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OVERNIGHT PARK VISITOR CONSTRAINTS TO PARTICIPATION AND INTERESTS POTENTIALLY SERVED IN INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management

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by
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Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

Interpretive programs are offered by parks and public lands to inspire the visitors to further appreciate the heritage resources presented and protected within parks. These programs and services add an additional dimension to park visits, may increase enjoyment, provide visitors with a richer understanding of heritage resources, create opportunities to influence visitor behaviors in ways helpful to managers, and possibly provide motivations for visitors to extend their stay. Any potential desired outcome resulting from the strategic use of interpretative programs requires participants, and the broader the audience, the wider the influence. Consequently, a study of the variety of reasons that people are attentive or not to interpretive services could provide ways to modify programming in terms of publicizing, delivery, and content. Specifically, this study explored the types of constraints to attending interpretive (or ranger-led) programs to that visitors experience. Visitors who attended interpretive programming and those who do not were asked to describe their perceptions about the value of interpretive programming, the types of people who attend interpretive programming, how content is presented, and the topics of the programs. Qualitative interviews and demographic surveys were conducted with 57 campers at three different developed campgrounds at state parks in the southern Appalachian Mountains. Using a pragmatic approach, the themes that developed included the role of unstructured time, information availability, lifestages, environmental issues programming, and competing activities. Through increased awareness of constraints to participation, interpreters should be able to troubleshoot existing programs, schedule programs at optimal times and locations, and

publicize programs more effectively. Through this process, interpreters could increase their ability to meet park management objectives.

Keywords: interpretation, constraints, campgrounds, delivery style, environmental issues, publicity

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OVERNIGHT PARK VISITOR CONSTRAINTS TO PARTICIPATION AND INTERESTS POTENTIALLY SERVED IN INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

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Introduction

State, local, and national parks serve society in a variety of different ways. Parks serve several important roles ranging from being a source of national, regional, or local pride to ecosystem services. Parks are places where cultural, historic, and natural resources can be enjoyed and conserved or even enhanced for their current and future values. An overarching purpose of interpretive services being offered in parks and public lands is to strengthen and enrich affective and cognitive relationships between people and park resources.

Parks provide ecosystem services, which are often taken for granted (Daily, 1997). These services include "purification of air and water, mitigation of floods and droughts, detoxification and decomposition of wastes, generation and renewal of soil and soil fertility, and pollination of crops and natural vegetation" to name a few (Daily, 1997, p. 1). Without these services, humanity would be unable to sustain itself.

Individuals benefit from the existence of parks in other ways, including opportunities to improve health and to relieve stress. As "lack of physical activity has become a significant health issue in the U.S." (Floyd, Spengler, Maddock, Gobster, & Suau, 2008, p. 361), increasing physical activity has become a priority. Communities need "access to safe and convenient community open spaces and facilities" in order to increase physical activity through recreation (Floyd et al., 2008, p. 361). Excessive stress has been linked to fatal diseases, including cancer and heart disease (Hansmann, Hug, & Seeland, 2007, p. 213). When choosing a place to recover from stress, "people tend to favour green spaces like nature reserves, woodlands," and parks (Hansmann et al., 2007,

p. 213). Parks serve an important role in society as a place for people to relieve stress (Hansmann et al., 2007).

Park visitors also use parks for spiritual and restorative purposes. Some visitors may visit parks in order to feel closer to God or learn about their "spiritual heritage" (Klenosky, Frauman, Norman, & Gengler, 1998, p. 32). Furthermore, people are seeking recovery from mental fatigue during their leisure time (Hammitt, 2004). People can "find in nature something that comforts and restores" (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989, p. 175).

Parks exist for the greater good of society; however, the continued support for parks and public lands "relies heavily upon their abilities to broker positive relationships with local populations" (Stern, 2010, p. 174). One method to help ensure parks continue to be relevnt and garner broad based political support is to create emotional bonds between people and the parks. Interpreters are the front-line personnel providing opportunities for the public to further their understanding of the importance of the park and deepen their enjoyment of heritage resources. Interpreters strive to provoke park visitors to appreciate park resources (Tilden, 2007). Currently, most interactions between interpreters and park visitors happen during park programs. Unfortunately, less than 20% of park visitors will attend an interpretive program during their visit to a park (Knapp, 2007). These low participation rates are a function of many things, but when visitors do not attend interpretive programs when they easily could, important opportunities are missed.

