal point to aid in our understanding of gender and ethnicity influences on outdoor involvement. Yet, outdoor leaders who are well-trained in communication and group leadership skills and highly experienced in technical skills, are often at a loss as to how to address social justice issues that arise in the outdoors (Warren, 2002).

Outdoor Leaders

Leading people in the outdoors requires a variety of specialised skills. While outdoor leadership competency, programme curricula, and effective leader qualities have been studied (Gass, et al, 2003; Mitten, 1999; Raiola & Sugarman, 1999; Priest & Gass, 1997; Ewert, 1989), there is little empirical data to substantiate the notion of how relationships built in the outdoors impact on participant experiences. Teaching and modelling excellent leadership demands responsibility, not only for reaching programme goals, but also as way to impact on the lives of programme participants. Accordingly, improving leadership development opportunities in the area of gender and cultural awareness may be a critical focal point that is manifest in the meaning of the overall experience for participants.

Outdoor organisations and the leaders who guide trips know that leadership often determines why some programmes succeed and others fail (Graham, 1997). Effective leaders share common qualities including good decision-making and problem-solving skills, trustworthiness, communication, caring, self-confidence, ability to inspire others, and technical competence, to name a few (Graham, 1997; Priest & Gass, 1997). Just as there are rules and policies to follow, there are relationships to be built beyond skills and techniques. “Leadership involves not only the body and the mind, but the spirit and character as well; good leaders have the intuition, compassion, common sense, and courage it takes to stand and lead” (Graham, 1997, p. 11).

Building relationships is part of “good” outdoor leadership. While planning, developing technical skills, making hard decisions, and resolving conflicts are essential, often overlooked is how the composition of the group contributes to achieving these basic goals (Roberts, 1996). One’s sensitivity, the ability to balance intellect with intuition, developing skills in accepting others, and understanding an assortment of learning styles based on gender and ethnicity can influence outdoor leaders’ effectiveness. Warren (1998), points to the need to determine whether leaders have a significant mediating effect on the overall experience of programme participants.

Factors such as gender roles and stereotypes, achievement motivation, competition versus cooperation, empowerment, trust issues, use of language, constraints/barriers, and mentoring have been examined in association with leadership development (Henderson & Roberts, 1998; Warren, 1996). Jordan (1992), for instance, suggests leadership styles typically employed in outdoor programmes and courses are often oriented towards men and may be less effective for
Women and girls. For example: “Males tend to prefer and work well under a traditional hierarchical, directive leadership approach where power is in the hands of the ‘boss’ and the rank and file conduct the daily business. Generally, girls and women do not work well in a highly competitive, tiered setting. They are kept dependent upon the leader for information, support, and power, inhibiting them from trying to achieve their full potential” (Jordan, p. 63). Mitten (1992) developed an alternative model for outdoor leadership that emphasises creating a safe, non-threatening, supportive environment in which women and girls are empowered to make their own choices and decisions about participation and involvement with a programme.

While there has been increased recognition of gender and culture-based challenges linked to leadership (Pinch, 2003; Warren, 2002; Wittmer, 2002), impacts of the outdoor and environmental education experience on ethnically diverse participants are still relatively indistinguishable. According to Roberts & Rodriguez (1999), the past decade has seen a greater effort to integrate multicultural elements in outdoor activities, increasing leaders’ understanding and appreciation of participants’ cultural values, and increasing understanding of traditional uses of outdoor and experiential learning by assorted ethnic groups.

While a variety of anecdotal information is available, multi-culturalism in outdoor education relating to how leaders’ impact participant experiences has been deficient in past research and the majority of studies are based on traditional models designed and taught by white professionals and educators to primarily white participants (Rodriguez & Roberts, 1999).

Programme Description and Hypotheses

Established in 1957, the Student Conservation Association” (SCA) is the United States’ largest and oldest provider of national and community conservation service opportunities. It engages students and adult volunteers in the stewardship of natural and cultural resources. One of SCA’s summer programmes, “Conservation Work Crew” (CWC), engages high school age students (ages 15-19) in four weeks of service-learning through completion of an environmental conservation work project followed by a week long recreation trip. Student volunteers apply for the programme through one of the five regional offices of SCA located throughout the United States, or they apply on line at www.thesca.org. Applications are then screened for admission to the programme according to the student’s level of interest in conservation, a candidate’s particular interest that best matches the needs of partner agencies, flexibility, and a letter of reference.

