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Carlton Yoshioka
Iowa State University

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TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL FAMILY SOCIAL GROUPS
AND DETERMINANTS OF RECREATIONAL BEHAVIOR

BY

DR. CARLTON YOSHIOKA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

LEISURE STUDIES CURRICULUM
202 BEYER HALL
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
AMES, IOWA 50011

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to provide data on social groups (both traditional and non-traditional family groups) and leisure behavior. The intent was to determine if changes in the family social group structure has an impact on leisure behavior. Data were obtained from a stratified sample of a resource-based facility. Results indicated that no significant differences were apparent between traditional and non-traditional families and participation in selected recreation activities. Implications and recommendations were provided for leisure professional to provide the optimum situations for family (social group) interactions.

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INTRODUCTION

Social scientists have investigated leisure behavior from many perspectives. The family is one perspective that has experienced extensive activity and attention. (11;13) Despite the potential of social group research, leisure professionals have not determined or appreciated the value of social groups to the understanding of leisure behavior. Similarly, the impact of recreation participation and social groups is not considered extensively at either the research or professional levels. It is generally accepted that recreation enhances the family and other social groups, but recreation also tends to fragment the groups into separate sub-units in the pursuit of leisure experiences.

More research is needed to understand relationships between recreation and the family as a social group.

The social group approach of the family as a potential determinant of motivations, preferences and satisfactions associated with certain recreational activities has been reinforced by a recent study.(10) They found utilizing cluster analysis that participant satisfactions were determined by the size and composition of the participating social groups. Initially, research by Burch (2) suggested that the level of involvement in recreation is influenced by the type of social group. Burch (3) further developed this hypothesis by proposing a personal community that identified a social relationship in the leisure camping lifestyle of certain individuals. Subsequent researchers (6;9) further enhanced the theoretical perspective for social groups and outdoor recreation by replication and extension of the social group perspective.

More recently, Christensen (7) and Dottavio, et al. (8) re-examined the social group as a viable basis for selected water activities. A combination of social system (family or friendship) and social aggregate (social-economic/demographic) variables provided further indications of promise in social interactions analysis. However, these efforts still placed the emphasis on the participant's pattern of involvement and not on the reason for that particular leisure involvement. McDonald (14) argues that the underlying interactions within the social structure of groups, is a more promising area of investigation than the emphasis on activities.

Buchanan, et al. (4) suggest a possible link between the variability of the experience available from an activity and the diversity of the participating social groups. The emphasis was placed on the different meanings of an activity by various participating social groups. The distinction was that different meanings were assigned to the same activity by different social groups engaging in the activity. The data by Buchanan revealed that swimming provided a greater variability in meanings, and consequently, a greater occurrence of friendship and friendship/family social groups were apparent.

Changes in the social structure of family groups with the disruption of the nuclear family appear distinct.(1) It reasonably follows that with the greater variability of traditional and non-traditional family social groups, a greater variation of recreation activity meanings will occur.(4) If this diversity of recreation activities and social groups are visible, then an exhaustive examination and understanding of social groups related to leisure behavior by recreation planners and managers is essential. Currently, however, very little research has been done on within group differences and specific outdoor recreation activities as they relate to social groups and the family.(11) The commonly utilized social group types are "family," "friendship" and "family/friendship." However, the three traditional social group types utilized in past studies are inadequate to account for the variability of participating social groups. Additional research is needed to delineate and verify that these categories reflect the current structure of social groups.

More recently, social group research has focused on the unit of

analysis of the social group at home and then the on-site recreational participation by that social group (participation unit dynamics, Snepenger, 1984). For instance, the nuclear family of four on a leisure outing may not participate as a group. The father and the son may go fishing, while mother and daughter go sight-seeing. Snepenger (15) found that participation unit dynamics depended on the leisure activity, length of stay, and group size.