Participation in park programs may be low for a number of reasons, including scheduling, the social dynamics of each group of visitors, and the inherent interests of the

visitor. Park programs should be scheduled when the greatest number of participants has the freedom to attend (Kraus & Curtis, 2000). When parks fail to consider the the visitors, the agency creates barriers to participation (Crompton & Lamb, 1986). Visitors arrive in groups, negotiate interests among themselves, and determine which activities the group will participate (Falk, 2009); some individual desires may not be fulfilled. Interpretation is a form of free-choice learning, a leisure activity (Falk, 2009). No member of the public is required to visit a park or attend an interpretive program.

These considerations suggest that constraints to leisure conceptual model (Jackson, 2005) may be useful in designing and scheduling programs. As participating in interpretative services is a form of leisure, constraints to participation may work against visitors attending interpretive programming. Jackson (2000) defines constraints as "factors that are assumed by researchers and/or perceived or experience by individuals to limit the formation of leisure preference and/or inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure" (p. 62). By using the "constraints to leisure" model as an analysis tool, reasons for not participating in interpretive programs can be systematically identified. Interpreters must understand the constraints experienced by park visitors in order to reduce those constraints. By reducing constraints, interpreters may increase attendance at interpretive programs, broadening the audience who receives interpretive messages about the importance of parks.

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of constraints to attending interpretive programs experienced by visitors staying in a campground where

interpretive programs are currently offered and to develop strategies that may reduce these constraints.

Literature Review

The Purpose of Interpretation

The National Association for Interpretation defines interpretation as "a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audiences and the meanings inherent in the resource" (Brochu & Merriman, 2008, p. 16). Veverka (1997) has argued that "interpretation is the most powerful and effective communication process any agency has available to it for communicating any message to its publics" (p. 9). Since visitors freely choose to participate in interpretive programs, outcomes from these experiences may be particularly potent and meaningful. Through interpretive programs, park users are engaged in experiencing the reason that a particular park exists and why the park is worth preserving in a way that is meaningful to them.

Interpretation serves many functions in maintaining and preserving parks. Parks exist, in part, to protect natural, cultural, and historic resources. Through interpretation, visitors enrich their understanding of that individual park; furthermore, "people respect the things they appreciate" (Pepi, 1994, p. 1). Through social marketing, interpretation "can be applied to social concerns" (Atkinson & Mullins, 1998, p. 51). Specifically, interpretation can encourage "visitors to take a pro-active role in site/resource protection" (Veverka, 1997, p. 9). Seen through the lens of social marketing (Atkinson & Mullins, 1998), interpretation services the existing interests of the visitors and provokes visitors to

deeper appreciation of resources. Therefore, interpretation has a place in park management, but only if visitors come to interpretive programs.

Ham (2009) further examined the idea that interpretation can be used to meet park management goals by providing a framework describing how interpretation can motivate protection by visitors. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction or academic teaching; the goal is provocation. Gaining understanding can be defined as developing a "personal set of facts that wouldn't necessarily be included in a factual-recall evaluation" (Ham, 2009, p. 52). Through interpretation, a person is provoked to think (Tilden, 2007). The first step toward protection is accomplished through the provocation of thought and internal dialogue. After this new understanding is reached, appreciation may deepen. After a person has established positive personal meanings associated with the park or natural area being interpreted, it follows that the audience's attitude toward the natural area will be positive. Once people have an appreciation for something, Freeman Tilden "reasoned simply that people would not knowingly harm the things they care about" (Ham, 2009, p. 53). However, this protection functions on a very general level and may not apply to specific behaviors. In order for management to accomplish goals about specific behaviors, "we must succeed in influencing those people's beliefs about that specific behavior…if their beliefs about engaging in the behavior are predominantly positive, it will lead them to have a positive (appreciative) attitude about the behavior, which in turn increases the likelihood that they will behave as we want" (Ham, 2009, p. 54). Through enriched understanding comes a change in attitude toward the natural area, and protective behaviors or intentions may follow.

A study conducted by Absher and Graefe (1997) investigated the difference in motives for visiting a park between park visitors who chose to attend interpretive programs and those who do not attend. The study found that individuals who do not attend interpretive programs scored higher on the escapist item than those visitors who attend interpretive programs. Additionally, a motive classified as "nature/learning" was higher for the group who does attend interpretive programs (Absher & Graefe, 1997, p. 56). These findings suggest that those individuals who want interpretive programming will seek it out. In order to increase the possibility of meeting management goals, interpreters need to diversify their audience. Through reducing constraints, interpreters may be able to attract those visitors who are less motivated to attend interpretive programming.

