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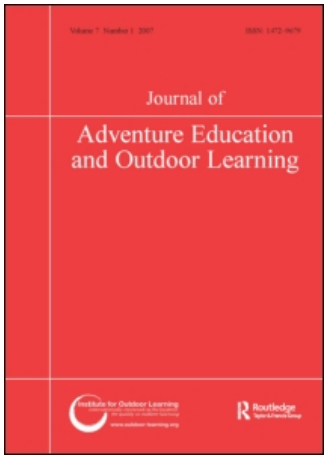

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A Critique of Neo–Hahnian Outdoor Education Theory. Part two: "The Fundamental Attribution Error" in Contemporary Outdoor Education Discourse.

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Abstract

In the first of a two part series of articles I argued that "character building" in outdoor adventure education (OAE) is a flawed concept. This, the second article, examines the persistence of the idea of character building in OAE in the face of strong evidence that outdoor experiences cannot change personal traits. I examine how the "fundamental attribution error" can explain the paradox of (a) a shortage of evidence that adventure education "works" and (b) a widespread belief that it does "work". I review the place of character building in research, and develop a critical reading of a representative adventure education text. I show how unchallenged dispositionist assumptions emerge in neo–Hahnian discourse. I explain how discarding the intuitively appealing but fallacious foundations of neo–Hahnism can clear the way for situationist approaches to outdoor education that bring much needed sensitivity to cultural, regional, historical, and social contexts.

Introduction

In part one of this study (Brookes, 2003), I defined neo–Hahnian outdoor adventure education (NH OAE) as outdoor education centred on the notion that the "character" of individuals could be "built" by certain one–off outdoor experiences. I pointed to the weight of social psychology research that demolished the idea that personal traits inferred from behaviour in one situation (for example an OAE situation) could be used to predict behaviour in a different situation (for example a workplace). In short, while OAE programs may well shape behaviour for the duration, may well influence what participants believe about themselves, and may well teach certain skills or knowledge what they do not do is build character.

Yet the idea of character building persists. At the time of writing, an internet search for documents containing all four terms "character, building, outdoor, and education" produced over 60,000 hits. Uncritical references to Kurt Hahn and "character building" abound in the OAE literature, and are almost a standard inclusion in the introductory remarks for research publications in OAE. Taking into account that different terms may be used (for example "personal" for "character" and "development" for "building") the influence of the notion of character building is immense in the outdoor field. Examining how and why this has occurred is important not only to help understand how the NH OAE field has been constructed, but also to more clearly see the way forward for more defensible "situationist" OAE theory and practice.

If character building is a fallacy, where did NH OAE go wrong? In one sense it did not. If character building is taken to mean not a literal claim but an appealing slogan, then it has been remarkably successful. (I discuss this in more detail in (Brookes, 2003)). Part of the appeal of character building

has been symbolic, and its endurance may be linked to its flexibility. It is a positive term (compared to, say, "personality manipulation") that has diverse connotations. It can serve pacifist or bellicose ends, conservative or liberal ideologies, and be attached to notions of discipline or resistance alike.

Whatever popular appeal character building may have, and have had in the past, it does not explain how character building as a specific claim could persist in OAE *research* and *theory*.

The explanation I explore in this article is that NH OAE "went wrong" for entirely understandable reasons. I will argue that character building conforms to a widely observed bias to prefer character–based (i.e. "dispositional") explanations of behaviour over context–based (i.e. "situational") explanations. I will point to evidence that overconfidence in the ability to make predictions based on observations of character has been widely and consistently reported in experimental situations. Simply put, OAE research and theory has been subject to, or at least not sufficiently careful to exclude, a common bias.

