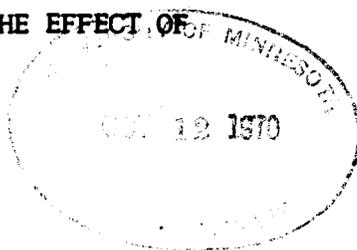


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CAMPING AND COHESIVENESS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EFFECT OF  
OUTDOOR RECREATION ON FAMILY SOLIDARITY<sup>1/</sup>

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## Introduction

Outdoor recreation gives rise to many kinds of social effects which are valued highly. One of these effects appears to be stronger family cohesiveness; i.e., enhancement of person-to-person intimacy binding a family group together. Family cohesiveness is important for several reasons: (1) it can promote effective socialization of children; (2) it can strengthen self-concepts of family members; and (3) it can improve the participant's satisfactions gained from association with other people.

## Previous Research and Study Objectives

Previous leisure research supports the hypothesis that leisure activity and group cohesiveness are related. Furthermore, outdoor recreation has been shown to have one of the highest family participation rates of all family leisure activity. Particularly relevant was a study by Wylie (4) who found that family members believed outdoor recreation, of all family activities, had the greatest influence on their family unity. Research also indicates that the cause of the relationship between leisure activity such as outdoor recreation and group or family cohesiveness is social interaction induced by mutual activity. None of the studies reviewed showed a positive relationship between family solidarity and contact with nature.

Consequently the present study was designed to examine these hypotheses in a local setting: (1) that mutual outdoor recreation helps sustain and increase family cohesiveness by inducing processes of social interaction within the family group; and (2) that contact with nature does not intensify person-to-person bonds except possibly for those people who value nature highly.

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## Study in Brief

The data were obtained from a random sample of families camping at St. Croix State Park in Pine County, Minnesota between June 26 and September 4, 1967. The 30,000 acre park is located about 100 miles north of St. Paul along the St. Croix River. Park developments include overnight camps, picnic areas, organized group camps and river access points.

The husband, wife and oldest child over 12 of the 306 families in the sample were interviewed at the park. At this time measures of spring cohesiveness, attitudes, preferences, and background information were obtained from family members. A follow-up questionnaire, sent to the husband in the fall, probed family outdoor recreation activity over the summer and also fall cohesiveness. This modified ex post facto experimental design helped answer questions about the causal relationships between the main variables.

Some losses from the original sample occurred for various reasons. There was also a 10% non-return rate on the mailed follow-up questionnaire. Tests of the various losses from the sample revealed that losses were limited and appeared to be random in nature. All major measurement scales were tested for reliability and validity. All scales were found to be reliable measures. While validity can never be fully determined, empirical indications were found that suggest the measurement scales were valid.

Cohesiveness was measured by ascertaining the amount of intimate communication of troubles, secrets, and mood among family members. This measure was devised by Dr. Charles E. Ramsey (Professor of Sociology, University of Minnesota) and modified by the senior author for use in the present study. Measures of attitudes towards the natural environment were derived from studies by Burch (1) and West (2).

## Results

Results from the study provide moderate but consistent support for the proposition that outdoor recreation activity helps maintain and increase family cohesiveness. Summer activity was related to fall cohesiveness more than spring cohesiveness was to summer activity, suggesting that activity may affect cohesiveness more than cohesiveness affects activity. Present activity was related to present cohesiveness more than past activity was related to present cohesiveness, suggesting that continuing activity may be relevant to continuing cohesiveness. Furthermore, those families that could benefit most from an increase in cohesiveness (i.e., those with low spring cohesiveness) appear to experience the greatest increase in cohesiveness over the summer due to outdoor leisure activity.

Two factors of social cause were tested in the study: (1) Interaction among family members was related to both activity and cohesiveness; (2) Value similarity among family members relating to leisure values, measured by similarity of camping preference, was related both to summer outdoor activity and to cohesiveness (i.e., the greater the similarity the greater the activity and cohesiveness). Value similarity among family members relating to naturalistic values, measured by attitudes about preservation and motivation for camping, was not significantly related to cohesiveness.

The nature of the camping preference (i.e., preference for developed or primitive sites) was not related to cohesiveness. Naturalistic values were related to cohesiveness (i.e., persons with naturalistic values tended to have more cohesive families). This was especially true for the upper middle class, well educated, families in the early stages of the family life cycle.

The pattern of results, both in the review of literature and in the associated findings of this study, seem to indicate that this relationship is not due to the natural environment itself. Rather, the process of causation may be related to the perception and positive valuation of the naturalistic environment. If nature is to affect the human bond among individuals it would appear that nature must be valued by those individuals and that positive valuation must in some way be connected to subjective self-expectations for behavior. The more plausible alternative explanation of the correlation of naturalistic values and cohesiveness is that both are found simultaneously in certain social groups (mainly the upper middle class, highly educated, young families). The two variables may not be causally connected at all. It is suggested, however, that both of these explanatory processes may be influencing the correlation.

### Implications

The existence of "public benefits" of various kinds which cannot be effectively marketed by private enterprise is a principle argument for public provision of outdoor recreation areas like state parks. Precise identification of many of these "public benefits" and their relationship to outdoor recreation activities has, indeed, been rare. This study, however, has shown that outdoor recreation may influence family cohesiveness or solidarity. Family solidarity is generally conceded to be a public benefit. Therefore, the study has contributed to our ability to discuss one of these "public benefits" more concretely.

The findings of this study do not directly help us answer many other questions about outdoor recreation, such as the number of recreation areas which should be provided, the location of such areas, and the facilities and services which should be provided at such areas. However, they do suggest a principle useful as a guideline in helping to make these decisions. If outdoor recreation does provide these public benefits to the society, barriers to participation should be minimized. Developing more areas closer to centers of population would help to minimize barriers.

Other study results suggest that people participate in accordance with their values and preferences. Presenting only a narrow range of activity opportunities or providing only those that are most popular, could be restricting use. For instance, in St. Croix State Park, there are two semi-primitive campgrounds that are used only for large groups and for overflow use on peak days. If these could be kept open to the public at all times with the addition of more primitive campsites, the park (one of the most beautiful in the state) might attract the persons who would benefit most from its use. The arrangement of activity centers within a recreation area can restrict participation. In St. Croix Park, for instance, the fact that the swimming area was four miles from the campground often discouraged persons from swimming. If the idea of an activity complex is important to the stimulation of use, it is almost equally as important that activities in the complex not interfere with one another and destroy minimal privacy or inhibit use.

### LITERATURE CITED

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