When Outdoor Orientation Program Idioculture Changes: Understanding Student Resistance

Brent J. Bell
University of New Hampshire

Christa Ricker
Tufts University

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Abstract

Colleges with outdoor orientation programs often encourage student involvement through leadership experiences, including the directing of these programs. The student directors (SDs) assume significant responsibilities, including managing budgets, logistics, and the training of peer leaders. SDs also manage the program's idioculture, creating a desirable group for student peer leaders to join. Sometimes SDs have ideological conflicts with administrators leading to resistance. Administrators depend upon the free labor of SDs for the programs to run and hope to minimize conflict. We report on the experiences of three college outdoor orientation programs with change and resistance. Our findings suggest SDs in this study shared similar narratives about their program that resulted in resistance to change, such as believing their program is unique, misunderstood without direct experience, only understood by peers, and that their experience is the correct experience to replicate. These beliefs are legitimized in the outdoor orientation program's idioculture, a system of beliefs and behaviors.

Keywords: Outdoor Orientation, College Student Club, Idioculture, Peer Leadership, Outdoor Education

Brent J. Bell, Outdoor Education Program, University of New Hampshire; **Christa Ricker**, Assistant Director for Campus Life, Outdoor Education, and Pre-orientation Programs, Tufts University.

Address correspondence to Brent J. Bell, Department of Kinesiology, NH Hall, 124 Main St., Durham, NH 03824, Phone: 603–862-3047, Email: bbell@unh.edu

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Introduction

This study explores three outdoor orientation programs' (OOPS) experiences with student resistance to programmatic changes. Currently 191 college campuses in the United States have outdoor orientation programs (Bell, Nafziger, Gass & Starbuck, 2014), all with the objectives of building social support, increasing self-knowledge, and allaying student fears. Research of OOPs show many positive impacts, even up to 17 years later (Gass, Garvey, & Sugerman, 2003), including significant positive impacts to the student peer leaders (Starbuck & Bell, 2017).

Most OOPs involve peer leadership of incoming first-years. In the United States, these peer leaders average 90 hours of training (Bell, et. al, 2014) and receive minimal or no financial compensation, but most leaders report the experience as "worth it" because of the membership in a close-knit leader community, which is positive, supportive, and fun. Additionally, some programs have student (peer) directors (SDs), who take on administrative positions within a program. SDs in this study were responsible for program administration and staff selection. The SDs were also tasked with managing the culture of the leader community, which we refer to as the idioculture, defined as "A system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group" (Fine, 1979, p. 734).

This study began when we were contacted by college administrators for guidance regarding programmatic changes and industry standards regarding OOPs. A theme of student resistance emerged as a significant concern at the three different programs. Each administrator described a group of SDs unwilling to communicate effectively. One Dean described how the leaders resisted her every suggestion, another Dean described how the leaders invited the President of the college to dinner with the intent to undermine her position. The new ideas were seemingly uncontroversial, such as increasing risk management practices or aligning programming with institutional values (as identified by administrators), yet they were met with heavy opposition from SDs and leaders. (For example, at one college students demonstrated resistance by assuring the Dean that streaking and nudity were no longer program activities, but continued the practice of streaking on trips.)

As former Program Directors, we had experiences with and observed such resistance, including student threats, alumni disapproval, loss of donations, unwanted media attention and the involvement of college presidents and deans. Although resistance may be a normal reaction to change, often our professional colleagues (Program Directors) found the level of resistance, in this case the adamant refusal to consider change, perplexing.

We found three features worthy of investigation. The first was the in-

tensity of the student resistance; second the similarities in the patterns of resistance at all three programs; and third the mutual complaints by students and administration about being misunderstood. We wondered about the "triggering events" that unearthed the different narratives and beliefs about the programs. In understanding these narratives, explicated through the triggering events, we hoped to achieve insight into the students' cognitive beliefs and the process that led them to resist programmatic changes.

We use a semi-narrative style in this paper to demonstrate how our process of thinking emerged during this study as we unpacked these questions through interviews of students and program directors. Using a generic qualitative data approach, we searched to identify ways in which change could be understood and possibly handled more effectively.

Review of Literature

Outdoor Orientation Programs

Outdoor orientation programs are innovative college transition programs that involve small groups of students (less than 15 per group) spending at least one night away from campus camping in the outdoors (Bell, Holmes, & Williams, 2010). Research on outdoor orientation programs currently includes more than 28 peer reviewed articles and multiple doctoral dissertations and masters' theses. The benefits to participants include higher GPAs (Gass, 1987; Stogner, 1978) and increased retention (Bell & Chan, 2017; Brown, 1998; Gass, 1987). Psycho-social research also reports higher rates of autonomy (Gass, 1987; Vlamis, Bell, & Gass, 2011), higher levels of social support (Bell, 2006), and increased self-efficacy (Jones & Hinton, 2007). Outdoor orientation programs are popular among students, many of whom claim their outdoor orientation experience as one of the best of their life (Bell & Holmes, 2011).

