

Considering Students' Experiences in Diverse Groups

Case Studies from the National Outdoor Leadership School

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Abstract

Outdoor adventure education (OAE) spaces are historically white and privileged. Through a social justice lens, if we, as OAE providers, believe that all people should have access to OAE experiences, one potential remedy to access barriers may be the provision of scholarships to students from lower socioeconomic status. This would increase diversity, broadly conceived, on OAE courses which would, in turn, affect group interactions. But in what ways? Through sociometric measures (social network analysis) as well as interviews, this exploratory study sought to describe the experiences of students on OAE courses composed of different numbers of students receiving full scholarships. Challenges of integrating students receiving scholarships into existing OAE program structures are discussed, and programmatic modifications are considered.

Keywords: *NOLS; sociogram; Summer Search; adolescents*

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Introduction

Outdoor adventure education (OAE) spaces are historically white and masculine (Chavez, Winter, & Absher, 2008; DeLuca, 1999; Mitten, 1999; Roberts, 2009). Research in outdoor recreation management indicates that various individuals and groups face issues of disempowerment. Women, people with disabilities, and people from racial and ethnic minorities do not enjoy the same access to OAE as white men (Floyd, 1998; Floyd & Gramann, 1995; Floyd & Shinew, 1999; Shinew et al., 2006). More specifically, people of color often engage in different leisure pursuits for reasons including historical inequalities (Meeker, 1973; Roberts, 2007) and the resulting lack of access.

Outdoor adventure education spaces are also privileged as,

We must realize that the construction of 'living simply' for a period of time carries a hefty price tag in terms of gear and access. Often, we go 'into the woods' with thousands of dollars of equipment, available only through privileged discretionary income (Rose & Paisley, 2012, p. 148).

Consider the sheer financial cost of participation in OAE: Thirty-day Wind River Expedition courses offered by the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), for example, bear tuition costs of \$4,640, plus additional travel, equipment, and miscellaneous expenses. In addition, many of these activities take place in remote geographic locations, forcing reliance on permits and, typically, multiple modes of motorized transportation only available through privileged access to information.

Consistent with Miller's (1999) conceptualization of social justice, to the extent that we (as OAE providers) believe that all people, regardless of socioeconomic status, should have access to OAE experiences and to the extent that we have some control over barriers to that access, we have a moral obligation to act. One potential remedy to these access barriers may be the provision of scholarships to students from lower socioeconomic status. This would, at least temporarily, ameliorate access issues around financial barriers and add diversity, broadly conceived, to the typically privileged student population. Then, to the extent that socioeconomic status is correlated with race and/or ethnicity, increasing the number of students receiving scholarships may also serve to increase the racial and/or ethnic diversity of students on OAE courses. While we must be cautious that scholarships do not simply "provide a venue change for the same patterns of privilege and power to manifest rather than tilting the systems that made such access unattainable or unappealing" (Rose & Paisley, 2012, p. 149), real understanding of social differences "can't happen until groups are diverse" (Warren, 2002, p. 236). In short, if understanding of social differences is a goal of OAE (which may be debatable relative to other goals), we need more diverse groups of students on courses and the provision of scholarships may be one pragmatic way to achieve that end.

But what happens to OAE as groups become more diverse? While much research has been conducted regarding activity preference, park use, and participation in outdoor recreation opportunities (e.g., Arnold & Shinew, 1998; Floyd, Gramann, & Saenz, 1993; Floyd, Shinew, McGuire, & Noe, 1994), little has focused specifically on OAE. As learning and education are central tenets and processes of OAE, literature focusing on educational settings becomes relevant. Parallels from higher education suggest that *structural diversity* (the presence of people from different backgrounds) is a necessary but insufficient condition for maximizing educational benefits; rather it is *interactional diversity* (the informal contact and interchange between students)

that facilitates learning (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). However, with respect to student learning and personal development in higher education, Hu and Kuh (2003) found that White students benefitted more from racial and ethnic diversity on campuses than did the students of color themselves. Increasing diversity affects interpersonal processes and group dynamics as well. One sociometric study, for example, found that middle school students were likely to offer more acceptance nominations, or “votes,” and fewer rejection nominations to their same-ethnicity peers (Bellmore et al., 2007). Perhaps most simply, Lott and Lott’s classic work (1965) suggested that groups whose members have more similar backgrounds will be more cohesive. Thus, diversity affects group functioning, but how, specifically, in OAE? Is increasing diversity beneficial (and, if so, how and for whom)?

