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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was devised and disseminated at the 1983 American Camping Association (ACA) convention to ascertain from members the value placed on camping research. The questionnaire addressed the following concerns: who should be conducting research, how should research be disseminated, what are the important broad areas of needed research, and what research questions should be addressed. Study results indicated 88% of the respondents believed that ACA should do research; over 75% believed that research should be reviewed and reported in the Camping Magazine; areas of most research needed were the individual and camping and programming in camp; and broad areas to address were the individual and camping and management. Recommendations made in light of the study findings were: respondents and other consumers of camping research realize the value of research; value of camping to the individual appears to be the broad question in camping which needs more investigation; camping research is not viewed as the domain of one academic discipline or as the domain of only university students and faculty; and an important goal of ACA should be the dissemination of research findings that will enhance the meaning of research and promote the sharing of findings and methodologies among researchers. (ERB)

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A NEEDED FRAMEWORK FOR TELLING THE CAMPING STORY

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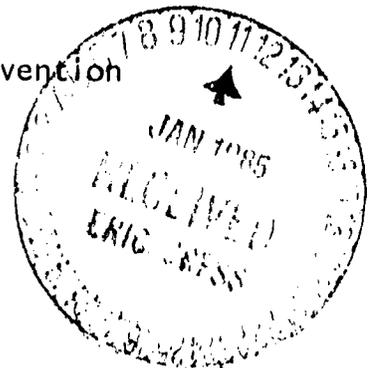
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A true profession and a legitimized social movement are marked by the research which is conducted regarding the issues and concerns of the movement or profession. Research in camping is not new. Organized camping has been an important aspect in the lives of many people over the past 100 years, and as a consequence, much has been written about the organized camping movement. Research related to camping has been conducted for many years on a wide variety of topics. This research, done primarily by graduate students and persons in camping-related fields, has provided a great deal of information.

Additional systematic studies are needed. Knowledge gaps which impair the provision of "better camping for all" need to be identified. In addition, it is useful to assess the way in which camping research is planned, funded, performed, disseminated, and utilized. Since research provides the framework for telling the camping story, accurate information and communication of the findings are imperative.

#### Background Information

The most comprehensive synthesis to date of the research related to camping appears in van der Smissen and Brookhiser's 1982 bibliography entitled BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RESEARCH ORGANIZED CAMPING, ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION, ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES,

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INTERPRETATIVE SERVICES, OUTDOOR RECREATION USERS, AND PROGRAMMING. Although the bibliography covers more than just research on organized camping, it provides an extensive list of published and unpublished camping research.

A modified content analysis was used to categorize the kinds of camping research which van der Smissen and Brookhiser assembled. The bibliography contains over 1500 citations related directly to camping. Of those, one-third pertained directly to camp management with the most common topics of research including administration and leadership skills and school camp administration. Another one third of the studies dealt with the individual growth and development of campers. The most common topics regarding this research issue related to psycho-social characteristics, changes in special population groups, and self-concept. Almost a fourth of the studies dealt with topics related to camp program. These included evaluation of camp programs, special population programming, and the value of special activities in camp. Ten percent of the studies addressed societal aspects of camp with the most common topics being the educational possibilities/values of camp and the group aspects of the camping experience. Less than 2% of the studies referenced in the bibliography addressed the biophysical environment of camp.

Three-fourths of the studies which were cited in the bibliography were conducted prior to 1970. The majority of the research cited (60%) was graduate student research for theses and dissertations compared to journal and publication writing. It appeared that the great majority of graduate research was never

published in journals. In general, after a cursory analysis of the bibliography, it did not appear that a lack of research exists in most of the major camping areas, but rather the lack of communication concerning the research may be a problem.

#### Determining Present Camping Research Needs

To determine the present need for camping research, a brief two-page questionnaire was devised. The purposes of the questionnaire were to ascertain from the members of the American Camping Association the value placed on camping research, who should be conducting research, how research ought to be disseminated, what the most important broad areas of needed research are, and what possible research questions should be addressed. In addition, some demographic data were collected about the individuals who were completing the questionnaire.