The shared curricular practices of outdoor orientation programs include:

- The use of the outdoors/wilderness to provide novel and challenging environments;
- Student groups small enough for discussion/sharing, and large enough for diversity of student experience (less than 15, but typically 8–12);
- Trained peer leaders (two or three) who are often past participants;
- Focus on the adjustment to college.

Approximately 85% of current outdoor orientation trips in the United States are led by students (Bell, et. al., 2014). Many student leaders report

the reason they became a leader was a desire to recreate the positive experiences they had on their own outdoor orientation programs (Starbuck & Bell, 2017). As Bell and Holmes (2011) found in a study of 237 student responses to a neutral essay prompt (Write about your positive and negative experiences), 98% of the students reported positive experiences, and 83% of the students reported strong group cohesion. We believe these positive outcomes are influenced by what Fine (1979) describes as the group's idioculture.

Idioculture

The term *idioculture* refers to "A system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group" (Fine, 1979, p. 734). Fine developed the idioculture concept in a study of Little League baseball teams, where each team has its own local culture within a structure of a league. We found the idioculture concept useful in understanding outdoor orientation programs because, like Little League teams, OOPs share similarities of practice, rules, and design, but each program can express a specific and unique "team" culture. In his studies, Fine (1979) explored the various ways in which idiocultures are created, develop, and change; for example, how different customs and behaviors may be welcomed into one group but not into another. Among outdoor orientation programs, the idioculture idea and specifically a few of the concepts created a lens for us consider student resistance.

An element of Fine's theory is a *triggering event*, or an event that causes a change in norms. For instance, "A miscue may provide the impetus for a joking sequence that remains part of group lore. A threat to the group may produce a legend, new norm or a prescription for group action" (Fine, 1979, p. 742).

The Question

We were curious about the student resistance to change because it was reported as highly emotional and at a level perplexing to administrators. The emotions that accompanied seemingly inconsequential changes had led to great outbursts. For example, changing the location for an activity, or not utilizing the same hat vendor, resulted in emotionally charged discussions that assumed threats to program integrity. Clearly more was going on for the leaders than just these simple changes. Something likely existed in the idiocultures of these programs that we did not understand. Using

interviews, we investigated the experiences of both students and Program Directors over a multi-year period. Our study specifically focused on the identification of triggering events as a causal condition leading to resistance to change and the reports of students feeling misunderstood. Our belief was that understanding the students' reasons for resistance may lead to better transitions in the future.

Methods

We chose to use a Generic Qualitative Approach (GQA), as outlined by Percy, Kostere, and Kostere (2015), to study our question. We considered other approaches, but this approach fit our questions best since we wanted to know more about why strong resistance was forming, instead of the phenomenological idea of "how resistance was experienced." Because we both work with outdoor orientation programs, we also wanted to honor our personal experiences during the study and Generic Qualitative Inquiry (GQI) is considered a useful approach "when a researcher has a body of pre-knowledge/pre-understanding about a topic" (Percy, et. al., 2015). GQI focuses on "the content of opinions of the actual world experiences and happenings, on the thoughtful description and reflection of historical occurrences" instead of the "inner organization and structure of thought" of participants (Percy, et. al., 2015).

  As part of our approach we were careful to always return to the data to make sure our analysis was supported. Working as a team allowed us to take the time to independently revisit the data, create memos about influences and pre-conceived ideas, and develop logic paradigms. Our commitment was to ground our claims in the data and create a structured description/narrative of the process of resistance as the outcome.

Participants

Three OOPs were identified as experiencing SD resistance. All had recent triggering events leading to the hiring of new Program Directors (professional staff). The new Program Directors were interviewed and also asked to provide a list of student leaders willing to be interviewed who had at least two years of experience within the program, guaranteeing all participants were over the age of 18. Four student leaders from each school were interviewed. We were able to contact these leaders at different stages of acceptance of the new Program Directors, but everyone was interviewed

within 2 years of the new Directors' tenure. When possible, we conducted follow up interviews with students and Program Directors. All the students interviewed became alumni of their college before publishing results.