NH OAE and the "Fundamental Attribution Error"

Within the narrow confines of a strict NH view of OAE, namely that OAE programs change character traits, questions about *causes* of behaviour are crucial. The formal study of the inferences people make about the causes of behaviour spawned the development of attribution theory (Kelley, 1967). Attribution of cause is a social process. For example, in accident analysis cause (blame) may be attributed to operator error even though context or systems–related circumstances may be poorly understood (Perrow, 1999) and the mental processes of those involved may be unknown (Reason, 2001). Attribution may be cultural or ideological. As I discussed in Brookes (2003) the success of character building in building the scouting movement did not depend on the literal truth of the concept, rather, it resonated with popular beliefs and anxieties. That is not to say that discussion of attribution must be unrelated to "true" or actual causes of behaviour; but in most cases in real life there are no (accessible) true causes, only competing attributions. Attributions can nevertheless be evaluated—attributions based on prejudice or rage might well be put aside in favour of those based on observation and logic.

It is precisely this uncertainty about attributions that makes the literal claims of NH OAE to build character wrong. Introducing their seminal review of research in the field, Ross and Nisbett (1991, p. 1) reflect that the most certain knowledge to emerge from social psychology is a "hard–won ignorance". They contend that "social psychology [at graduate level] rivals philosophy in its ability to teach people that they do not truly understand the nature of the world." NH OAE is fallacious not only because it over–emphasises personal traits, but because it requires adherents to believe that human behaviour can be explained and predicted with an insupportable degree of certainty and simplicity. The term "attribution error' is used in the study of unsupported beliefs about the causes and predictability of human behaviour, but it should not be inferred that in non–experimental situations "true" causes or "reliable" predictions are necessarily available.

Ross and Nisbett (1991, p. 126) use the term "fundamental attribution error" to refer to a set of persistently observed biases:

> people (1) infer dispositions from behaviour that is manifestly situational, (2) overlook situational context factors of substantial importance, and (3) make overly confident predictions when given small amounts of trait–relevant information.

The term was coined (and defined somewhat more narrowly) by Ross (1977) in what became the most widely cited article in social psychology in the 1980's. There are reasons to be cautious about the term – "pervasive attribution bias" is the term I will use in what follows[1]. "Fundamental" should not be read as implying universal or inevitable – it is common to explain behaviour in situationist terms ("I am not rude, I am in a hurry") and common to assert that human behaviour is not easily predicted ("you can't be sure I will mess up if you give me another chance").

Attribution bias may not be fundamental, but it is pervasive. A bias towards dispositionist attributions is probably adaptive – it provides an easy way to render the world comprehensible (Ross & Nisbett, 1991) (this is true of many aspects of memory and cognition, which reduce mental effort, and work satisfactorily a lot of the time (Haskell, 2001; Reason, 2001; Schacter, 2001)). It is easier to attribute an angry outburst to an individual's tendency to anger than to investigate and understand what is going on in that person's life.

Attributing behaviour to "character" (personal traits) mostly works: "[I]n the course of ordinary experience, we rarely have a chance to observe the same people in radically different roles or situations in a way that would fairly test the cross–situational consistency of their geniality, generosity, or ability to delay gratification." (Ross & Nisbett, 1991, p. 147). In everyday dealing with people, behavioural *consistency* is observed because of *situational stability*. It is common to be surprised by how "different" a person may seem when encountered in an unfamiliar situation (Ross & Nisbett, 1991, p. 149–150).

Ross and Nisbett (1991) summarise an extensive literature on attribution bias studied in experimental situations. I recommend interested readers refer to the full text – here I will mention some examples. (a) Even when individuals know that in a simulation "manager" and "clerks" have been assigned randomly, they will rank the arbitrarily designated "managers" higher on management traits (Ross & Nisbett, 1991, p. 128). (b) The Darley and Bateson experiment (see (Brookes, 2003)), based on the parable of the good Samaritan, provides further evidence,

> On the way to the new building, the seminary student was hailed by a man lying in a doorway, who asked for help. And did the seminary student offer their help? Did it make a difference what the nature of their religious orientation was? Did it make a difference whether or not they were in a hurry? The answers are, respectively: some, no, and a great deal (Ross & Nisbett, 1991, p. 131).

