



Further clarification of interpersonal versus social values conflict: Insights from motorized and non-motorized recreational river users



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ABSTRACT

This study examined interpersonal conflict and social values conflict among motorized and non-motorized river recreational users at a relatively low use recreation area in interior Alaska. Previous methodologies for operationalizing social values conflict are not conceptually clear and may result in individuals being classified into the wrong conflict typology. This study addressed these conceptual problems by: (1) introducing a new conflict typology to differentiate between social values conflict and latent problem behaviors and (2) by uniformly applying a non-behavior based measure to classify social values conflict. Data were collected using an on-site survey of motorized ($n=26$) and non-motorized ($n=63$) river recreational users at multiple put-in/take-out locations. To the extent that conflict existed, social values conflict was the most prevalent. A small but perceptible number of respondents in both user groups reported a latent-behavior conflict. The results of this study were compared to the results of studies using previous methodologies. Differences were found between the number of non-motorized respondents who were classified into the no conflict and social values conflict typologies.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Understanding the underlying causes of recreation conflict is essential to implementing an effective management response. Research has increased our understanding of conflict, yet the refinement of measures continues. This study investigated measurement issues regarding interpersonal vs. social values conflict and the impacts on management recommendations.

- Correctly identifying conflict as interpersonal or social values is crucial to selecting the most appropriate management response.
- Future studies of recreation conflict should also include evaluations of latent-behavior conflict to identify users who simply have a problem with another's behavior even though it is not evident as interpersonal or social values conflict.
- Evaluations of social values conflict should focus on non-behavior based measurements.
- Managers should apply a combination of management strategies to reduce conflict among river recreational users.
- Education efforts can be used to reduce social values conflict by broadening general understanding among users and dispelling myths. It can also be used to communicate generally accepted practices that can reduce or eliminate interpersonal and latent-behavior conflict.
- Zoning and alternative management strategies such as alternative infrastructure development can be used to reduce interpersonal conflict by limiting interactions between users, enhancing recreational opportunities, and maintaining quality recreational experiences for multiple use types.

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1. Introduction

Conflict has been a topic of outdoor recreation related research for nearly 50 years (Lucus, 1964; Tynon & Gomez, 2012). Early conflict research was descriptive and primarily focused on a density

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dependent notion of conflict that emphasized incompatibility between uses and competition over resources (Devall & Harry, 1981; Bury, Holland, & McEwen, 1983). With the introduction of the goal interference (i.e., interpersonal conflict) model by Jacob and Schreyer (1980) research quickly evolved to place greater emphasis on the underlying reasons that precipitate a conflict situation and how they could be managed. In the 1990s, the idea of social acceptability or social values, defined in this context as recreationists' evaluation of acceptable recreation activities in an area, became an important theory in conflict management (Blahna, Smith, & Anderson, 1995; Williams, 1993). As a result, more recent conflict research has explored the concept of interpersonal versus social values conflict (Carothers, Vaske, & Donnelly, 2001; Hidalgo & Harshaw, 2010; Tynon & Gomez, 2012; Vaske & Donnelly, 2007; Vaske, Donnelly, Wittmann, & Laidlaw, 1995), with the operationalization of social values conflict continuing to evolve (Vaske, Needham, & Cline, 2007). This study extends previous research by offering further clarification of the distinction between interpersonal and social values conflict. Specifically it examines several potential limitations with the conceptualization of social values conflict, proposes a method to account for those limitations, and compares the typologies that result when applying different methods.

1.1. Interpersonal conflict

Jacob and Schreyer (1980) defined conflict as "goal interference attributed to another's behavior" (p. 396). According to their model, referred to as interpersonal conflict in subsequent literature, in order for conflict to occur there must be direct or indirect social contact. For example, a hiker may experience interpersonal conflict if she is passed on a narrow trail by a mountain biker who is traveling too fast (Watson, Williams, & Daigle, 1991). Jacob and Schreyer (1980) introduced four factors (activity style, resource specificity, mode of experience, and tolerance for lifestyle diversity) that contribute to conflict. A combination of factors or a single factor alone could be enough to cause conflict. Studies of interpersonal conflict have been conducted on multiple activity groups that include canoeists and motor boaters (Lucas, 1964; Adelman, Herberlein, & Bonnicksen, 1982), hikers and stock users (Watson, Niccolucci, & Williams, 1993), cross-country skiers and snowmobilers (Knopp & Tyger, 1973; Jackson & Wong, 1982), oar-powered rafts and motor powered rafts (Shelby, 1980), and skiers and snowboarders (Thapa & Graefe, 2003; Vaske, Carothers, Donnelly, & Baird, 2000); the theory has generally been supported (Thapa & Graefe, 2004). While the concepts introduced by Jacob and Schreyer have exhibited a high degree of generalizability across activities, they did not offer an explanation for conflict in the absence of contact or a model for measuring such.