To be clear, increased access to OAE and the resulting outcome of increasingly diverse student groups should not be equated with social justice. Rose and Paisley (2012) asserted that “simply encouraging more racially diverse participant groups amounts to a benevolent invitation for ‘others’ to take part in processes and institutions already well under way without them” (p. 142). A social justice perspective would necessarily suggest programmatic and procedural ramifications to effectively serve increasingly diverse groups in OAE. To understand the forms such ramifications might take, we need to know more about the impact of interactional diversity in OAE.

This study, then, seeks to answer two related but different questions. Pragmatically, NOLS was interested in the most effective ways to distribute scholarship funds and provide beneficial learning experiences for the students receiving them. The more “research-oriented” purpose of this exploratory study was to consider the experiences and patterns of relationships of students on OAE courses with different compositions of diversity.

Methods

Data were collected from students on courses at NOLS, an international provider of OAE. Established in 1965, NOLS strives to be the “leader in wilderness education” (<http://www.nols.edu>) by combining the development of leadership and technical outdoor skills with education regarding risk management and environmental studies. Courses are tailored to specific populations including youth, college-age students, individuals 25 years of age and older, and individuals either currently working as or seeking to become outdoor educators. Course offerings range from eight days to a full academic semester in length, and students can elect to earn college credit at the undergraduate or graduate level for their studies with NOLS. In the 2012 fiscal year, 87% of students on open enrollment courses at NOLS (those courses listed in the catalog) identified themselves as white, 67% were male, and 83% paid the entire cost of participation (without any level of scholarship).

There are many methodological issues associated with studying diversity (Shinew et al., 2006). Recognizing this, we chose scholarship status (receiving a full-tuition scholarship) as a proxy for “diversity,” broadly conceived. Receiving a full-tuition scholarship is an indicator of socioeconomic status and may also capture racial and ethnic diversity to some extent. In our study, most (but not all) students not receiving scholarships were white and most (but not all) students receiving scholarships were people of color. Regardless, students seeking and receiving scholarships at NOLS are *different*, perhaps in myriad ways, than the majority of more privileged students who pay most of or the full cost of attendance.

In this case, we focused on students receiving scholarships through an organization called Summer Search. This is a nonprofit organization “dedicated to helping low-income youth build

the confidence, character and skills needed to complete college and achieve their full potential” (<http://www.summersearch.org>). With offices across the United States, Summer Search applies uniform criteria (including socioeconomic status and academic performance) to identify students with potential, then matches them with year-round mentors and provides access to leadership development opportunities (including OAE courses at NOLS). In 2010, Summer Search served 1,696 high school students: 95% of whom qualified for free/reduced federal lunches; 91% were the first in their families to attend college; and two thirds self-identified as Black or Latino (<http://www.summersearch.org>). Summer Search pays one third of tuition (with NOLS paying the remaining two thirds), travel expenses, and equipment rental costs for their students taking NOLS courses. We chose to focus on students from Summer Search because of the consistent procedures in selection and the students’ full-scholarship status in order to manage some variability. However, as it is the only universal selection factor, we functionally delimited our operationalization of “diversity” to socioeconomic status (represented by scholarship status) for this study.

Data were collected from six 30-day NOLS courses for 16- to 17-year-olds during the summer of 2012. Staff at NOLS assigned students from Summer Search and students from open enrollment at NOLS onto six courses to form three different compositions of students receiving full-tuition scholarships: Two courses of 12 students each consisted of two students receiving full-tuition scholarships; two consisted of six students receiving full-tuition scholarships; and two consisted of all students receiving full-tuition scholarships. While not an explicit focus of this study, sex of the students was a definitive visible marker of diversity and, as such, also needed to be addressed. A mixed methods approach was then used to consider each group’s cohesion and social structure and to encourage students to describe the social experiences of their courses in their own words. The results from the quantitative portion of the study have been presented elsewhere (Jostad, Paisley, Sibthorp, & Gookin, 2013), and focused on group cohesion data. This paper focuses on the qualitative results from sociometric measures and interviews.