When told the results of this experiment, subjects in another experiment *still* maintained that " "altruistic people" would help and "selfish people" would not, regardless of how much time they happened to have on their hands" (Ross & Nisbett, 1991, p. 131).

Ross and Nisbett (1991) also summarise, (a) other evidence which shows that lay prediction is not confined to predictions about "predictable" individuals in certain situations, and (b) studies that found a general willingness to offer trait–based explanations and make predictions about future behaviour based on very little evidence, and to ignore situational evidence even when *situational evidence was the only evidence available*. Strikingly, while individuals may use situational factors to explain their own behaviour (Kagan, 1998), when shown film of their behaviour they revert to trait based explanations (Ross & Nisbett, 1991, p. 141).

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[1] I am grateful to one of the reviewers for pointing out the need for caution here.

Attribution bias helps explain how NH OAE may seem convincing. OAE situations *can* change behaviour. Facilitation may have the effect of *exaggerating* belief that changed behaviour implies changed personal traits (attribution bias). Because trait attributions once made tend to be robust, participants continue to believe "they" have changed after leaving the OAE situation. Confirmation bias (Schacter, 2001) (a tendency to filter observations to fit existing beliefs) and consistency bias (Schacter, 2001) (a tendency to attribute false consistency to one's own beliefs over time) may amplify this persistency–participants may become *increasingly* convinced that the OAE program changed them (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997). This explanation of NH OAE is summarised in table one.

Table 1.
NH OAE 'success' explained, and the alternative position based on social psychology research

The Neo Hahnian OAE position:		
OAE programs change personal traits in specific directions	**Facilitation assists participants to maintain their new traits after the program has finished**	**Participants report that their new traits persist**
The alternative situationist position, allowing for dispositionist bias:		
OAE programs change behaviour in specific ways. Certain situations can change behaviour quite reliably	**Facilitation amplifies existing tendencies to attribute behaviour to traits. Participants and facilitators convince themselves behaviour changes indicate trait changes**	**Belief that traits have changed persists because: (a) trait attributions tend to be stable (made quickly, revised reluctantly) (b) confirmation and consistency biases reinforce beliefs formed during OAE**

The observation that attribution bias is so pervasive as to be expected may help resolve an apparent contradiction between widespread adherence to NH OAE, and its flawed conceptual foundations. How academic research and theorising within OAE have responded to dispositionist bias is another matter.

Trait Versus Situation in OAE Research

Conceivably, in-house OAE research could be contaminated by attribution error (for example questionnaire results may report not actual behavioural change but changed beliefs). However, one would expect some indications in the research literature that the substantive claims of NH OAE were flawed, if, as I have argued, they are. I have been unable to locate research that specifically

challenged the *idea* of personal trait development, and I found many instances where the *possibility* of character building went unchallenged. However, there is a body of research that has raised questions about the outcomes of NH OAE programs.

Disquiet about NH OAE: Vagueness; Enthusiasm Exceeding Evidence; Biased and Unconvincing Research

Researchers from outside the OAE field have commented on vagueness in the OAE literature, either about what the essential elements of OAE were, or about what it aimed to achieve. Irvine (1994) points out that this vagueness makes it difficult to conduct, or evaluate, research.

Roberts, White, and Parker (1974) and Drasdo (1972) struggled to find meaning in claims made for Outward Bound style programs; Macleod (1983) encountered similar difficulties with character building in youth movements. If anything such criticism has intensified following a wave of enthusiasm for OAE in Outdoor Management Development (OMD). Jones and Oswick (1993, p. 11) cite Wagner, Baldwin, and Roland (1991), "[s]ome of the controversy over outdoor training stems from confusion over the different types of training available", and report from their own review that differences over what OMD *is* mean that "comparisons between outcomes are less likely to yield consistent results and conclusions". Lack of clarity also applied to some aims and objectives. Reviewing more than 90 published sources Jones and Oswick (1993, p. 12–13), found "many articles gave such broad and general aims and objectives that 'any form of management training' might be expected to contain the same or similar items".