Process

Program Directors and students were asked to participate in a 30 to 60-minute interview, with the potential of up to two additional follow-up interviews. Interviews were conducted over Skype using Call Recorder, an application that created digital recordings of our conversations. Participants were informed that the interviews would focus on exploring their lived experiences and the cultural changes they observed.

Our analytical process followed GQI using thematic analysis with constant comparison, as outlined by Percy, et. al. (2015). This process began with a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of 28 open-ended questions (available on request), such as "What are some unwritten rules of the program?" and "What is your greatest hope and fear about the program?"

Because the interviews were semi-structured, we used the questions to encourage dialogue about the participants' experiences with the program and how it was changing.

Thematic Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service and downloaded in the Dedoose qualitative analysis program. Researchers read the transcriptions individually and began to apply descriptive codes to the data. After we completed coding independently to assess consistency, the codes were assembled into themes. We found it more productive to discuss the codes together throughout this part of the process. We reanalyzed the material in each theme and added memos. Memos provided a way for us to share emerging ideas from the data and check findings. The iterative process continued for 16 months, providing time to consider themes and questions in the memos with the ability to recheck the interview data to insure consistency.

Themes were organized and reorganized through a process aided by two conference presentations, which allowed us to utilize feedback from peers and encouraged us to develop conditional propositions about the data. We used logic diagrams to identify the central phenomena (resistance), as suggested by Creswell (1998). Our process of identifying causal conditions eventually reached saturation, over years our themes both grew in number

(as many as 12 themes) and were reduced (as few as three themes). The last stage of our process was checking with the Program Directors from each program to verify that our conclusions were consistent with their lived experience (member checking). Because the SDs had graduated and left the institutions, we did not have contact with former SDs.

Descriptions of the Three Programs

Each of the three programs studied were at highly competitive private residential liberal arts colleges known for their excellence in academics. All programs met the curricular practices of traditional OOPs as outlined earlier in this paper, with some elements of uniqueness. Table 1 highlights notable characteristics of each program and ways in which they differ from one another.

We share information about the context in which the three schools in our study were situated while protecting program anonymity. We describe their OOPs below using pseudonyms: First College (FC), Second University (SU), and Third University (TU), and pseudonyms for the students at FC from a list of gender neutral names beginning with A, SU pseudonyms begin with B, TU begin with C, and all the Director pseudonyms begin with the letter D. We interviewed a total of 12 student leaders and 3 Program Directors, conducting a total of 23 interviews. Some of the student leaders interviewed also held leadership positions while working with their programs; they are referred to as Student Directors (SD).

Table 1. Notable Characteristics of the Three Outdoor Orientation Programs

College/University	Notable Characteristics
First College (FC)	• Strongly influenced by an Outward Bound curriculum in its initial development. • Operated for more than 25 years. • Isolated both geographically from other OOPs, as well isolated from outdoor education practices as very few student leaders reported experiences with another outdoor program. • Longer trips (more than twice as long as the other two programs). • Professional director who had started the program and managed it for 25 years. • College's unique curriculum meant leaders were not available to lead their junior year due to study abroad requirements.

(*continued*)

Bell and Ricker

Table 1. (*continued*)

College/University	Notable Characteristics
Second University (SU)	• Program was developed and operated by students starting in 1996. • Incorporated a "hands off" curriculum design—leaders would "shadow" the group, but it was up to the group to figure out how to set up camp, cook, read a map, etc. with leaders following far enough away to not be involved in the conversations and dynamics, but close enough to respond to emergencies and to manage risk. The leaders at SU perceived this design was superior to other programs. • Training of student peer leaders included weekly classes (formal) and traditional gatherings (informal). The leaders had secured a house off campus (passed on to leaders each year) to host social events, including small parties each week after training activities.
Third University (TU)	• Program developed in 1986. • On campus the program had a reputation for maintaining high levels of group cohesion after the end of trips, often having weekly group dinners throughout the entirety of the academic year and even into the years that followed. • Leaders of the program had a campus reputation of being wild and crazy. For example, participants interviewing to be leaders would often show up for leader interviews in the nude to demonstrate their commitment to wild fun. In the two years prior, the Dean's office had first discouraged and then forbade the program from incorporating nudity. • Had been reported as mocking other schools' outdoor orientation groups if they crossed paths in the woods, as well as for streaking through different college and universities outdoor orientation groups' campsites. Other college's OOP directors had complained to the Dean's office about the behavior of the program. • Administrators were aware of participant complaints about being pressured into uncomfortable program activities (streaking), yet the practices continued. • Program had an assigned faculty advisor who assisted in the logistical planning of the program, such as developing routes and organizing transportation, but left the curriculum to the SDs.