Constraints to Leisure

The goal of constraints to leisure research is to "investigate factors that are assumed by researchers and/or perceived or experienced by individuals to limit the formation of leisure preferences and/or to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure" (Jackson, 2000, p. 62). However, constraints can be overcome or negotiated around (Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993).

Constraints are classified into three types: intrapersonal constraints, interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). Intrapersonal constraints "involve individual psychological states and attributes which interact with leisure preference rather than intervening between preference and participation" (Crawford & Godbey 1987, p. 122). Examples of intrapersonal constraints include

depression, stress, and religious orientation. Interpersonal constraints are the effect of relationships between individuals and the characteristics of those individuals (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). Examples of interpersonal constraints include not having a leisure partner or leisure partners not wanting to do the same activities. Structural constraints are those "that intervene between preferences and participation" (Jackson, 2005, p. 3); examples would include availability of time, the opportunity to participate, and the financial resources required to participate (Raymore, Godbey, & Crawford, 1994). As older adults age, decline in health could be a structural constraint (McGuire & Norman, 2005). Later, the term "antecedent constraints" appeared in the literature, being defined as to "negatively affect leisure preferences rather than participation" (Jackson, 1990, p. 56). The intrapersonal constraints category is similar to antecedent constraints.

Furthermore, these constraints are described as being experienced by an individual in a specific order. A would-be participant first encounters intrapersonal constraints; only after these constraints have been negotiated does the would-be participant move on to interpersonal constraints. The last constraints encountered are structural constraints (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991). The results of a study performed by Raymore, Godbey, Crawford, and von Eye (1993) confirms the "notion that intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constrains form three distinct classes…[and] these three types of constraints occur in a hierarchy" (p. 110). However, the question of whether constraints are experienced linearly may not be of practical significance when designing or troubleshooting interpretive program offerings.

In order for the would-be participant to ascend through the constraints hierarchy, the previous category of constraints must either be absent or overcome. At this point in the literature, the definitions for barriers and constraints diverged. Barriers are now classified as insurmountable obstacles, where if an individual encounters a barrier, the result was non-participation. Conversely, constraints have varying intensities, which participants can "negotiate through…and thus succeed in initiating or continuing leisure participation" (Jackson et al., 1993, p. 2). Although the result of a constraint may be non-participation, "this may be only one of many outcomes that are possible; people may instead modify their behavior to maintain a pattern of sustained involvement" (Scott, 1991, p. 323). This assertion is supported in a study by Kay and Jackson (1991), which found that "individuals experienced constraint while continuing to participate in the activities to which the constraint applied…there appears to be only a small proportion of cases in which constraints completely exclude participation" (p. 310). Furthermore, Shaw, Bonen, McCabe (1991) found that "the evidence suggests that the more frequent reporting of at least some perceived constraints is associated with higher rather than lower participation" (p. 297). This finding is not well explained, but may be due to the concept that "individuals may have to participate in an activity before they can recognize all of the constraints related to the activity" (Raymore et al., 1994, p. 101). However, individuals experience different constraints at different intensities at different times during leisure, so no generalization concerning a single or even similar set of constraints can be made (Jackson, 1993).

The constraints framework (Crawford et al., 1991) has been criticized because, "if activity participation is not the primary goal that directs people's choices about leisure, models which attempt to explain activity participation might be misguided" (Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997, p. 444). Also, the hierarchy presented by Crawford and Godbey (1987) is not absolute; interpersonal relationships could facilitate leisure despite "unresolved personal constraint" (Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997, p. 447). Also, the label of constraint appears to be self-perpetuating. During interviews, individuals rarely used a term similar to "constraints" when they spoke of the "the factors that influenced their leisure choices…To label these situations as constraint negotiation imposes a term and framework that does not seem to fit the reality" of what the interviewees experienced (Samdahl & Jekuvoich, 1997, p. 446). However, the "hierarchical leisure constraints model" was confirmed to be applicable across cultures (Walker, Jackson, & Deng, 2007).

Constraints to Leisure and the Experience Economy

The practitioner's goal is to facilitate participation in recreation and leisure. The general assumption has been that intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints are outside the sphere of influence of practitioners (Searle & Jackson, 1985). However, antecedent constraints may not be beyond the influence of practitioners. A visitor who is unaware of opportunities is not genuinely uninterested in those opportunities, but instead is experiencing an intrapersonal constraint (Raymore et al., 1994). "Intrapersonal constraints create a lack of awareness through selective attention. An individual would be unlikely to synthesize information of interest in an activity due to intrapersonal constraints, they may be less likely to attend to information regarding that activity"

(Raymore et al., 1994, p. 115). Practitioners have alternatives to reducing or eliminating this lack of awareness, notably, “a thorough review of the promotion and publicity used” (Searle & Jackson, 1985, p. 245).