Researchers from outside the OAE field have encountered disparities between the enthusiasm of believers and evidence for supporting NH OAE. Irvine (1994, p. 25) observed, "evidence in support of managerial and management learning through OMD regrettably is little more than anecdotal".

Jones and Oswick (1993, p. 14) reached a similar conclusion, noting there was little overlap between articles that *claimed* certain outcomes of OMD, and articles that attempted systematic evaluation, "[t]hose authors who do suggest proven outcomes are reliably derived from OMD interventions appear to be doing so in the absence of supporting evidence".

Badger, Sadler–Smith and Michie (1997, p. 323), in a study of what users thought of OMD programs, and how they reached their conclusions, were persuaded that "current users of outdoor development feel that it is effective". [C]urrent users [have] firm beliefs in the benefits for personal, team and leadership development. What was not clear was how such conclusions were arrived at other than through anecdote and intuition."

Hattie et al. (1997, p. 45), in a review of research into Outward Bound style programs, commented, "we were struck by the number of research papers that read more like program advertisements than research."

In-house OAE research has been criticised on the grounds of apparent bias, or reliance on evidence that is less than convincing. Jones and Oswick (1993) argued that much of the research literature is open to bias because the authors are sponsors and/or providers of training, and that "[c]ommonly used methods of evaluating OMD may be systematically biased in favour of confirming that this form of training is effective in achieving its aims and goals" (Jones & Oswick, 1993, p. 16).

Badger et al.'s (1997) review concluded that information about the effects of OMD on actual organizational performance was hard to obtain, and potentially biased, while less helpful information on participants' reactions was easy to obtain. Roberts et al. (1974) expressed reservations about research into "the character training industry" on the grounds that it was in-house. There is also a body of research that specifically rejects some or all aspects of NH OAE.

NH OAE doesn't work

Rosenthal (1986, p. 106) argued that although scouting in Britain was modelled on the public school system, unlike the public school system scouting did not serve an elite group, and "[n]o recognizable Scout species ever developed nor has anyone ever been able to demonstrate that Boy Scouts as a group emerged from scouting experience significantly different from the rest of the non-Scouting world".

Considering OAE in corporate training, Roberts et al. (1974, p. 150) stated,

> Our conclusion, though open to dispute by further research but wholly consistent with all the evidence now available must therefore be that, whilst personalities may be affected, young lives are rarely re-shaped by the schemes under scrutiny. Previous commentators such as Fletcher, have been over-impressed by the evidently exaggerated influence trainees attribute to their courses and organisers are deluded by the selective feedback they receive. The character-training industry is not liable to re-shape society, and though negative conclusions are never particularly exciting, the evidence makes them inescapable.

And later,

> Character training schemes do not dramatically transform people's lives within the space of a few weeks. Course organisers have not found any secret formula that has eluded other education and youth workers for so long. Modest accomplishments are familiar in other branches of education, marginal changes can be worthwhile, and the achievements of character-training schemes can be realistically judged only against modest standards. Cost is the main problem. (p. 162)

Roberts et al (1974) did find one specific effect of the programs they studied; a significant number of participants felt less satisfied at work following the course. This suggests that a change of circumstances can produce a heightened *awareness* of circumstances (time in the mountains can make work seem less attractive).

Mand (1985) in Irvine and Wilson (1994, p. 30) rejected "magical" notions that a one to four week experience can "redress emotional or behaviour problems that took 15 years to develop". Irvine and Wilson (1994, p. 36) argue that OMD might be effective, but only if it satisfies effectiveness criteria not unique to outdoor settings or adventure, "having examined the concept of OMD, the mystique of which much of its reputation rests seemingly illusionary. Its credibility relies almost exclusively on questionable anecdotal evidence".

Hamilton and Cooper (2001) proposed that OMD should improve three measures: team climate, motivation, and stress. They found "team climate" improved in only one of four measured dimensions. Intended effects in the workplace were much weaker than self–reported changes, but they stop short of concluding that OMD based on NH OAE is flawed.