Triggering Events

Consistent across all three programs was the presence of a triggering event that set off an increase in administrative inquiry and oversight. We found it useful to develop an understanding of these events because it signified a time when program norms were questioned. While some changes may have already been in progress, such as FC having to relocate its programming area, there were specific triggering events associated with student resistance.

The triggering event for FC was the departure of the long-time director and subsequent hiring of a new Program Director. This change occurred two years after a risk management review team had identified a program culture resistant to change. The departure of the director and rehiring process took place over the summer, when many students were away from campus. Student leaders reported feeling disrespected that the new director was hired without their involvement.

When the new director arrived, little preparation for the transition of leadership had occurred. Dakota, the new director, walked into a program in disarray, stating:

> So one of those contextual things is that I also came in [to the job], there weren't any materials that let me know what had been done in the past. And with the folks leaving right after I got here we were kind of reinventing the wheel a little bit, so there was a lot of room for misunderstandings and kind of like oh, my gosh, you took this out of the program? Those kind of just, we were just walking into all sort of landmines . . . we had nixed stuff [the leaders valued] that we didn't even know we were nixing.

SU did not have a director at the time of their triggering event. The triggering event was an exposé in the campus paper accusing the program of hazing. A first-year student reported that the counselors had introduced a game, "Throw Down, Show Down," in which the goal was to take off your clothes and put them on a leader. The four leaders of two separate groups created a competition in which they promised that the first group to get naked and jump in the lake would be awarded a carrot cake (report from college newspaper, 2011). The newspaper reporter indicated students were pressured to conform to practices such as skinny dipping, streaking, and acting in embarrassing skits. The article also reported a troubling incident when a group of participants were lost in the woods during the hands-off activity and the leaders could not find them. A local search and rescue team had to

be called for help. The combination of the article and incident thrusted the program into the spotlight with the administration. Brooke stated:

> And so a couple years ago when an article came out that was talking about nudity and hazing on our trip—that was sort of sensationalist, but also had kernels of truth in it—our program kind of came under fire by the university. And the two co-chairs at the time sort of—kind of reminds me of how the president can just like declare a dictatorship, like they kind of just took over, they changed the model.

TU's triggering event occurred when a hurricane passed through the area causing the Forest Service to close the National Forest the day after students had left on their trips and hiked to backcountry camp sites. Hundreds of students were involved and needed to be contacted. A scramble to find and communicate with trips during heavy rains highlighted the program's complexities. Soon after this event, the long-term faculty advisor resigned. During conversations with the Dean's office, the advisor reported being increasingly uncomfortable with the behavior of the students at staff training, which had escalated over the years with students attempting to shock each other by breaking social norms. This information was concerning to the Dean because it highlighted that the program had hidden practices and misled the Dean's office. The Dean threatened to shut down the program, but instead hired a new Program Director, initially for one year, to help the program to change, and thus continue.

The new Program Director began their job by going through the program files during the first week of employment and uncovered more questionable information from the leader applications, including crude activities such as vulgar songs and the remaining presence of nudity. The new Program Director reported feeling "haunted" by what was uncovered (*Dylan*, personal communication). The SDs were not present during the Program Director's first week of employment, but upon returning to campus were asked to attend a meeting with the Dean's office. As Cameron, one of the SDs, reports:

> So I guess the situation which we walked into, you know, the day after I got home, we were notified that we needed to have a meeting with certain Deans, and in this meeting, you know, quotes from those [leader] applications were taken saying this is proof that—that there's a culture in this program that is, you know, not acceptable, that nudity happened on the program last year, which was expressly forbidden—we can debate that, because we don't think that happened—but, anyway, and if these changes aren't made [the program] is going to be canceled for this year,

and those changes included, you know, no nudity on the program at all, no lewd songs or games. I think that's it.

Findings

As we worked through the interviews, common to all three OOPs was the high level of student resistance to any changes a new professional director suggested. At the extreme, students preferred cancellation of the entire program rather than making seemingly inconsequential changes. The resistance to these changes were couched in the following beliefs that created themes and sub-themes we derived from the interview data:

1. Resistance to administration—Students believed they knew better than faculty, staff, parents (adults) about what first-year students need. Two key assertions provided the foundation for this belief:
   a. Administrators do not understand the program
   b. Student leader autonomy is essential to creating the benefit for first-year students
2. Resistance to conformity—The students believed that the outdoor orientation program was unique and special and not comparable to other programs, either internal and external to the college. Any change would force conformity to inferior practices. Therefore, resistance contributed to protecting the program's "specialness."
3. Resistance to new curricular ideas or experiences—The leaders' experiences (or past experiences) were THE experiences everyone should have. This motivated leaders to replicate all program practices and led to resistance to any new curriculum based upon a belief that anyone who had not directly experienced the program could not understand the program.