As practitioners evaluate the marketing and promotion strategies they employ, knowledge of the current state of the service sector is crucial. The United States has shifted into what has been dubbed an “experience economy,” which “is the latest state of an evolution aimed at extracting as much value from the market as possible” (Lorentzen, 2009, p. 830); although experiences have traditionally be considered a subcategory of services, “experiences are a distinct economic offering, as different from services as services are from goods” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 98). Society has progressed to “want products, communications, and campaigns to deliver an experience” (Schmitt, 1999, p. 22). People are now purchasing experiences, such as Disney World; “experiential purchases are those made with the primary intention of acquiring a life experience: an event or a series of events that one lives through” (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003, p. 1194). Although the argument can be made that parks and Disney are different experiences, “visitors are making the choice to visit us instead of another venue, a venue that may be for profit” (Weaver, 2007, p. 15). Furthermore, “the nonprofit world is not immune to competition; getting and holding an audience is critical to a museum, park or zoo’s financial health” (Weaver, 2007, p. 9).

Tilden’s (2007) principles of interpretation nest nicely within the experience economy, as the primary goal of interpretation in provocation, which produces an engaging experience between the visitor and the heritage resource. In order for

interpreters to capture some of this audience who seeks these pleasurable experiences, interpreters need "a greater understanding of our clientele" (Atkinson & Mullins, 1998, p. 52). Interpreters need to focus on increasing "audience analysis so the programs we develop for our audience will be well received and rewarding to our clientele, will fulfill management goals, and will provide for greater ecosystem restoration and protection" (Atkinson & Mullins, 1998, p. 52).

In order for interpreters to increase attendance at their campground interpretive programs, research must be conducted on the constraints to participation experienced by campers, so marketing and promotion strategies may be adjusted in an attempt to overcome or compensate for those constraints. This study attempts to identify these constraints using qualitative analysis.

Methods

This applied mixed methods study was aimed at developing strategies to improve attendance at interpretive programs at three separate sites in the same region of the United States. Data collection was encapsulated, where the qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time (Henderson, Ainsworth, Stolarkzcyk, Hootman, & Levin, 1999). The paradigm of inquiry for this study is pragmatic, which is "outcome-oriented" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 16). Data were collected using a short demographic survey and semi-structured interviews. The interview structure drew upon Seidman's (1998) phenomenological interview structure, which includes three distinct sections pertaining to the life history of the participant, the "details of experience," and reflection on the meaning" of the experience (p. 12).

This approach was used because the researcher was interested in camper decisions to attend or not attend an interpretive program. Additionally, an understanding of the motivations for these decisions was important in informing a practice that is responsive to visitors' interests. Using semi-structured interviews provided a balance of effectiveness and efficiency to revealing motivations of campers. Furthermore, this straightforward method can be used by interpreters to better understand the desires of park visitors.

Site Descriptions

Three Georgia State Parks were selected for sites of data collection. All three parks have had seasonal interpreters working the summers for over five years. The first, Vogel State Park is a 233 acre area located in the North Georgia mountains near Blairsville. Its 22 acre lake has a swimming beach, rental pedal boats, and fishing within walking distance of the campground. The park has 103 regular and 18 walk-in campsites. A stream runs the length of the campground, abutting some of the campsites. Other facilities include 17 miles of trails, miniature golf, and playgrounds. The overall atmosphere of this park is relaxed and family oriented.

Black Rock Mountain State Park is located in the North Georgia mountains in Mountain City. This mountain-top park contains 1,743 acres and 44 campsites with cable television hook ups. The 17 acre lake allows electric motor boats, fishing, and swimming; however, the lake is not within walking distance of the campground. The 11 miles of hiking trails inside the park provide access to spectacular scenic views. The overall atmosphere of this park is relaxed and slow-paced.

Tugaloo State Park is located just north of Lavonia, Georgia on a peninsula in Lake Hartwell. The park contains 393 acres and 105 campsites with cable television hook ups. Some campsites are waterfront sites, and campers can moor their boats immediately adjacent to their sites. Activities include swimming, tubing, water skiing, sailing, fishing, miniature golf, canoe rentals, and 4 miles of hiking trails. The overall atmosphere of this park is busy and energetic.