"Creationist" Theories and "Flat–Earth" Research in OAE

A "creation myth" of NH OAE as the almost magical discovery of Kurt Hahn appears even in research that does not support NH OAE. Roberts et al. (1974) noted influences of traditions that pre–date Kurt Hahn (youth groups, associations between a healthy body and a healthy mind) and more recent fashions (such as encounter groups), but reported that previous research had failed to critically examine the conceptual basis for NH OAE.

Hattie et al. (1997, p. 44) state that "most researchers trace the origin of modern adventure education to Kurt Hahn". True, but only if one omits research specifically directed at the origins of the youth movements, and neglects more recent influences. Such an approach tends to remove NH OAE from the realm of critical debate over its ideological, social and cultural dimensions. Studies of Scouting too, Springhall (1977, p. 141) noted, were "flawed until recently "by an over–adulation of its founder".

The central premise of NH OAE—character building, is often uncontested. Research that purports to have located the ends of the earth—in the form of changed personal traits—is not subject to the criticism that the earth is not flat (character building is a myth).

Many of the findings that Hattie et al. (1997) review describe traits: conscientiousness, values, self-esteem, independence, emotional stability, aggression, assertiveness, maturity, challenge–ness (sic), and flexibility. Claims that these traits have improved are "flat earth" findings; either NH OAE has stumbled onto a means to make human behaviour more predictable than decades of social psychology research has been able to demonstrate (i.e. the earth is flat after all) or such claims must cast serious doubts on the research projects that generated them.

There is no reason to suppose that any of the studies cited by Hattie et al. (1997), many of which were "in house", were subject to intentional bias. A more plausible speculation is that the studies failed to carefully separate observable changes in patterns of behaviour from participants' beliefs about their own behaviour, thus producing data contaminated by the fundamental attribution error. Roberts et al.'s (1974) study, not cited by Hattie et al. (1997), identifies this problem with previous research on Outward Bound programs.

If NH OAE does not change behaviour, but does change self-concept, especially self-esteem or components of self-esteem, might not that in itself be counted as success? "Improved" self-concept might *lead* to behavioural changes. In the case of self-esteem, Emler (2001) studied behavioural implications in considerable detail. He concluded that low self-esteem was implicated as one of a number of factors that increased the risk of: "teenage pregnancy, eating disorders, suicide attempts and suicidal thoughts, and (for males only) lower earnings and more extended periods of unemployment in early adulthood" (Emler, 2001, p. 3). However, vulnerability to negative peer–pressure, and risk–taking such as driving too fast under the influence of alcohol, was associated with *high* self-esteem. Moreover,

> in several cases the evidence was about as clear as it could be in ruling out a causal influence of low self-esteem. These cases are crime/delinquency (including violent crime), racial prejudice, teenage smoking, and child maltreatment. What make some of these cases particularly clear is that high, not low self-esteem is the more plausible risk factor. (Emler, 2001, p. 2)

Emler's research does not exhaust the question of NH OAE as "improving" self-concept. But it suggests that treating self-concept as a context–free trait is dubious. There may be specific cases where aspects of the self-concept of certain individuals could be changed in beneficial ways. It is likely that NH OAE programs could achieve such changes; they appear to be effective at changing self-attributions. But NH OAE cannot sidestep the critique developed in this study simply by substituting "self-concept development" for character building.

Trait Versus Situation in OAE Theory

> [E]very adventurer starts out as a liar, a storyteller who wants to believe his own stories, and therefore needs to act them out. In this sense, the escape from culture becomes a coy act of culture. (Zweig, 1981, p. 240)

Character building remains foundational in much OAE theory. Its influence does not always appear clearly labelled, but attribution bias appears to be tightly woven into some (NH) approaches to OAE theory. To understand this requires an approach more indebted to cultural studies than social psychology. The following discussion provides an outline for such analysis.