The purpose of this study was concerned with individual preferences by traditional and non-traditional (family) social groups to certain outdoor activities. In addition, the research focused on the differences of social group membership and participation unit dynamics. The question of participation unit dynamics relates to whether the family that travels to a leisure locale is the same as the social group that engages in a given activity. The assumption is that the composition of the social group at home, or even on-site, is different than the social groups participating in various recreational activities.

METHODS

This examination was based on data obtained from a proportional sample of visitors at an U.S. Army Corps of Engineers multiple-use reservoir in central Iowa. The sample design was based on the Corps of Engineers' previous visitation surveys measuring participation at selected recreation sites. Sampling was stratified to allow for representation of day use, over-night camping and extended visitation throughout the year. This study was conducted during the winter, spring and summer of 1984-1985.

Visitors were systematically interviewed by road survey teams during ten-one week vehicle traffic stop sessions. Each individual interviewed was then asked if they would be willing to accept a 12 page written questionnaire. The pre-paid survey packets were coded to assist in a non-respondent analysis. Of the 1257 visitors that accepted the questionnaire, 463 (36.8 percent) usable questionnaires were returned for analysis. Despite the low return rate, the non-respondent analysis (data from the Corp of Engineers' interviews were coded with the additional data of this study) revealed that no significant differences existed between the two groups. The non-respondents were as diverse and heterogeneous as the respondents for this study.

A matrix was used to determine the participation unit dynamics (on-site composition of the social group). A four column matrix required the respondents to list the people who came to the lake with them and what relationship they were to the respondents. They were then asked to "circle all the activities in which each member participated during the visit." Six items (for up to 6 members of the group) were provided to determine composition of the group that engaged in given activities. The activities section consisted of a check list of 24 recreation activities, plus an additional seventeen activities that were added to determine the social groups engaged in specific recreation activities.

RESULTS

An examination of the data revealed that the visitors to the outdoor recreation resource: lived within a 20 mile radius (79 percent), were employed full time (66 percent), had a spouse working full time (56 percent), were married (71.4 percent), were educated (90 percent with at least a high school degree), and a moderate income (65 percent with \$20,000 or more). Despite the concern for the disruption of the family, the data suggest that the family is still quite active in recreational participation. The working parents within the family structure, including full time and part time working spouses, resulted in over 70 percent of this sample.

The frequency of recreation participation supported the multiple use aspect of a predominantly water-based resource. The results are summarized in Table 1. The main recreation activities for the 463 users were swimming, boating and fishing. Overall, 45 percent of the activities consisted of biking, walking, picnicking, visiting with other people, and other non-water related pursuits. This resource has the initial attraction of the lake, but the data revealed that varied interactions take place in and surrounding the water-based resource.

Reducing the 30 or more recreational choices to a more efficient eleven recreation activities, Table 2 addresses recreation participation from the social group perspective. The chi-square test of homogeneity revealed if there were differences between social groups and the eleven recreational activities. Comparisons were developed between the traditional family with children and the non-traditional family with children; the traditional family without children and the non-traditional family without children; the dual career family and the traditional family; and the elderly social group (55 years or older) and those under 55 years of age. The tests of homogeneity showed that only the senior group differed significantly.

The final research question is addressed by Table 3. The on-site social groups were collapsed to include the nuclear family (38.3 percent), extended family (19.4 percent) and friends (42.2 percent) that engaged in selected recreation activities. The chi-square test reported a significant difference ($p < .01$) between the three social groups and the recreation activities. The extent and the actual differences of the social groups will have to be investigated in future research attempts. By comparing the social group composition and the engaged social group, the data does suggest that participation unit dynamics is a factor. Friends, as a social group, also appeared to be very significant in the social groupings that occur at specific on-site situations.

DISCUSSION

This study attempted to examine recreational behavior from the family (social group) perspective. Data from a site-specific,

resource-based facility were used to determine the impact of social groups on certain recreation activities. Additionally, the contention that activities might tend to segment social groups, particularly the family, was investigated. The hope was to provide leisure managers the data to anticipate and possibly prevent any unnecessary stress on the family pursuing a recreational experience.