The questionnaires were distributed as people entered the doors at the opening session of the 1983 ACA Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio. A total of 315 useable and completed questionnaires were returned at the end of that session.

A second questionnaire was mailed in early September 1983 to 105 people who had indicated on the initial questionnaire that they would be willing to provide further information. Eighty of the mailed questionnaires were returned. This questionnaire consisted of 80 of the most frequently identified research questions which were proposed by the initial respondents. The people participating in this second phase of the study were asked

to rate the importance of these research questions.

### The Value of Camping Research

The respondents to the first questionnaire given at the Convention in Cincinnati represented a variety of camps. Almost half of the respondents represented agency camps while a little more than one-fourth were from religiously affiliated camps (RAC) and less than one-fourth were from private independent camps (PIC). Sixty percent of the respondents represented resident camps with 35% representing both resident and day camps and 6% from day camps. Demographically, the 315 respondents had an average age of 39 years. They had been employed in camping for an average of 13.6 years. Slightly more males (53%) than females comprised the sample. Eighty percent were camp directors, 11% were staff, and 3% were educators. Almost 90% held a baccalaureate degree with 43% having some additional graduate school education.

On a 10-point scale, the respondents saw research in general as being important with an average score of 8.0. Concerning the value of camping research, the average score was 6.53. When these two scores were plotted against one another, a positive correlation (.41) was found between the two scores. In other words, those who tended to see research as valuable, also saw camping research as valuable. No associations were found between the stated value of camping research and the number of years a person had been employed in camping, the sex of the respondent, or the camp sponsorship. While education did not statistically affect the score related to the value placed on

camping research, as one might expect the people with graduate education had a higher score regarding the value of camping research.

Several questions were asked regarding who should be conducting camping research. Of the total respondents, 77% believed that educators/researchers should do research, 76% believed that camp directors should do research, and 88% believed the Association (ACA) should. These percentages did not differ depending on the sponsorship of the camp, although religiously affiliated camp people did not rate as highly in their desire to have research conducted by directors and educators. It was interesting to note that in general many of the respondents saw ACA as having an important role in conducting research.

Over three-fourths of the respondents believed that research should be reviewed and reported in the CAMPING MAGAZINE. Private independent camp respondents were the most vehement about this belief. An open-ended question was asked concerning the ways that people could learn about new research in camping. Twenty-six percent of the respondents indicated that professional meetings were an important way. About 14% believed that the National Recreation and Park Association journals and publications were a good outlet. The need for a research newsletter was suggested by 13% of the respondents while another 11% suggested special mailings and articles in other magazines. Local section meetings and local publications were also suggested by 11% of the respondents. Other possible means suggested were research seminars, research review workshops, special research

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mailings, kindred groups, research memos from ACA, and an annual bibliography.

### Areas of Most Research Need

The respondents were asked to identify on a 10-point scale the importance of five broad areas of camping research. These five areas included: the individual and camping, society and camping, the nonhuman (biophysical) environment and camping, management of camps, and programming in camps. The area which received the highest rating was the individual and camp (8.3) followed closely by programming in camp (8.2). Society and camping and the nonhuman environment and camping both received a rating of 7.6 while the management of camps was slightly ahead of these issues with a 7.8 rating. These ratings were similar for the four sponsorships, except that religiously affiliated people regarded the value of research on the individual and camping as a significantly lower priority. These same respondents from RAC camps saw programming as the most important area of needed research.

Over 200 questions emerged when the Cincinnati respondents were asked to identify the research questions which someone ought to study. When all questions were listed which had received at least three responses, a total of 80 questions were identified. The most frequently asked questions pertained to the lifelong benefits of camp, the needs of today's youth, how follow-up can be done on campers, the cognitive benefits of camp, how skills learned at camp are transferable to other aspects of

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life, parental expectations of camp, how camp affects counselors as well as campers, and how to select competent staff.