It should be noted at the outset that character building is not universally accepted in OAE theory. Reservations about character building, including its association with the Hitler Youth, were evident at least three decades ago (Roberts et al., 1974, p. 13), and there has been some retreat from the term. When in Australia five participants and two instructors drowned on the first, well publicised program of the Victorian Outward Bound School on Lake Hume on August 16, 1963, outdoor education in Victoria acquired a distinct ambivalence towards character building (Brookes, 2002b). It has by no means disappeared, however.

NH Influences in Miles and Priest "Adventure Programming"

Character building can be readily identified as an explicit foundation of contemporary OAE theory. Webb (1999, p. 4), for example, in the first chapter of Miles' and Priest's (1999) *Adventure Programming* presents the developmental stages of recreation benefits as a pyramid capped by "character development". Hirsch (1999), introducing developmental adventure in the same book, prefers the term "personal growth" to character building. These terms are not necessarily synonymous (although both are so vague as to suggest the futility of seeking fine semantic differences), but it is clear Hirsch means by personal growth not just behavioural change *within* the OAE program, or gaining skills and knowledge that *may or may not* be applied in other settings, but an expectation of "change at the intrapersonal or interpersonal level" (Hirsch, 1999, p. 25). Hirsch's chapter illustrates two mutations that may disguise character building if allowed to pass without comment. (1) Character is reformulated into behaviourist terms. Instead of character being explicitly inferred from patterns of behaviour, in NH OAE behavioural change is explicit, and character left implicit. (2) "Learning" replaces "building". Here it is necessary to understand that NH OAE tends to adopt a special definition of learning. Rather than referring to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, or insight, it instead refers to "a shift in the way people feel, think, or behave" (Priest, 1999, p. xiii). This more psychologically deterministic view of learning slots neatly into the notion of character as determining behaviour, effectively blurring the distinction between what I have learned and whether or not I will act on, or be influenced by, that learning.

Character building may be alive and well, but the depth and extent of its influence is difficult to determine. In some accounts of OAE it may be obscure, embraced ambivalently, or simply absent. Bailey (1999), in the fifth of the introductory chapters in *Adventure Programming*, avoids character building. Gillis Jr. and Ringer (1999) seem to repudiate character building when they specifically advocate *continuity* between the social context of the OAE situation and the "everyday" situation requiring therapeutic intervention, "persons who comprise the client's social system are involved so that the changes in the clients persist after the adventure therapy program has ended" (Gillis Jr. & Ringer, 1999, p. 31). At the same time, they appear to endorse the use of therapeutic OAE to "target personality" (Gillis Jr. & Ringer, 1999, p. 30), and uncritically refer to the foundational status of Kurt Hahn and Outward Bound. Although apparently unable to quite step outside the "NH" mindset, they are circumspect about research evidence for the efficacy of OAE therapy. Not coincidentally, they are also among the few contributors who refer extensively to recent non–OAE literature. Horwood (1999) too, in the remaining introductory chapter, offers a ritual nod of approval in the direction of Kurt Hahn and character building in his closing paragraphs. But his contribution for the most part gently pulls the rug from under NH OAE, firstly by providing a context–based schema for understanding OAE, and then by deconstructing the notion that outdoor adventure is educationally unique.

Adventure Programming has more than 60 chapters; rather than discuss each, I will let the discussion of the five introductory chapters exemplify how explicit and implicit character building claims appear throughout the text. While those contributors most concerned with defining character building in precise terms tend to be most circumspect about its proven existence, many contributors seem unwilling to abandon at least a *symbolic* commitment to neo–Hahnism. This might be seen as a matter of necessity; OAE contains diversity and contradictions that tend to defeat attempts at logical definition, but can be *explained* in terms of common origins and common symbols. Nevertheless, if *Adventure Programming* can be taken to loosely represent a "school of thought" in OAE (primarily centred in the United States), its defining characteristic is a literal–mindedness with respect to "adventure". It is as if someone has mistaken the advertising imagery around a particular consumer product with its technical specification, or confused an actor in a supermarket with a character they play. In short, notwithstanding the number of studies (MacDonald, 1993; Macleod, 1983; Roberts et al., 1974; Rosenthal, 1986; Springhall, 1977) that have analysed how character building movements have succeeded because of what they appealed to rather than what they actually achieved, a significant cohort of OAE theorists have not considered the symbolic aspects of OAE.