In the following sections we describe some of the analyses of these themes, using quotes and examples of both student and Program Director experiences. We then conclude with a narrative of how we believe these themes interacted in supporting resistance.

Resistance to Administration

When college administrators demanded changes in the program, students expressed a lack of clarity in the structure of authority. Alex, a student, remarked, "Who are these people? What is this like just analogous blob that's

called the administration that hands down mandates? Like why should we trust them?"

An additional factor in the resistance to administration was the assumptions some students made about the professional staff being "out of touch." Alex commented:

> Hey, they're old and out of touch. They don't understand our generation. Like they don't get what we're trying to do here. Like they're 20 years past where we are. Like they have this like warped perspective. They don't get it.

There was an assumption by the SDs that generational differences made administrators unable to understand the current student body and, by extension, the reasoning behind the actions of the program.

Students also believed that complete autonomy was essential for the program to work. The introduction of professional staff was received by students as a direct threat to their autonomy in the program. Caelan remarked:

> I would say the one thing that people are worried about is this not being run by students anymore, and in our meetings with the Deans, you know, they kind of talked about the program as if (the director) and they were running it and we were just sort of, you know, there, along for the ride. And so I, now I'm thinking that's the one thing that would really be objectionable to students if it was seen that we, (a Student Director) and I, were not in charge.

SU hired an alumnus with experience working in the field of outdoor education and risk management to consult with the OOP and who, according to the SDs, changed the model. This consultant was eventually hired to work with the SDs as a full-time Program Director, but the SDs still considered the position as one of a consultant and not as a Program Director.

The college administrators asked SDs to make changes on trips to assure they were not hazing participants. Student leaders were fearful the program was going to change and lose its uniqueness. As Brooke stated:

> I mean, you know, we've heard a lot of threats about what the university might do with our program over the years, whether or not—whether it would be from like shutting us down completely to like including university officials on the trip, things like that. And, you know, we just don't really know what to believe anymore.

Bailey commented:

> I remember, so my freshman year, [new director] was brought in but no one had ever heard of [new director] before. [New director] was brought in as kind of like a speaker for one of our classes that we were having and I kind of remember, shortly after that, [new director] was brought on as kind of like a, very like supplemental advisor. [New director] definitely was not the center of the program, [new director] was like a consultant-type role.

The SDs at TU felt threatened and met with the university president, key alumni, and faculty to rally support. The SDs met with leaders to craft messages about how to collectively manage interactions and messaging as a group to control the reputation of the program. The SDs wanted to protect specific aspects of the curriculum and were pressured by leaders to do so. As one SD reported when asked about the university's desire to eliminate nudity on trips, "If we [the SDs] eliminated skinny dipping, I think the leader community would fire us" (personal communication). The SDs were caught in the middle, trying to defend some beloved activities that peer leaders found harmless and funny and what some leaders thought were essential to the program. As Caelan remarked, "We had to defend ourselves to the administration. And, you know, many of these things aren't, aren't defensible, you know?"

Resistance to Conformity ("we are unique and special")

Consistent among the programs was a perception by SDs of their programs' uniqueness, both in comparison to programs within their own campuses as well as when compared to other colleges. Part of the perceived uniqueness was the strength of the bonds between leaders. As Casey noted:

> I mean, because it's been four years since I was a participant, I would say now when I think of [the outdoor orientation], I think of my experience [with leaders], and just that community of people where there's so much trust between people and so much just total support between people. And I've experienced this myself and heard this from tons of other people. One of my friends [a leader] had a really bad concussion. She couldn't do any of her schoolwork. And she got the concussion playing rugby. And the rugby team sort of abandoned her and were like, "Well, you can't play anymore." And it was her [outdoor orientation leader]

community that really like helped her get through the past year. And there are just so many stories like that where even after we've graduated, you know, if someone has a problem, there's a built-in community who will support you no matter what.

Students who went on to lead and contribute to their OOP described their experiences with their program as some of their best in college. Bailey remarked:

I think that as a program, it is such a special program because all the [leaders] have this great bond with everyone else in the program, special relationships that we form throughout a year together. I think that is something that you can't teach in a classroom or train for, it's just this generic loving feeling for everyone else that you are working with. That is the biggest thing, something I would love to stand as part of the program forever.

Similarly, Adrian shared:

I learned a lot about myself that week and a lot about kind of—to some extent, how I kind of wanted to live my life in the college setting . . . Yeah, it's definitely had a huge impact on my life.