While completing important conservation work projects, students gain valuable outdoor living skills, learn minimum impact techniques related to the recreational area in which they are participating (e.g., Yellowstone National Park, Arapaho National Forest, Kenai Fjords National Wildlife Refuge), and participate in various environmental education activities. Each year SCA places over 100 service crews involving approximately 600 students and 150 crew leaders in more than 30 different states in the U.S.

This paper examines the relationships between gender and ethnicity within an American context on participants’ evaluations of SCA leaders and explores the quality and impact of their overall wilderness experience. These relationships are stated more formally below:

\( H_1: \) Males will rate the SCA experience differently than females.

\( H_2: \) Ethnically diverse students will evaluate the crew leaders differently than white students.

\( H_3: \) Males will evaluate the overall SCA experience differently than females.
Figure 1. Theoretical impact of gender, ethnicity and crew leaders on evaluations of a wilderness-based experience

H₄: Ethnically diverse students will evaluate the overall SCA experience differently than white students.

H₅: Evaluations will show that crew leaders mediate the relationship between gender and ethnicity and the overall impact of the experience.

Methods

While the data for this study was collected in the summer of 1999, the overall SCA crew leader and participant demographics have changed very little since that time, and results of this analysis are germane to present-day participants. This study was completed in conjunction with the SCA's Conservation Work Crew (CWC) programme and a detailed comparative analysis of all SCA programmes (Roberts, 2000). Of the 596 youth participating in the programme, 503 students completed and returned the evaluation with a response rate of 84%. The 1999 CWC evaluation was designed to provide information on a variety of program components. Specific items were adapted from several previous studies (e.g., Driver & Johnson, 1983; Kellert, 1998; Priest & Gass, 1997). In addition, a convenience sample of 10 students from SCA's National Urban and Diversity Programme in Seattle was selected to participate in a focus group to discuss the evaluation content and pre-test the instrument.

Model Variables

Gender and ethnicity were included in the model as independent variables. Sex was coded as 0 equals males and 1 equals females. A measure of ethnicity was based on each participant’s self-ascribed ethnic background. The seven original categories for this variable were recoded into a dummy variable (white = 0; ethnic minority = 1) for analysis.

Qualities of crew leaders: Respondents rated the qualities of their crew leaders on eight items including:

1) leader’s sensitivity to diversity issues,
2) communication skills,
3) ability to make effective decisions, and
4) helpfulness in maintaining group dynamics.

Other questions addressed:

5) crew leader enthusiasm,
6) demonstration of good management skills,
Gender and Ethnicity on Outdoor Leader Effectiveness

7) role modelling, and
8) whether students were comfortable approaching leaders about their fears and apprehensions (See Table 1 for a complete list and item wording). All variables were coded on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “poor” (1) to “excellent” (5).

Impact of the experience: Participants were also asked to rate their general feelings and thoughts about participation in the SCA programme via a series of seven statements. Statements related to development of confidence, value of service learning and preservation of natural resources, environmental education activities, and overall meaning of the experience (See Table 1 for item wording). Responses were coded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).

Analysis
A confirmatory factor analysis tested whether the variables relating to attitudes towards the crew leaders and impact of the experience provided a good fit to the data. LISREL 8.14 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993) was used to construct a model based on the maxi-

Table 1. Items measuring quality of crew leaders and impact of overall experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Standardized Factor Loading</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Cronbach Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualities of Crew Leaders(^2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive role models for me (“cool but cautious!”)</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>20.62</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicated well with me; made effort to help me understand things</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>18.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity – leaders treated &amp; listened to everyone fairly &amp; with equal respect</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>14.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt safe expressing fears w/ my crew leaders (confide &amp; trust)</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>19.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to make effective decisions</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>18.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided me with info &amp; opportunity to participate in deciding what activities to do</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>16.59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful in maintaining group dynamics</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>19.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt comfortable approaching leaders w/ concerns or ideas</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of the Experience(^3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve learned about value of caring for &amp; preserving the land</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>11.52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned about the value of service learning to the environment &amp; importance of volunteering</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>11.76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned a lot from the environmental education activities</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>9.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This summer helped me to be more confident and self assured</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>12.59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating on this crew helped me obtain greater appreciation for hard work</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>11.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation on this crew was a meaningful life experience</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>12.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) All t-values significant at \(p < .001\).
\(^2\) Variables coded on a 5-point scale from “poor” (1) to “excellent” (5).
\(^3\) Variables coded on a 5-point scale from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).
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maximum likelihood estimation procedure and the correlation matrix of the items measuring the two concepts. Structural equation path analysis was then used to test the model, as well as assess the mediation role of the crew leaders.

