FEAR IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION: THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND PROGRAM
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Following up on Ewert's (1988) study of Outward Bound students, the purpose of this study was to measure situational fears held by participants in a different type of outdoor program. Based on past findings, three hypotheses emerged. H1: Items representing social-based fears (e.g., fear of confrontation in the group) would be associated with elevated anxiety levels more than those items representing physical fears (e.g., falling or becoming injured). H2: Females would be associated with elevated fear levels more than males. H3: Levels of anxiety would decrease. Subjects were recreation and physical education majors completing separate Outdoor Education Practicum (OEP) courses through an outdoor education center in the Adirondacks. The OEP courses, which aim at environmental awareness, interpersonal effectiveness, and professional preparation, differ from the Outward Bound courses of the earlier study. The 13 day OEP included a 5 or 6 day "pretrip" camping education period at the Center and a 5 or 6 day extended canoe or backpacking trip in various parts of the Adirondack Park. Although involving physical and emotional stresses, the OEP does not center around the systematic progression of challenges associated with the "Outward Bound" formula. Subjects completed a Situational Fear Inventory (1) upon arrival at the Center, (2) after completing the pretrip phase, and (3) following their trip. To determine the significance of changes in fear levels, one-way ANOVAs with post-hoc Scheffe tests were utilized. To test the associations of elevated fear levels (i.e., means above 40.0) with type of fear and with gender, Chi Square was used. Hypothesis 1 was supported. Considering all fear measurements, 31% (26) of social-based fears were elevated compared with just 12% (11) of physical fears. This association of elevated fear with type fear of was significant $X^2(1, N = 168) = 10.844, p < .001$. Hypothesis 2 was supported. Female mean levels of fear were elevated in 30 of 87 measurements. In contrast, male means were elevated in 7 instances. The association of elevated fears with gender was significant $X^2(1, N = 174) = 18.16, p < .001$. Hypothesis 3 was also supported. All levels of anxiety lessened with later measurements; 71.6% were reduced significantly ($p < .05$).

Two sets of implications are noteworthy. First, from a programmer's perspective, it is useful to know the fears of wilderness program participants. The general findings and the item-specific findings may suggest ways that course sponsors can market, design, or review their programs. Second, the results support previous findings that females report higher levels of fear than males. This trend may simply reflect more honest responses from females. However, if social learning is an influencing factor in the development of fears, particularly among females, programs such as the one studied can play an important role in reducing those fears. From the broader context of society, the true value of programs such as this one may lie more in the modification of fear and feelings of inability and less in the learning of any particular skill or technique.


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