A belief common to all three programs was that their OOP was unique from all others. This belief was functional in resisting change. It gave power to those individuals who had directly experienced the program, and it marginalized information coming from the outside, even from similar programs. When student leaders believed their program was both *the best* and *different from all the others*, it did not make sense for the program to seek information from anywhere else or anyone else. As Dakota, a Program Director, stated:

And there were several comments [by student leaders in training about the program] in class . . . like the, you know, "We're so unique" and "We're the only people who do this sort of thing."

The confidence that the program was better than others was often expressed in the program's unique features. Avery said, "I appreciate [program] for its duration, 16 days, which is, I think, really ideal for this kind of trip, and I also appreciate that it's student led and that you're only out there with other students."

These beliefs were extended to resisting internal messages as well. Even

at the college, if the program had not been experienced directly, it was be-lieved it was not understood. For example, during one leadership training, two leaders described an activity where they pulled down their shorts and put eggs between their buttocks and cracked them in front of the other lead-ers to a lot of laughter and shock. The SDs explained this in their interview, trying to figure out how to create boundaries for the leaders and also insure it was fun and wild. Cameron, one of the SDs stated:

> . . . like go back to the egg thing and use it as an example, I guess we're like—you know, we're definitely thinking about what—what is appro-priate and like what has a place in our program and what does not. But I—my sense is that where [program director's] idea of what would be appropriate . . . is very different than ours, because I—I mean I don't like want to speak for [program director] but I don't know if [program director] really sees a purpose to them. And seems very like, "What is this helping your program with?" And to me having—having people think that the program is fun and that they can do fun things that like create this loyalty to the program, like in a day of 12 hours of training, there needs to be a break or something. . . . And so like to me it's—maybe the egg thing now would be crossing a line, but if something is just like weird or silly but not, you know, sexual or offensive, then like I think that definitely has a place in our program. But one of my fears is that, you know, because it's not useful—that it could be seen as like something that's unnecessary.

And when someone did experience the program but did not like it, that person's opinions were ignored or minimized. Brandy commented:

> We made a lot of positive changes for our program based on what was published in this article [from the campus paper]. But it was written by someone who had never done the program. People who were interviewed were campers who did the program and then were not chosen to be [leaders], so they sort of had a semi-bitter, I guess, view of the program.

Similarly, Addison stated:

> I think the lasting impression that that article gave was . . . just like ev-eryone thinks we're crazy. But yeah, I think [the program] is known for just being like kind of a like very fun, kind of weird like really crazy, very social group. And then everyone who did [the program] . . . has had the experience and really enjoyed it.

Resistance to New Curricular Ideas or Experiences

One reason for resistance was the differing beliefs, or different realities of the students and administrators. The students reported having intensely positive and unique personal experiences with the program that they wanted to recreate for others. Students' desire to provide a similar positive experience led to resistance to new ideas. Being a leader in the leader community was also a positive experience. Bailey shared:

> I guess for me, like a huge part of my college experience was this social community that we had, and we built, and it would be awesome for me to come back in five years or ten years and still see that community as like, vibrant, as it is.

From the leaders' point of view, the only options for demonstrating understanding of the program is first to have directly participated in the program and second to have enjoyed it. To have done neither was likely to lead to an accusation of not understanding the program. As Ari remarked:

> I would say most people have no idea what our program is. I would say most faculty and staff have no idea what our program is. I would say that half, maybe more than half of students know what our program is.

The need to replicate the experience for others was often mentioned by the student leaders, because the trip was such a positive experience for them. Campbell shared:

> I would say change is difficult, and even if it's change for the best or change for all the right reasons, people are going to be afraid that they're going to lose what they loved or what they had. And people always want to share their exact experience, and obviously that's not possible, because it's just not. But, you know, when little things change, people feel like it'll—it'll change other people's experience for the worse.

In a similar fashion, Alex stated:

> I had an amazing trip. Everyone on my trip really benefited from the way the [leaders] just let us do it, because it was the first time we were forced to be independent and to just be totally self-sufficient, and that's what a pre-orientation program should be is like introducing you into college where you're not going to have your parents. And so a lot of [leaders] and—we're getting away from this now, which I think is a good thing,

but kind of sad in like nostalgia. But it's a good thing, because it's a lot safer now. But it's hard to change it because [leaders] feel an allegiance to it because it was the way they were brought up.

Students from FC had expressed a general resistance to change before their past director left, and resistance continued when the new director was hired. The new director faced multiple challenges in the job including resentment of peer leaders who feared the unique features of their program were going to be lost. Added to this stress was the immediate need to find a new program area and develop a new set of trips, new local operating procedures, and new route plans. Dakota shared:

I was one of the first people they'd ever brought in that had led or taken direction of the program without being involved with [FC] or the program. So, they're fairly insular.