"A given variable may be said to function as a mediator to the extent that it accounts for the relation between the predictor and the criterion" (Baron & Kenny, 1986, p. 1176). In structural equation analysis, three separate models are required to demonstrate mediation (Hayduk, 1987). In the full mediation model, the predictors (gender and ethnicity) only influence the criterion (impact of the experience) through their effect on the mediator (evaluation of the crew leaders). In the partial mediation model, the predictors influence the criterion variable directly and indirectly through their effect on the mediator. In the third model, direct effects, the predictors directly affect both the criterion and the mediator, but the mediator is constrained to not affect the criterion.

Mediation occurs under the following conditions: First the predictor must be significantly related to the mediator, and the predictor must significantly affect the criterion variable (direct effects model). Second, the paths between the predictor and the mediator, and between the mediator and the criterion must be significant in both the full and partial mediation models. Full mediation occurs when the direct path from the predictor to the criterion is not significant in the partial mediation model. Third, a comparison of the nested models using the chi-square statistics indicates that the full mediation model fits better than the direct effects model, and the partial mediation model fits no better than the full mediation model (Baron & Kenney, 1986; Hayduk, 1987).

Results

The confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that the data provided an acceptable fit to the evaluations of crew leader qualities and the impact of the experience constructs (Table 1). The standardised factor loadings ranged from .64 to .83 for the qualities of crew leaders scale and from .48 to .61 for the impact of the experience scale, with relatively small standard errors (SE = .04 and .05, respectively). Additional support for combining specific variables into their associated constructs is evident from the reliability analyses. The Cronbach alpha for the crew leader qualities scale was .89, while the coefficients for the impact of the experience scale was .74.

Bivariate Analyses

A t-test was conducted to examine the effects of gender and ethnicity on each construct (evaluations for the crew leaders and the overall impact of the SCA experience)\(^1\). Contrary to Hypothesis 1, males and females did not differ in their evaluations of the crew leaders (t = .72, n.s., Table 2). White participants, however, reported more positive evaluations of their crew leaders than ethnic minorities (t = 3.24, p < .05); findings support Hypothesis 2.

Table 2. Effects of gender and ethnicity on the evaluations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Quality of Crew Leaders</th>
<th>Impact of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>t-value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>.72(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>3.24(^b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Minorities</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Means are not significant at p < .05
\(^b\) Means are significant at p < .05

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Table 3. Mediation tests for three models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediation model</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>$\chi^2 / df$</th>
<th>GFI</th>
<th>NFI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>RMR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full mediation</td>
<td>221.91</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial mediation</td>
<td>221.13</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct effects</td>
<td>288.80</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\Delta \chi^2 \text{ (full vs. partial)} = (\chi^2 \text{ (full)} - \chi^2 \text{ (partial)}) = (221.91 - 221.13) = 0.78$, n.s.

$\Delta \chi^2 \text{ (direct vs full)} = (\chi^2 \text{ (direct)} - \chi^2 \text{ (full)}) = (288.80 - 221.91) = 66.89$, $p < .001$.

$\Delta \chi^2 \text{ (direct vs partial)} = (\chi^2 \text{ (direct)} - \chi^2 \text{ (partial)}) = (288.80 - 221.13) = 67.67$, $p < .001$.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 predicted gender and ethnic differences in the students’ evaluations of the quality of the overall experience. The results support both predictions. Females rated the experience more positively than males ($t = 3.03$, $p < .05$); and whites gave significantly higher evaluations than minority students ($t = 4.55$, $p < .05$). While these bivariate analyses supported 3 of the first 4 hypotheses, it is important to note that participants from both sexes and regardless of ethnic background reported favourable evaluations for both the leaders and the experience. The average scores of the crew leader evaluations ranged from 4.26 to 4.52, where 1 equals poor and 5 equals excellent. Similarly, the average scores for the evaluations of the overall experience ranged from 4.15 to 4.46 (scale = strongly disagree [1] to strongly agree [5]).

Multivariate Analyses

Evaluations of the crew leaders were hypothesised to mediate the relationship between the demographic predictors (gender and ethnicity) and the impact of the overall experience criterion. To address the multivariate relationships among the variables, three structural equation models were examined (direct, partial, and full mediation). Support for the full mediation model and Hypothesis 5 is shown in Table 3. The full mediation model ($\chi^2 = 221.91$, $df = 101$, $p < .001$) had a significantly better fit than the direct effects model ($\Delta \chi^2 = 66.89$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$) and was statistically equivalent to the partial mediation model ($\Delta \chi^2 = .78$, $df = 1$, n.s.). The explanatory power of the full model and its statistical significance provide new insight into the relationship between the variables of ethnicity and gender in predicting the impact of the overall outdoor experience.