The results indicated that the family as a social group is still a viable vehicle for leisure participation. This coincides with the review of literature by Holman and Epperson (11). Over 70 percent of this sample were married and of the married group, 56 percent were considered dual career families. This is even more surprising since the activities occurred outside the home where a decrease in family activity is apparent. Willmott (17) reported that two out of three individuals preferred recreation activities at home, while the United Media Study (16) revealed that six out of ten recreation activities were done outside the home. Regarding spouse employment outside the home, researchers (5, 16) have reported that dual career families were more inclined to utilize their limited free time in leisure pursuits. This was again evident in the preponderance of dual career families in this study. Dual career families had the least amount of available leisure time (16), however, a disproportionate number of visitors in this study had both adults working full time.

Whether specific outdoor recreation activities were preferred by different social groups was examined by this study. The only significant results were the age connected concerns of the elderly. The results concurred with related research findings that activity forms themselves did not promote family cohesion, satisfaction and/or even influence marital and family situations.(11)

The comparison of traditional and non-traditional social groups resulted in only one significant difference in the eleven selected activities. Despite the limited amount of leisure time available to non-traditional groups, the participation in recreation activities appeared unaffected. The single-parent and dual career family groups seemed to use a disproportionate quantity of free time for the leisure experience. A related study reported that single-parent families revealed no significant differences in leisure satisfaction indicators when compared to two-parent families.(18) More research is required in this area to provide guidance to leisure managers.

The results suggest that social groups participating in certain activities are different than the social groups arriving at the recreational site. Of 70 percent that originally embarked as a family unit, 42.2 percent of the participating social groups separated into friend associations. This segmentation of the family social group into sub-units supports the findings of Snepenger.(15) The leisure manager must make concerted efforts to encourage more family oriented opportunities.

This present study was site-specific and representative only of the Midwest respondents that shared their leisure experiences. However, several implications and recommendations can be directed at leisure

professionals and managers to assist them in providing the optimum situation for family (social groups) interaction.

1. The family is still an active social group in outdoor activities. The traditional social group, the nuclear family, is a frequent user, but the dual career, single-parent and the senior groupings are also becoming groups to be included in marketing and programming strategies. For resource areas that are attempting to increase the number of visitors, these groups may provide a fertile target for future interest.

2. The number and ages of children and adults in the traditional and non-traditional social groups are definite determinants of participation. Along with participation concerns, the leisure manager will have to decide on activities that promote, engage and enhance family/group quality and not encourage segmentation into sub-groups of participation.

3. Items such as distance required for travel, fees and charges for the family should be included in the overall decision-making process by leisure managers. Additionally, concerns such as traffic congestion, crowding, litter, noise conditions and water pollution were also problems reported by the respondents in this study.

4. The most frequently participated activity form for the family is the television. Leisure managers of outdoor areas have the opportunity to short circuit the negative impact of television by taking a proactive approach to providing family/social group alternatives to viewing television.

5. The above recommendations suggest the need for continued emphasis on the family as a basis of leisure behavior research. Leisure investigators must verify all the present findings in this area and develop a more basic theoretical and conceptual foundation for future study. Additionally, investigators must provide the bridge between basic and applied research benefit leisure service managers and the discipline of leisure studies and services.