1.2. Social values conflict

Conflict can also arise between user groups who do not share the same norms and/or values (Saremba & Gill, 1991; Ruddell & Gramann, 1994). Blahna et al. (1995), for example, found that while encounters with llama packing trips may be rare, some individuals may philosophically disagree with the appropriateness of allowing llama packing to occur in the backcountry. In a study of hikers and mountain bikers in the Rattle Snake National Recreation Area, nearly two-thirds of hikers, most of whom had encountered mountain bikers, reported that mountain bikers were objectionable, although hikers had difficulty expressing the behaviors they found objectionable (Watson et al., 1991). In these situations, regulating behaviors or separating users, as might work in situations of interpersonal conflict, likely would not be effective as the source of conflict is not linked to a particular behavior. Conflict associated with differing norms and/or values as presented by Blahna et al.

(1995) is often referred to as social values conflict. It has developed into an alternative theory of recreation conflict and differs from interpersonal conflict in that it focuses on perceived conflict in the absence of direct interaction between users.

Vaske et al. (1995) further defined the construct of social values conflict as a recreationist having problem with a behavior without having witnessed that particular behavior. They operationalized its measurement through a series of survey questions regarding witnessing behavior and evaluations of those behaviors. Their model was supported in a study of conflict between hunters and non-hunters on Mt. Evans in Colorado. They hypothesized that since agency regulations and geographic conditions minimized encounters between these two groups, any conflict that did exist was more likely to be attributed to social values conflict than interpersonal conflict. Perceived conflict was operationalized by providing respondents with a series of behaviors and asking them to rate the frequency of observation and to what extent they were perceived to be a problem. The individual responses were combined to create a conflict typology. The results of the study indicated that to the extent conflict existed for the hunting-associated events, most of the problem was associated with differences in social values, indicating that simply knowing hunters were in the area was enough to trigger perceptions of conflict. Researchers then applied this model to different situations to assess its generalizability.

Carothers et al. (2001) tested whether the distinction between interpersonal conflict and social values conflict generalized to groups more similar in their value orientations. Their study of mountain bikers, hikers, and dual-sport participants (hikers and bikers) found that to the extent that conflict existed, interpersonal conflict was more prevalent than social values conflict. For example, when evaluating hikers, between 10% and 33% of the three groups indicated a social values conflict. In contrast, between 67% and 90% reported interpersonal conflict. This finding is not surprising given the similarities between these groups. However, the fact that social values conflict was detected among users who are likely to share similar values/norms raises a methodological consideration: did those classified as having social values conflict not witness behavior because they purposefully took actions to avoid a potential interpersonal conflict?

Vaske et al., 2007 speculated that a potential overlap might exist between interpersonal and social values conflict and posited that people who observe an event and consider it to be a problem could in fact be experiencing interpersonal conflict, social values conflict, or both. The methodology used by Vaske et al. (1995) to distinguish between interpersonal and social values conflict was revised by adding an additional conflict group to account for people who may experience both interpersonal and social values conflict. The revised method was tested on cross-country skiers and snowmobilers at two separate locations in Colorado. Respondents in the interpersonal conflict group were segmented based on whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement "just knowing that skiers (or snowmobilers) are in the area bothers me." Respondents who agreed with the statement were placed in the interpersonal and social values conflict group; those who did not remained in the interpersonal conflict group. The study found that some respondents expressed both interpersonal and social values conflict for each of the problem behaviors. The revised interpersonal and social values conflict model was also applied in a study of perceived conflict with off-leash dogs (Vaske & Donnelly, 2007). This study found that a majority of respondents experienced both interpersonal and social values conflict with off-leash dogs and their owners and provided additional empirical evidence of the new conflict group.

More recently, measurements of interpersonal conflict and social values conflict were applied to recreationists at six beach

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