The overall fit of the full mediation model was assessed using six indicators ($\chi^2$, $\chi^2 / df$, GFI, NFI, CFI, RMR, see Table 3). Values for the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), the Normed Fit Index (NFI), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) for the full mediation model were in excess of .92 indicating an acceptable fit for the model (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The Root Mean Square Residual (RMR), which measures the average discrepancies between the observed and the model generated covariances, was .04 suggesting a close fit of the data (Church & Burke, 1994). Although the model produced a significant chi-square, large sample sizes tend to inflate this statistic. Consequently, Marsh and Hocevar (1985) suggest that the chi-square should be evaluated in relation to the model’s degrees of freedom; a $\chi^2 / df$ ratio of 2:1 to 5:1 indicates an acceptable fit. The full mediation model was in this range ($\chi^2 / df = 2.20$).

Figure 2 diagrams the full mediation model. Consistent with Hypothesis 5, a significant relationship between participant attitudes towards crew leaders and impact of the overall experience was observed ($\beta = .48$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .23$). The positive coefficient implies that individuals who rated the crew leaders positively were more likely to have a more positive attitude towards the overall experience. Finally, both gender and ethnicity ($\beta = .13$, $\beta = -.34$, respectively; $p < .05$; $R = .14$): the negative coefficient for ethnicity suggests a moderate disparity of the
relationship with non-whites rating the leaders less positively than white students.

**Conclusions**

Results of this study suggest that while SCA participants favourably evaluated their overall experience, females were more positive in their overall evaluation of the programme than males, and white participants gave statistically higher ratings than their non-white cohorts. Whites were also more positive in their evaluations of the crew leaders than ethnic minorities, but there were no statistical differences between the two sexes with respect to the SCA leaders. The quality of crew leaders mediated the relationship between the demographic predictors (gender and ethnicity) and the impact of the experience on participant lives, as predicted.

The fact that there is a disparity among females and males, and white and non-white programme participant evaluation may be a reflection of the different needs of diverse crew members. The sensitivity of evaluation instruments in addressing the unique differences that may be inherent in females and non-white group members regarding programme outcomes is essential in understanding how programme areas vary between participants. Incorporating insightful staff training that identifies the nature of these differences will have a positive impact on crew leader effectiveness and leadership quality. Leaders must therefore be appropriately trained and organisational systems changed to reflect these distinct participant needs. Three potential explanations may account for the disparity between white students and other ethnic groups. First, the more favourable rating of programme participation by whites over ethnic minorities may be a reflection of the greater personal meaning and central life interest many whites have for the natural environment. Traditionally and historically, participation rates of minorities in outdoor recreation activities have been low (Hartmann & Overdevest, 1989; McDonald & Hutchison, 1986; Washburne, 1978). Consequently, less value and status may be placed on participation in a conservation work crew type of activity within cer-
tain minority cultures and communities. Non-white participants may therefore score the overall experience lower than the dominant group because they, and/or their peers, may not place as much value on the experience.

Second, many SCA participants have had less exposure and fewer opportunities than the dominant culture in society to participate in conservation and outdoor education programmes. Hence, most of the summer programme’s ethnically diverse participants are “prepared” for the summer work crew experience through participation in year-round urban and diversity activities. The summer crew experience, in essence, places the participant in a novel, unique, and out of the ordinary situation (i.e., stepping out of their comfort zone). While this anxiety might dissipate with repeated exposure, initial crew experiences that result in personal discomfort and uncertainty might result in less favourable ratings by non-white participants.

Third, although SCA leaders were evenly distributed between females and males, more than 90% were white. This may have influenced their ability to communicate effectively with ethnically diverse participants. Further research is needed to identify whether cross cultural communication training, diversity training, or exploring multicultural perspectives during future crew leader training might influence outdoor leader effectiveness when dealing with diverse participants in the programme.

Discussion

To have a long-term educational impact, wilderness-based experiences must be presented in a way that is relevant to diverse audiences (Warren, 2002; Wittmer, 2001). The concept of transference (Gass, 1985) may provide insight into the crew leader–participant relationship. Transferring the experience and creating a context for learning is imperative for wilderness-based experiences to have a long-term educational impact, and is completely dependent on the knowledge and ability of individual leaders to facilitate this transfer (Roberts and Rodriguez, 1999). Leaders of wilderness-based experiences must be trained in transference skills that are cross-cultural, and take into consideration the variety of cultural competencies necessary for a programme with diverse participants.