Social network analysis (SNA) was used to assess the social structure of each group. This technique provided a graphical representation, or sociogram, of the relationships among individuals in a group through the use of graph theory (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). A sociogram is comprised of two main components: social entities (called actors or nodes) and relational ties (called edges). The actors in the network are the people in the study, and are represented by a shape or name in the sociogram. Actors can take on different shapes or colors to represent different attributes, such as sex and scholarship status in this case. The edges are the connections between actors and represent the transfer or flow of information (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Questions that ask actors to nominate, or select, others based on a particular criterion generate directional edges with arrows showing whom each person nominated. Actors with more incoming and outgoing edges are viewed as more popular or as having more prestige than others in the network (Hanneman & Riddle, 2005). These sociograms, because they are created mathematically and reflect weighted nominations, lie somewhere between quantitative and qualitative data. As we are focusing solely on the visual representation (map) here, we chose to treat these as qualitative data.

The SNA data were collected at three different times in order to map changes in group structure throughout the courses. The collection occurred at three points: approximately day 10 (first re-ration, or re-supply, of food), approximately day 20 (second re-ration), and day 30 (the final day of the course). Each student was asked to respond to the following scenario, designed to assess how she or he would response in a social context:

You are preparing to do an easy day of travel without instructors. The route is only a few miles on-trail and the weather will be excellent. You will be camping near a lake and should have plenty of time to hang out and enjoy each other's company. Name up to three students you would want in your group.

In this SNA, actors are represented according to scholarship status and sex. We restricted the number of nominations, or choices, to three other students so the effects of incoming relations could be seen. Data were uploaded into an SNA software package called C-IKNow (Huang, Contractor, & Yao, 2008) which produced sociograms, or social maps (Figures 1–3).

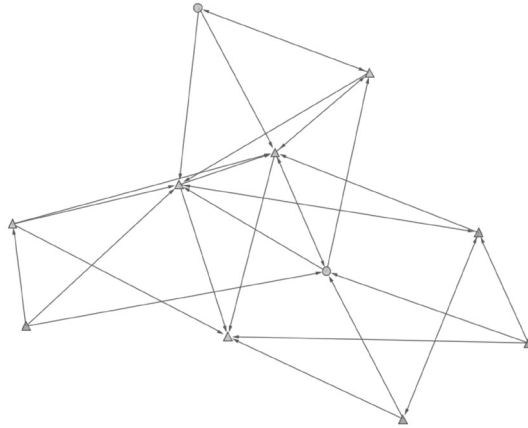


Figure 1. Sociogram for Composition A (2 Students Receiving Scholarships, Day 10). Circles represent students receiving scholarships; triangles represent students not receiving scholarships. Orange represents students who are female; blue represents students who are male.

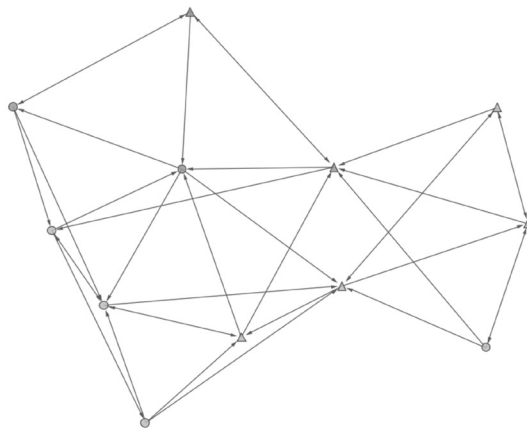


Figure 2. Sociogram for Composition B (6 Students Receiving Scholarships, Day 10). Circles represent students receiving scholarships; triangles represent students not receiving scholarships. Orange represents students who are female; blue represents students who are male.