These eighty questions were grouped into the five broad areas previously discussed to see if the specific questions reflected the priorities suggested for the broad areas. Thirty-eight percent of the questions were categorized into the individual and camping area, 29% into management, 21% society and camping, 10% into programming, and only 2% into the biophysical area. This grouping allowed a comparison between the original importance of the five broad areas with the actual types of questions suggested by the respondents. The comparison indicated that over 79% of the respondents asked a question related to the broad area of the individual and camping while 61% asked a question which pertained to the management of camp. Clearly, the individual and the camping experience was the most needed research area as evidenced by the value placed on this category and by the kinds of questions which were asked.

These eighty questions were further analyzed by asking a subsample of the respondents through the mailed questionnaire to indicate how important these questions were. Table 1 illustrates the results of the second questionnaire with all questions listed that received a score of 3.75 out of a possible 5-point Likert scale with 1=no research needed and 5=extremely important topic. As can be seen, most of the first items related communicating the value of camp and ascertaining how camp affects the individual.

Research in Camping is Needed

The results of this study seemed to indicate that an interest and a need exist for further research in the field of organized camping. It appeared that specific questions can be identified, particularly in the areas of the individual and camping and the management of camps. It was evident that the needed broad areas of research as perceived by camp professionals of today are similar to the camping research which has been done in the past. In view of the findings, dissemination of research information may be one of the biggest challenges in the effective use of research in the future. Several specific recommendations can be made in light of the findings of this study:

1. Respondents to this study and other consumers of camping research realize the value of research. Therefore, efforts should be made to encourage the undertaking and dissemination of research and evaluation studies related to the camp experience.

2. The value of camping to the individual appears to be the broad question in camping which needs more investigating. While it is true that many studies have been completed in this broad area, it was evident that more studies which continue to look at the benefits of camping using both longitudinal as well as cross sectional approaches will continue to be important in the future. Efforts are still needed to document through research the value of camping.

3. Camping research is not viewed as the domain of one academic discipline nor as the domain of only university students and

faculty. It was clearly evident that camp directors themselves ought to be doing research and that the American Camping Association ought to be encouraging the undertaking of research, initiating needed studies, and providing ways to disseminate the research which is conducted.

4. Dissemination of research findings that will enhance the meaning of research to the consumers of the research as well as promote the sharing of findings and methodologies among researchers ought to be an important goal of the Association. Better means are needed for communicating research findings so the information can be used and unnecessary duplication of studies can be prevented. In addition, new methodologies for conducting camping research must be sought and shared among researchers.

Clearly, research is of value in the camping movement since data are needed to "tell our story" and to provide "better camping for all". Efforts must be continued to explore important research questions and to share the findings so professionals in the camping movement have a framework for communicating the value of the organized camping experience.

Table 1  
Highest Ranking Questions to be Researched  
Concerning Camping

<u>Item</u>	<u>Score*</u>
What can we do to make the public understand that camping is an important educational opportunity?	4.22
What are the "lifelong" benefits of a camp experience?	4.09
What does the camp experience do?	4.04
What about follow-up on campers--does a camp experience benefit?	4.00
What is the impact of a camp experience on counselors?	3.99
How does camp meet the needs (educ., emotional, physical) of today's youth?	3.92
What are the positive and negative effects of counselor and staff influence on campers?	3.89
What are parent expectations of the camp experience for their children?	3.86
What occurs in camper/counselor relationships?	3.83
What do kids want at camp?	3.82
How is attitude change affected in camp?	3.82
Can skills learned at camp be transferred to the community?	3.81
How do you select the most effective staff?	3.80
How does camp affect individual growth?	3.80
What societal changes are affecting camp enrollment?	3.79
What are camp's human development effects--pro/con?	3.79

\* Based on 5-point scale.

N = 80