One example that caught the new FC director by surprise came from not understanding a leader tradition. In previous years, the leaders were given special hats during leader training. The hats had been part of the cultural tradition of the program, marking the completion of training. Not knowing the tradition, Dakota, the new director had not purchased these hats:

We had gotten shirts and didn't realize that there were hats they were all expecting to get. . . . This seems kind of trivial, but these specific hats, these beanies that they all would get, . . . walked in you had no idea that yeah, they had these certain hats that they really cherished and it really meant [to them] that they had become a [program] leader.

From the student leaders' perspective, Avery remarked:

. . . the first time you led as a . . . leader, you were awarded one of these hats at the end of training, and then, you know, you wore it into the backcountry and on the trip, and it was sort of this symbol of—sort of like icon of [the program] leaders. . . .
    And for whatever reason, they weren't ordered the first year that the new directors were here, so last year the new hats—and I found out, because I was really interested in it . . . the previous coordinator . . . had difficulty working with the company that provided these hats, . . . they just decided they didn't have time to do the hats, and so they didn't. And a lot of people were hurt by that and felt like that was a real deficit to the program to not have this sort of like symbol for the first-time leaders.

As the idioculture changed, leaders had difficulty knowing which aspects of the program were most important to maintain. If you do not understand which variables make a difference, you may believe an insignificant detail such as the color of the program t-shirt has an impact on the program. We describe this as "Everything matters when you don't know what matters." The process of questioning to understand what really matters necessitates an openness to self-evaluation that the SDs had resisted. The new directors wanted to ask these questions, and when student leaders feared the answers would lead to change, discussion was resisted.

Conclusion

To conclude, we offer a narrative of the story of resistance as a way of connecting the themes and causal conditions, based upon Wolcott's (2001) suggestion of the power to include narrative examples in qualitative analysis.

At these three institutions, a group of student peer leaders and SDs were involved in OOPs, each with a distinct idioculture. Each OOP was a large program, working with hundreds of students and over 30 peer leaders per program. The student leaders invested large amounts of time and had high levels of autonomy. The work was attractive, in large part due to the strength of the leader community and its idioculture. The work felt important because it was consequential to students who would likely develop emotional connections to peers and to the OOP itself.

The SDs (and at FC, a professional director) selected, trained, and managed the volunteer staff. The programs attracted student leaders willing to invest large amounts of volunteer time and viewed it as worthy. All three attracted student leaders and had competitive applicant pools. We believe the three programs in the study did this by developing strong idiocultures within the leader communities. All three programs reported on the closeness and importance of being part of the leader community. As Addison shared:

> The [leader group] is just a very, very tight knit group of people, and I think that really contributes to [programs] culture. You know, we have class together during the year. We also just usually just hang out a lot and like, you know, there's a [program] house . . . Like I guess, just like it's a very sort of live wild and free kind of culture I would say. So yeah. I don't know, it's very, very social.

Ari also reported on being able to fulfill important roles for the first-years:

It's really cool to have a support network when you come back to the—to the real world, so to speak, to the front country, and you come to college, and your student leaders who are taking care of you, who basically felt like your mom and dad or your second—you know, your second set of parents for a few weeks, it's really cool to have them around on campus as resources.

The strong community beliefs (idioculture) reinforced commitment to the outdoor program. All three programs had strong reports of closeness and of having participated in a unique experience. Perceiving the experience as unique allowed it to be understood only by those with direct (participation) and positive (interpretation) experiences. These beliefs increased the value and importance of the leader community and fomented a resistance to criticism. Having "outsiders" lacking in understanding helped to define the group. When "outsiders" described the outdoor orientation program leaders as "those people who love to go to the bathroom outside" or "don't shower," it helped to reinforce the program's beliefs of being misunderstood by "others."

The administration's narrative involved a desire for the programs to operate without problems and without needs, including attention. At Third University, it was clear the Dean was being pulled in numerous directions and putting out "a lot of fires" and likely desired programs without such "fires" or conflict. Within a busy system of college/university student affairs, a program run by students, largely funded by student fees, and receiving praise by incoming students can lose attention in a competitive environment of internal politics. When faced with the triggering events that led to conflicts with the OOPs, the administration's immediate response was to increase oversight and attempt to quickly solve problems by introducing mandates. Those mandates were resisted for their lack of understanding of the social dynamics of the group and a lack of relationship with the student directors. When new professional directors arrived, they were viewed as extensions of administrative mandates.