Symbolic Associations of Neo–Hahnism

It is to this symbolism, and the frameworks that support it, I now turn. My purpose here is not to attempt an exhaustive analysis of *Adventure Programming*, but to outline a critique of three elements of NH OAE that warrant further enquiry, and that introduce some social and cultural analysis absent from many accounts of OAE.

1 *The idea of adventure*: Priest (1999, p. xiii) could be read as disingenuous in defining adventurous experiences as "activities with uncertain outcomes (due to the presence of situational risks) that necessitate people applying their personal competence to meet the challenge and resolve the uncertainty". Adventure, of course, is nothing of the sort. Adventure is a way of *construing* certain experiences, the main prototypes for which in western culture are mythical. An adventure is *a kind of story*. OAE is "adventure education" and not "uncertainty education" precisely because the term "adventure"

conjures up desired images and associations. At the heart of the prototypical adventure story, particularly as represented in popular culture post WWII (Zweig, 1981), is the psychological transformation of a central character, the hero, on his or her return. The connotations of the term "adventure" contribute to OAE's credibility and attractiveness, and help to explain how neo–Hahnism could succeed while failing to deliver character building. The possible disingenuousness is in treating adventure as a literal truth while neglecting its literary origins and connotations. If the term adventure itself is not code for character building, it whispers character building to those who like the idea but sense the term has acquired some negative connotations.

2 *Kurt Hahn as a symbol*: Hahn is so closely associated with the idea of character building that it is reasonable to take every approving invocation of his name as a tacit endorsement of character building, not as an intellectual claim so much as a taken–for–granted assumption (attribution bias). As the editors of *Adventure Programming* point out, Hahn has "disciple[s]" (Miles & Priest, 1999, p. 43). The issue here is not what is or is not true about Hahn the person, but about how his name is used. Hahn seems particularly important as a pivot around which character building movements could turn from their militaristic, nationalistic, and imperialistic roots. OAE's connections with its past are not so easily discarded however.

3 *Disconnection from contemporary research and scholarship in other fields*: this paper has attempted to link some important social psychology with OAE, but the conditions that have permitted the field of OAE to take the mythology of adventure as literal truth owes something to a more general lack of intellectual curiosity and scholarly attention. Some sense at least of this can be encountered by scanning the lists of works cited by each contributor to *Adventure Programming*. While there are exceptions, it seems fair to observe of many contributions that: (a) while there are some references to non OAE scholarship and research from the 1970's or earlier, there is much less attention to more recent work, and (b) many of the distinctive claims made for OAE are floated in OAE publications rather than submitted to less partisan scrutiny in the broader educational, therapeutic, or human development literature (Samdahl & Kelly (1999) found a similar pattern of intellectual isolation in a detailed citation analysis of two leisure studies journals).

As recent work in cultural studies (During, 1993) have shown, terms such as adventure may have multiple meanings that require attention to how a term is actually interpreted in different situations. These are questions of detail; that NH influences remain strong in OAE is indisputable. Even where claims to develop personal traits are not made explicitly, deferential invocations of Kurt Hahn as originator, and references to adventure suggest in images what is not said in words. Many commentators from within "the movement" seem not to have considered that the field has been historically constructed around some appealing myths, combined with enjoyable activities that owe more to the immediate responses they elicit than any lasting transformative effects. Qualities of ambiguity, immediate appeal, and vague outcomes have probably contributed to NH OAE's endurance, and have allowed it to take many forms.

A Note of Caution on Situationist OAE

Situationist accounts of OAE have to take into account how individuals understand the situation. How a group of individuals respond when (for instance) I appear brandishing a pistol depends on how each *construes* the situation (he means us harm"; "he is making a poor joke"; "it is a water

pistol"; "he is demonstrating a point about construal"; "he is deranged"; "he is an actor in a film"; etc.). Construal is a function of the situation *and* the individual, and may be subtle (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). When "soil" moves onto the floor of a tent or onto clothing it becomes "dirt". Knowing a flower is not indigenous may change how it is perceived.