Outdoor programmes can be considered a setting where youth of colour with little or no exposure to the natural environment, are often quite unsure of themselves. Once these students are encouraged to move beyond their comfort zones and face their issues and fears, there is potential for developing new skills out-of-doors and building relationships with the program leaders. SCA programs deliver a powerful physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual impact to participants (Roberts, 2000). Seventy-six percent of all students of colour agreed or strongly agreed that participation on an SCA crew was an educational experience for them; similarly, 72% indicated their recreation trip following completion of the work project provided them with a quality experience. One African-American who participated on an urban-based crew summed up the personal impact of this program: The experience made me realise that I contributed to make our environment a better place. It definitely kept me from being lazy and taught me not to be afraid and to work hard. Now I have certain skills and experiences that can be useful in my life.

While the majority of minority participants reported positive experiences in the programme, 16% disagreed on some level, that the summer experience contributed to their personal development and 11% disagreed that they did not enjoy the educational activities or recreation trip. For instance, some of the comments received on the questionnaires implied that some participants had difficulty “relating” to their crew leaders, possibly impacting on their overall experience. If predominantly white staffs are to be effective in dealing with diverse programme participants.
these issues are worthy of further investigation.

Management Implications

While many programmatic resources are focused on the development of new programme components (Roberts, 2000), less is invested in those who deliver the programme. Additional training, including providing staff with a variety of tools to be more effective cross cultural communicators, is vital to developing effective leadership. Specifically, with the steady growth and popularity of youth programmes serving urban populations, it is becoming more essential that managers, directors, and leaders of field programmes receive adequate diversity training. Demographic shifts are drastically altering the makeup of participants in outdoor activities (Rodriguez, and Roberts, 1999). Differences in adolescents such as ethnic background, cultural values, physical ability, sexual orientation, education, etc., will play an increasingly important role in how participants communicate, train programme leaders, build requisite skill sets, and will ultimately determine effectiveness and success in achieving programme goals. Diversity training will serve to improve the “level of outreach” that outdoor leaders exert with youth from urban areas (Rodriguez and Roberts, 1999). As a result, visionary and pragmatic organisations must comprehend that developing a climate of inclusivity where differences are truly valued is more than just “the right thing to do” – it is both a business and programmatic imperative.

Although this study focused on one programme from the Student Conservation Association, the participants were recruited from a national pool of applicants. The findings and recommendations have wide applicability for the overall design and management of outdoor education and recreation programmes that serve diverse constituents. Since the leadership in these programmes (National Outdoor Leadership School, Outward Bound, etc.) tend to be almost exclusively white males, care must be taken to ensure that leaders increase their effectiveness across the variety of cultural boundaries inherent in diverse participants.

For programme managers and directors, evaluation as a tool has three key uses for practical application and this is enhanced when completed evaluations are strategically analysed:

1) determine what changes or impacts occurred as a result of participation in outdoor and experiential programmes,

2) provide staff with concrete information and baseline data to assist with planning and leadership training opportunities, and

3) provide an opportunity for an organisation to determine measurable goals regarding what will change (results) as well as how much change is expected (standards).

Implications for Future Research

As outdoor programmes attempt to appeal to more diverse audiences, it is crucial that research continues to assess and examine the overall impact and meaning of these outdoor recreation and educational experiences for participants of varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Additional exploration of the factor designated as crew leader qualities to be a mediating variable between gender and ethnicity may provide valuable information that could support decisions regarding the types of leadership training that are needed. For instance, in this study of CWC participants, ethnic minorities consistently rated the qualities and characteristics of their crew leaders lower than white participants did.

Another avenue for further research is the use of multiple opportunities such as environmental education, conservation-based service learning, and outdoor recreation as means for cultivating identity and culture. Future investigations must determine if programme participants utilise the CWC experience, regardless of ethnic identity, as a means to create, enhance, or sustain their culture (e.g., Allison, 1988; Floyd 1998). Research is needed to de-
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termine if outdoor experiential programmes like those of SCA are serving to create unique subgroups within certain ethnic populations (e.g., an environmentally concerned Latinos, or environmentally focused African-Americans). Future research should be directed at continuing to understand how ethnic identity is shaped and cultivated in order to help define the role of outdoor recreation and environmental programmes in the lives of minority adolescents and to explain the role that gender plays in one’s evaluation of effective leadership.

Footnotes

1 A two-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was an interaction effect between gender and ethnicity on overall impact and meaning of the experience. This analysis yielded a non-significant F-value (F = .014, p = .91).

REFERENCES


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