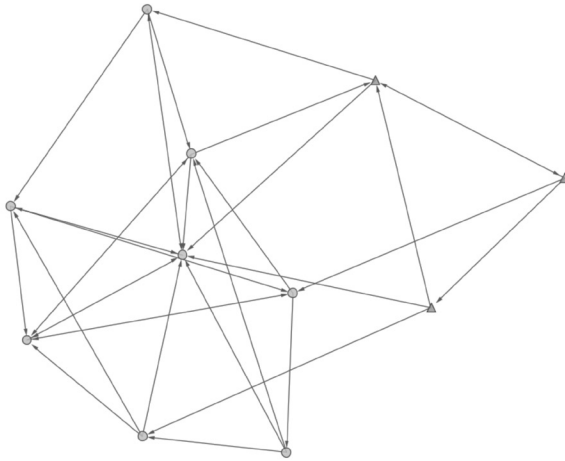


Figure 3. Sociogram for Composition C (All Students Receiving Scholarships, Day 10). Circles represent students receiving scholarships; triangles represent students not receiving scholarships. Orange represents students who are female; blue represents students who are male.

We also collected interview data to gain an emic [from within] perspective of each course. We conducted one-on-one interviews with every student on each of the six courses, observed the student debrief after the courses (conducted by NOLS program staff according to a standard protocol), and conducted focus group interviews with the instructor teams of each of the six courses when they returned from the field. The one-on-one interviews with students were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. We, as researchers, were merely observers in the student debrief to listen for additional information about interactional diversity. The interviews with the instructor teams were digitally recorded so that we could extract verbatim quotes if necessary. Four researchers were involved with the interview processes.

Two researchers conducted the data analysis, which focused primarily on the one-on-one interviews with students. We each read the students' transcripts thoroughly and independently. Via open, axial, and selective coding (e.g., Saldana, 2012), we each created summary themes from the data, again independently. Then we met to compare our findings, which were quite similar. We discussed discrepancies and modified our themes accordingly. We identified the most salient themes across course types and within each type, and highlighted idiosyncratic examples. The interview data provide a description of and the "whys" behind patterns of social relationships, whereas the sociograms provide graphical representations of these relationships.

Results and Discussion

Due to the volume of data, we have chosen to present the sociograms from the first administration (approximately day 10) and from one course of each composition (two, six, and all students receiving scholarships) as exemplary case studies. Analysis of the qualitative data produced several themes that cross all course compositions and several that were more specific to each course composition.

Social Network Analysis

The sociograms for each composition are shown in Figures 1–3. In Figure 1, for Composition A (two students receiving scholarships, both are male), the sociogram shows one student receiving a scholarship at the center of the network who is well-connected with other students who are also central. The other student receiving a scholarship is on the periphery of the network, with only one incoming nomination. A division between females and males is also clearly evident. A group of three females are seen clustered on the right side of the sociogram with one female student on the other side, also on the periphery.

Figure 2 shows the sociogram for Composition B (six students receiving scholarships, two are female and four are male). There is a clear division within this group. Five of the six students receiving scholarships are on the far left side of the sociogram. From these five students, only three nominations were given to students not receiving scholarship. The sociogram has two main subgroups, with two students connecting them. Both of these important social connectors (one male and one female) were students not receiving scholarships. Similar to Figure 1, the female students in this group migrated toward each other and are clustered in the top left of the sociogram.

Finally, Figure 3 shows the sociogram for Composition C. In this case, all 12 students received scholarships. As with the other course compositions, all of the female students clustered together on the right. There are four students on the periphery (two male and two female) who only have one incoming nomination each, suggesting some sense of isolation. One male student is clearly at the center of the network. While sociograms show general patterns of social connection, they tell us nothing of the reasons behind the patterns. The interview data offer useful insight into these social “maps.”

Interview Data

The interview data contained several patterns relevant across all three course compositions. First, Summer Search provided its students with bright orange tee-shirts to wear the first day at NOLS. While this did seem to inspire a sense of pride or camaraderie among the students receiving scholarships (especially in the groups of twelve students receiving scholarship), according to instructors, this also served to visually set these students apart as “different” than other NOLS students from the beginning.