The introduction of all three professional directors was threatening to students, and the new directors needed to gain student trust before they could institute effective change. Directors had to show a willingness to learn about the cherished history of the program. For instance, the director who did not understand the importance of leader hats as a symbol of leadership inadvertently caused more resistance. Directors choose their battles wisely, sometimes choosing to tolerate program practices they would have otherwise changed. Any shift in idioculture was best approached by developing mutual trust, protecting some of the student directors' former autonomy,

and focusing on the key principle of the program—to help first-years transition to college.

Many of the new changes that were the focus of student leader resistance and believed to be essential to the programs' success actually had little impact on the program. The new changes were accepted quickly by the newest student leaders. What did not change was the openness to new ideas. Instead, the new leaders' narratives clearly identified the "old ways" as wrong ("we used to do things wrong") and now the program had a better "new way." It seemed the new way was being cherished and would likely also face resistance to change in the future.

The students appreciated being "wild" as part of their college experience. We believe these "wild" experiences may serve students developmentally. As the student leaders prepared to lead, they often dressed in outrageous costumes—for instance, penguin costumes, tutus, and colorful socks—and expressed themselves loudly with yelling and dancing amongst the new students. The interviews suggested the importance of these experiences, both in breaking free of societal norms and in being supported/accepted by peers. We believe this explains the importance of skinny dipping, as it is both an act against societal norm and a demonstration of being "wild."

Discussion

As we worked through the analysis of the three programs, we were reminded of Turner's (1969) rite of passage containing a liminal phase where initiates are "betwixt and between" social roles. Turner suggests the liminal space is important for exploring boundaries and new ideas and may be the experience students desire when they want to be "wild." We suggest a focus on "the right kind of wild," encouraging norm-challenging experiences, but in the context of critical thought and consideration of social and physical risk. If students need a wild experience to propel them developmentally into developing autonomy, which may be what students are expressing, then the issue becomes "what constitutes the right kind of wild?"

At TU, the professional director and student staff approached "the right kind of wild" with the peer leaders, after making initial changes in the program by framing decisions from the principle "it's about the first-years"; the program quickly incorporated a new idioculture. A focus on the purpose behind activities resulted in less leader-centric traditions. A focus on the program goals was a positive force for change and helped direct consensus about the program's true mission. After two program seasons with the new Program Director at TU, SDs and student leaders reported working in col-

laboration with the administration instead of the previous "us versus them" relationship. Campbell remarked:

I think the general perception among the staff is that the program—the program is really well looked after by the administration, beyond [program director]. And it's not a constant struggle of having to, you know, beg or sort of force your way into things.

Similar outcomes have been reported by the Program Directors at FC and SU.

In addition to using a lens of the "right kind of wild," we encourage programs to adopt a culture of change within their programs, which allows for an ongoing examination and evaluation of the programs' curricula and traditions. This can be achieved through multiple sources of evaluation including participant surveys, leader surveys, focus groups, and debrief meetings. If programs work within an understanding that change is an integral part of their growth, and that anything and everything can be on the chopping block, it allows student leaders to maintain autonomy in the way their opinions impact the future of the program.

Our primary takeaway from this study is twofold: First, that it's important to understand the idioculture of a program, including how norms are formed and reinforced; and second, that the administration and student peer leaders need to form relationships and maintain communication. Although it is easy to conclude that understanding the idioculture is important, we want to emphasize the strong levels of trust and attentiveness to relationships is needed by the program director to accomplish such an understanding. Trusting relationships and understanding the nuances of culture take time and direct interaction. As programs may desire to do more with less, this is an area we believe professional directors must emphasize is worthy of investment. There was an old commercial tag line for motor oil "you can pay me now, or you can pay me later" that we think applies to these programs.

All three programs eventually hired new directors who invested great amounts of time to develop mutual trust with SDs. As trust developed, directors also understood student leaders as being in a developmental space—where pushing back on rules and norms may be part of a liminal phase of development. These leaders are also tasked with managing the risk to others. This developmental and nuanced space posed a challenge to programs directors. They are essentially training student leaders to manage risk, at a time when these student leaders most desire to take risks. Mandates, rules, policies were less effective at managing this challenge than creating an idioculture effectively emphasizing the program goals.

The dedication and enthusiasm found among the SDs and leaders in the three programs studied was an asset to each college. Administrators can support the programs by keeping the programs focused on the mission and values of the program. Without time for such conversations, we believe the risk is the development of idiocultures that slowly begin to serve the peer leaders at a potentially tremendous cost to the incoming students.

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