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TABLE 1

Frequency Participation of Recreational Activities

| Activity | Frequency | (Percent) |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Bicycling | 12 | (2.6) |
| Boating-Canoes | 5 | (1.1) |
| Boating-Power Boats | 37 | (8.2) |
| Drinking Alcohol | 3 | (.7) |
| Driving for Pleasure | 14 | (3.1) |
| Fishing from a Boat | 45 | (9.9) |
| Fishing from Shore | 63 | (13.9) |
| Nature Study | 7 | (1.5) |
| Photography | 4 | (.9) |
| Picnicking | 22 | (4.9) |
| Relaxing/Doing Nothing | 26 | (5.7) |
| Sailing | 7 | (1.5) |
| Sunbathing | 25 | (5.5) |
| Swimming | 88 | (19.4) |
| Using Playground | 5 | (1.1) |
| Visiting Other People | 1 | (.2) |
| Water Skiing | 3 | (.7) |
| Walking or Jogging | 13 | (2.9) |
| Camping | 44 | (9.7) |
| Sight Seeing | 10 | (2.2) |
| Dog Training | 4 | (.9) |
| Cross Country Skiing | 1 | (.2) |
| Duck Hunting | 1 | (.2) |
| Getting Away | 1 | (.2) |
| Bird Watching | 1 | (.2) |
| Volleyball | 1 | (.2) |
| Girl Watching | 1 | (.2) |
| Having Fun | 1 | (.2) |
| Parasailing | 3 | (.6) |
| Wind Surfing | 1 | (.2) |
| Getting Out of City | 1 | (.2) |
| Watching Boaters | 1 | (.2) |
| Boating-No Distinctions | 1 | (.2) |
| Fishing-No Distinctions | 1 | (.2) |
| | 463 | (100) |

TABLE 2

Frequency Participation By Social Group Types

| Activity | Trad. Family With Children | Non-Trad. Family With Children | Trad. Family Without Children | Non-Trad. Family Without Children | Dual Career Family | Trad. Family | Seniors | Under 55 |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------|-------------|
| Biking | 6 | -- | 3 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 10 |
| Boating | 17 | 1 | 12 | 5 | 24 | 13 | 4 | 33 |
| Sight Seeing | 4 | 1 | 11 | 6 | 11 | 13 | 5 | 19 |
| Fishing-Boat | 20 | 1 | 17 | 6 | 26 | 19 | 8 | 37 |
| Fishing-Shore | 18 | 2 | 24 | 17 | 26 | 37 | 11 | 52 |
| Picnicking | 10 | -- | 5 | 7 | 12 | 10 | 4 | 18 |
| Relaxing | 5 | -- | 13 | 7 | 11 | 15 | 7 | 19 |
| Sunbathing | -- | -- | 8 | 15 | 8 | 17 | -- | 25 |
| Swimming | 32 | 11 | 22 | 20 | 43 | 45 | 3 | 85 |
| Walking/Jogging | 3 | -- | 7 | 3 | 5 | 8 | -- | 10 |
| Camping | 21 | 1 | -- | -- | 25 | 19 | 7 | 37 |
| | 136 (88.9) | 17 (11.1) | 138 (59.5) | 94 (40.5) | 198 (49.6) | 201 (50.4) | 54 (13.5) | 345 (86.5) |

$\chi^2 = 14.92$
 $df = 9$
 $p = n.s.$

$\chi^2 = 14.71$
 $df = 10$
 $p = n.s.$

$\chi^2 = 12.35$
 $df = 10$
 $p = n.s.$

$\chi^2 = 20.185$
 $df = 10$
 $p < .05^*$

TABLE 3

Frequency of Engaged Recreation Participation By Social Group Types

| Activity | Nuclear Families | Extended Families | Friends | Total | (Percent) |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------|-------|-----------|
| Biking | 2 | -- | 5 | 7 | (3.4) |
| Boating | 4 | 7 | 7 | 18 | (8.7) |
| Sight Seeing | 5 | 5 | 5 | 15 | (7.3) |
| Fishing-Boat | 12 | 4 | 7 | 23 | (11.2) |
| Fishing-Shore | 18 | 6 | 15 | 39 | (18.9) |
| Picnicking | 1 | 1 | 7 | 9 | (4.4) |
| Relaxing | 9 | 1 | 4 | 14 | (6.8) |
| Sunbathing | 3 | 1 | 8 | 12 | (5.8) |
| Swimming | 6 | 9 | 17 | 32 | (15.5) |
| Walking/Jogging | 8 | 1 | 2 | 11 | (5.3) |
| Camping | 11 | 5 | 10 | 26 | (12.6) |
| | 79 (38.3) | 40 (19.4) | 87 (42.2) | 206 | (100) |

$\chi^2 = 35.611$
 $df = 20$
 $P < .01^*$