The language of OAE may influence construal of OAE situations. This is true of terms such as "wilderness" and adventure, but also of terms such as self-esteem, honesty, and cooperation — one *could* use, respectively, conceit, tactlessness, and conformity. Ross and Nisbett (1991) point out that individuals will interpret the same phrase in opposite ways depending on whether it has been attributed to Lenin or Jefferson. Most individuals will recognise the conjugation of this "irregular verb": I am firm, you are obstinate, he is pig–headed (Flew, 1975, p. 79). The term character is itself not neutral; it implies both certain behaviours and norms. Norms may be subject to different ideological, cultural, or religious beliefs. Taking an extreme example, where some see a heroic martyr, others see a cowardly dupe.

These comments are sufficient, I hope, to signal that while there is a case for developing more situationist accounts of OAE, the subtlety and complexity of the task should be acknowledged. Although certain situations have been shown to be quite deterministic, the same is not true for most situations. Shoda and Mischel (2000), in arguing for a contextual view of personality that accommodates hermeneutic and narrative understandings of human behaviour, point out that "[as] every good novelist knows, both the subtle texture of personality and its underlying dynamics may be seen in the seeming inconsistencies evident in a person even more clearly than in his [sic] consistencies" (Shoda & Mischel, 2000, p. 425). They contend that, "[a]lthough the personality system is intrinsically contextualized and interactive with the social world, the individual selects, constructs, and transforms situations rather than being victimized by them" (Shoda & Mischel, 2000, p. 408).

Future Directions for OAE Research — Reclaiming the Geographical, Historical, Cultural, and Social

> We must remember that critique is always limited, fragmented and unsure. Anything else is utopian fantasy... [t]oo often, critical educators have brought the whole of the life–world under a general rhetoric of criticism, causing an unspecified and free floating fear to permeate even the most innocent aspects of life... (Young, 1990, p. 70)

Notwithstanding its fallacious underpinnings, I expect that parts at least of the "character training industry" will survive for another century, and that clients, participants, and trainers will continue to be happy with the way things are.

However I can see little room to continue tolerating flat earth theory (character building) in outdoor education research and theory (I have omitted the "adventure" intentionally). There are risks of harmful interventions in other lives based on false (albeit sincere) premises (it is not safe to assume that OAE can do no harm), and lost opportunities to solve educational problems using more defensible theories. Facilitation that endorses personal trait development both denies that to maintain your "expeditionary self" you must continue to undertake expeditions, and offers false hope – that your expeditionary self can be reinvoked if you can learn to see taking the 8.30 train as an expedition.

Character building diverts attention from better, situationist accounts of what outdoor experiences can achieve,

1 Attention to *situations* introduces to outdoor education an imperative to pay attention to specific geographical, social, political, cultural and personal circumstances. While it is unsafe to generalise about such a loosely defined field, OAE theory has tended to lean on psychology (albeit selectively) at the expense of attention to the social sciences and the humanities.
2 Outdoor education programs that aim to develop *on–going relationships* between particular groups or individuals and specific outdoor environments do not need attribution error to "work". People *can* "change" in changed circumstances, and it is possible that individuals can by some criteria become a "better person" in the outdoors. To maintain those changes depends on maintaining, or at least periodically returning to, the changed circumstances. Perhaps it is too neat, but here the contention that "character building" is linked to colonialism, (and the educational issues that can arise in its wake (Brookes, 2002a)), comes full circle; in many aboriginal cultures identity and relationship with place are regarded as inseparable (Brookes, 1998).

I have argued previously that, at least in South Eastern Australia, there is an educational imperative to take seriously the problem of understanding and reshaping how communities experience and understand their regions (Brookes, 2002b). Here at least, neo–Hahnism is just one more imported "solution" that turns out to be, if anything, part of the problem facing outdoor environmental educators.

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