Across all three compositions of students, the most frequently mentioned source of conflict was food. Typically, these issues revolved around individuals (most often males) eating more than “their fair share” or “hoarding the good stuff.” One male student said, “I was pretty much hungry all the time.” This is neither surprising nor atypical given the physical and developmental needs of adolescents and the overall energy expenditure in OAE.

Also across all compositions of students, two main factors seemed to contribute most to a sense of *group-ness* (the term we used to represent a sense of cohesion). The first was having a common goal, which is a key structural feature of OAE. Students on each course spoke of having the “fastest re-ration time” [sorting of food at a logistics resupply], suggesting that instructors on each of these courses had posed that task as a challenge to the group and, coincidentally, administered the same praise for relative success. Other tasks included “getting to our ‘X’ on the map” (reaching the end point of the day’s travel), crossing a pass, or successfully completing independent travel without instructors. The second source of group-ness revolved around sharing superficial commonalities. Connecting over shared interests like sports, music, movies, and sneakers brought the groups together to “bond”: “It was just similar things that made us closer.”

Another common feature of all course concentrations was a split (sometimes referred to by students as “clique-y-ness”) between “guys” and “girls.” The sociograms for all groups show the girls on the periphery of the group structure. “The girls would just hang out with the girls and the guys would just hang out with the guys,” with the “guys” often taking on the leadership roles. This again is, perhaps, developmentally reasonable in terms of identity formation and is reinforced by NOLS’ structures and practices (e.g., single-sex tent groups) that serve to maintain distance between the sexes at this age for liability and programmatic reasons.

Data from the students begin to explain some of the common patterns seen in the sociograms. However, the sociograms for the individual course compositions also suggest some unique relationships on the different course types. The following sections focus on these dimensions.

Composition A (two students receiving scholarships). On this course, any differences of the students receiving scholarships were reduced to simply that, as they were consistently referred to as “[scholarship] students,” who “didn’t understand what this was going to be...[they were] just a little confused and disoriented for a lot of it” by those students not receiving scholarships. Another student not receiving a scholarship stated, “Some people had different backgrounds and were brought up differently...but the different views could clash at certain moments but it would be washed over and everyone could just forget about it and move on.” There was some discussion of schooling by a student not receiving a scholarship: “If you kind of went to a similar school or something like that, [the difference] wasn’t as big.”

Homesickness is not uncommon among students this age on OAE courses, and exaggeration (using absolutes such as “*always*” and “*never*”) and hyperbole are typical in adolescent expression. However, the most profound and visceral descriptions of homesickness were found on this course and were expressed by one of the students receiving scholarships: “I wanted to break my leg to get evac-ed [separated from the course and sent home]...that’s how homesick I was.” The same student, visually separated from the group on the sociogram (Figure 1), continued, “...everything they [students not receiving scholarships] would talk about was like from outer space.” In contrast, however, the other student receiving a scholarship was at the center of the sociogram and referred the group as being “like family.”

The sociogram also shows all of the female students on the periphery of the group. More specifically, however, one female is separated from the other three and has no incoming nominations. This separation was between the “popular...pretty...sporty girls” and the “girl from Russia” (the daughter of a U.S. diplomat assigned there). According to the latter, “I’m a little out of the loop on American teenage things and I have lived overseas my whole life...so most of the time I went to bed [instead of hanging out].” While it is impossible to discern whether the “clique-y-ness” among the girls was caused by exclusion or self-selection (or both), the sociogram suggests that a sense of group-ness among minority subgroups (be it female students or the two students receiving scholarships) is not a given. The commonality of being female or the commonality of receiving a scholarship does not guarantee connection, even with a lack of similarity with other individuals on these levels.

Composition B (six students receiving scholarships). The sociogram for this composition shows a distinct visual separation between students receiving scholarships and those not receiving scholarships. Some of this may be due to increased opportunity for connections between students receiving scholarships, perhaps resulting simply from larger numbers: “A lot of the students were also Summer Searchers in my group, like half of them...As a Summer Searcher, you’re automatically like ‘go talk to him.’ And you would have a connection.”

On this course, both groups of students spoke explicitly of “diversity” and did so in detail, identifying specific racial and ethnic, regional, and schooling (public vs. private) differences. However, the tone of the comments differed by subgroup, with students receiving scholarships being, generally, more positive about differences. For example, one of the male students receiving a scholarship stated:

I was just talking about my neighborhood and they [other students on the course] were talking about theirs and then I was like, ‘well, I live in a neighborhood full of Hispanics.’ They were like, ‘I live in a white neighborhood.’ So we started talking about our cultures and stuff...nobody got offended...because we both were wanting to learn.

Similarly, according to a female student receiving a scholarship:

I kind of saw myself a little different from everybody, since I come from a Mexican culture and they’re all different like Wisconsin and New York...I didn’t have a lot of people to relate to, but I like to meet new people and their culture and all that so it was good...it was an awesome experience just to hear them talk about different things.

Comments from students not receiving scholarships stood somewhat in contrast. The most descriptive comments came from students not receiving scholarships, as one male stated, “...like there were kids [on scholarship] which is like putting really rich preppy whites, basically, with different background people.” A female student said, “it was kind of a different way of meeting them [students who were “different”] and seeing what they were like and enjoying them for that...they can be really friendly once you get to know them.” However, the tensions around these “differences” could be high, as evidenced by another male student not receiving a scholarship: “There were people that were from the Summer Search thing. [The diversity was] forced, and you have to be friends with them...I would rather be on a different course [with people more like me].” Students’ stories on this course composition detailed much more conflict, which was reiterated by a member of the instructor team during their debrief: “[I felt like I was] thrown under a bus.” The instructor’s reaction suggested he felt un- or under-prepared for the social challenges presented by the course composition.

These comments shed some light on the patterns in the sociogram for this course. Students referred, at length, to the tensions leading to the distinct subgroups between students receiving and not receiving scholarships as well as to the position of “boys” and “girls.” However, while we can identify the two “connectors” through the SNA data, there is no information from the interview data that offers the “why” or “how” these individuals came to fill these roles.

Composition C (all students receiving scholarships). The sociogram for this course composition suggested the most interconnected group structure (“we’re all Summer Search students”), although the female students were still on the periphery. Students on this course demonstrated a different type of connection beyond more superficial commonalities: “I interacted with them like, ‘Hey, where are you from, where are your parents from?’” (from a male student, suggesting that the question was more about heritage than hometown). According to students’ comments, this course was characterized by “personal bonds” around “where we come from, like our roots” and being like a “tight family...you guys argue a lot but you love each other at the same time and that’s how we were.” One male student shared, “Well, I clicked with people since day one and we got to know each other and then we got to talk about our lives...so we became a family.”

This was the only course composition where students mentioned being able to talk about “pain and suffering about yourself,” which suggests a differential level of honesty and intimacy. One female student said, “We could all kind of relate...we all had similar backgrounds...so you got trusted and trusted people more...you just knew.” Another stated, “...you tell people...what you’ve been through but just being able to say that and get over it, I think that means a lot.” One male student described the “safety” that made this tone possible:

...we were all from Summer Search and we all had problems in our lives, like giant problems in our lives, that we were able to overcome and that’s why Summer Search picked us. [Being on a course with all students from Summer Search] was a really big impact because we knew that we weren’t going to be with rich snobby kids like some of the people say come here and we knew that we had the same social status as most of the other people, so nobody was above another person.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of students on OAE courses with different compositions of diversity, indicated here by scholarship status.

To inform this question, we utilized social network analysis and collected several forms of interview data. For each course composition, sociograms represented the social structure of the group at the time of the first re-ratification. Students’ comments, and instructors’ comments when appropriate, facilitated understanding of the sociograms and of the students’ experiences on their courses.

Composition C, the most homogenous group in terms of scholarship status (12:0), but, perhaps, the most diverse in other ways (e.g., race and/or ethnicity), demonstrated the most interconnected sociogram and the students spoke most highly of the group-ness on their course. These students were all sponsored by Summer Search, which employs specific selection criteria and programmatic requirements before and after the courses, suggesting that these similarities may trump other (more specific) differences by creating a homogeneity, of sorts, around level of privilege.

Composition A, the next most homogenous in terms of scholarship status (2:10) and, perhaps, the least diverse in terms of racial and ethnic differences, demonstrated the next highest levels of connection in the sociograms. However, the experiences of the “diverse” students (in terms of socioeconomic status and resulting privilege) were the most varied and dramatic. While both students stated that the course was a “good experience,” one experienced moments of profound isolation while the other enjoyed time as the central social figure.

Finally, Composition B seemed to provide the most opportunity to explicitly address “diversity” from an educational standpoint. Greater levels of diversity, in its myriad forms, allows for the interactional diversity (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002) so central to student development. However, it was also the most volatile group, requiring an additional skill set from the instructor team and inherently reducing the amount of time spent addressing other educational goals. In addition, as the students not receiving scholarships reacted so strongly to the experience, it seems that this composition actually represented a different “course type” for NOLS that would need to be staffed and marketed as such.

Certainly, due to its confined social spaces, OAE has the potential to metaphorically and microcosmically model society at large (Hunt, 1994) and to serve as an educational venue for social justice. The question becomes, then, what are the pedagogical and other aims of the orga-

nization? For NOLS, the primary goals revolve around developing outdoor and leadership skills and, with instructional time as a finite resource, any content added to the curriculum (such as social justice education) requires that something be removed. As such, and in light of these results, NOLS will continue to structure its courses so that it can maintain fidelity to its educational mission. This manifests in intentionally seeking to increase the number of courses consisting of all students receiving scholarships. Based on this study, students appear to be socially comfortable with this arrangement and, as a result, appear to be invested in and able to focus on achieving the outcomes central to NOLS's mission. As the demographics of the United States change, NOLS leadership expects that the types and compositions of racial and/or ethnic diversity on their courses will change, as well. Leadership at NOLS, then, is committed to recruiting and supporting a diverse team of instructors and to continuing to focus on cultural competency in its staff training and development.

A major limitation of this study revolves around operationalizing "diversity." For NOLS, students who receive scholarships (especially full scholarships) are already "different" than the majority of their students who enroll openly in catalog courses and pay the full cost of participation. Being supported by Summer Search is a valid indicator of socioeconomic status, as the selection criteria include specific guidelines tied to Federal standards, but the extent to which this status represents any visible markers of diversity is unknown. As we consider these students' experiences at NOLS, we cannot fully understand the role of socioeconomic status and/or perhaps more visible markers of difference or diversity: Does having the visible marker of a different skin tone (for example) matter more or less in these social relationships than caring about the right sports (lacrosse vs. basketball), where one lives (house vs. an apartment, rural vs. urban), where one goes to school (private vs. public), or how many pairs of sneakers one owns (the currency of conversation among many of the males in the study)? Is the difference about money or its resulting access to experiences? And does that trump visible markers of diversity? As social science researchers, we must become willing to speak explicitly and specifically about difference in order to be relevant.

Another limitation of the study, and part of the reason for the limitation above, stemmed from its exploratory nature and our tentative language. The interview questions were asked in terms of "group-ness" rather than diversity or difference (either being the diversity or being exposed to the diversity), choosing to approach the issue in the affirmative. We, as researchers, chose not to push the issue or probe too deeply with students who did not talk about their experiences in light of course composition, recognizing that students receiving scholarships were different relative to the typical NOLS student population. If, for example, a student receiving a scholarship did not feel that the group lacked a sense of group-ness or did not feel that she or he was treated differently as a result of that status, we chose not to suggest that possibility and, perhaps, taint the student's perception of her or his experience.

This study is the first of its kind in OAE, as it was a systematic attempt to gain insight into students' experiences based on various group compositions. While we feel able to advocate for course compositions of all students receiving scholarships, we do not have sufficient reason to advocate against course compositions of two students receiving scholarships. And while we believe that the composition of half of the students receiving scholarships has real potential for social justice education, we recognize that such a structure may be additionally taxing for instructors and represents a philosophical decision for the organization. This study may raise more questions than it answers, but we sincerely hope that it opens the dialogue around OAE as a site for intentional social justice education beyond the initial (and not-so-simple) step of increasing the diversity of participants on courses.

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