Data Collection

Data were collected in campgrounds in three Georgia State Parks (Tugaloo, Vogel, and Black Rock Mountain). These parks offer interpretive programs for visitors. Data collection took place between June 5, 2010 and August 6, 2010. Interviews were solicited from visitors staying in the campground on varied days and at various times in an effort to capture variation in the campground population.

During the course of the study, 57 interviews were conducted, which was based on data saturation. Saturation is reached once new information is no longer added. Drawing on phenomenology, 25 interviews may be required to reach saturation (Creswell, 2007). Due to the three sites, this study required more interviews to reach saturation.

The unit of analysis was the group of people staying at the same campsite. The interviewer asked to speak with a responsible adult; however, comments and opinions from others within the group were not excluded. No questions were directed to anyone under the age of 18.

The interviewer approached the campsite and asked if the adults would be willing to help the park by being interviewed about their opinions concerning the programs that the park provides. If the participant was concerned about time, the interviewer asked what time the participant would prefer to talk to the interviewer, and the interviewer returned at that time when possible.

The response rate for the interviews was 98%, which constituted one refusal. The average interview lasted 16 minutes. Although a total of 57 interviews were conducted, only 56 were analyzed due to a language barrier in one interview. Of the 56 groups of campers interviewed, 51 groups identified themselves as users of park programming, which is a user rate of 91%. Participants were asked if they had ever attended an interpretive program; those who answered yes were considered users. The majority of the groups interviewed were immediate family (55.8%) followed by family and friends (21.2%) and extended family (19.2%). The remaining groups came as individuals (1.9%) or groups of friends (1.9%).

Survey Instrument

The interview script (Appendix B) included a short, quantitative questionnaire and a semi-structured qualitative interview conducted by the researcher. The delivery style questions ranged from interpreter driven to audience driven, meaning the energy and momentum of the experience was produced and controlled by the participants. Specifically, the social hour was entirely audience driven, as the park's only role was to bring together visitors with similar interests to socialize. The interpreter was only present

as a facilitator and host; as the campers discussed their common interest, the interpreter was present to answer questions and clarify factual information.

The qualitative interview included a technique known as laddering. The means-end analytic approach uses laddering to uncover the personal values provided to the consumer by consuming a particular product (Klenosky, Gengler, & Mulvey, 1993). The laddering technique has been used successfully in the past to uncover the attributes, benefits, and values of interpretive services at South Carolina State Parks (Klenosky et al., 1998). Laddering uses a series of questions where the importance of the previous answer is questioned, which revealed how the individual values the park. However, during the first several interviews, it became apparent that the laddering questions were ill-suited for this study. Participants were not able to communicate the value of interpretive programming through this question and answer technique because the value of the programs were rarely integral to their camping experience. The laddering questions were removed from the interview protocol after the first 10 interviews.

Open-ended questions were directed towards uncovering possible constraints to participation in interpretive programs. Should the participant have trouble revealing relevant interests, the interviewer then employed to the laddering technique to help reveal relevant interests. The demographic survey included questions that were meant to characterize the group in terms of life stage, composition, and previous experiences with interpretation.

Data Management

Interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder then transcribed verbatim. These digital files were saved on both the researcher's laptop hard-drive and an external hard-drive. The digital audio files were saved on the external hard-drive for data verification and reporting purposes. Digital documents were kept in an organized folder tree, which were duplicated on the external hard-drive and then backed-up. The transcriptions were uploaded into Nvivo8 for coding analysis, and the Nvivo8 file was backed-up in the same manner as the digital audio files.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involved reading interview transcripts and coding. Drawing on phenomenology, transcripts were broken down to significant statements, and those significant statements were coded (Moustakas, 1994). The coding process drew upon Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes "defining clear categories (codes)" and "organizing these [codes] into a more or less explicit structure" (p. 45). Codes included researcher generated or *a priori* (Creswell, 2007) codes and open coding. The *a priori* codes, created before coding began, included leisure constraints, visitor interests, and actionable strategies for improvement. Open coding allowed the researcher to identify unexpected themes or values (Creswell, 2007). Themes were built by combining relevant codes, both a priori and open, by "blending inferences drawn directly from the displayed data" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p131). A complete list of codes can be found in Appendix C.

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis happen simultaneously as the researcher is the research instrument (Creswell, 2007). During the course of conducting interviews, the researcher determined that the laddering question type, described above, was not suitable for the subject matter, and the laddering questions were removed from the interview instrument. After conducting approximately 30 interviews, the researcher needed additional clarification concerning how the participants valued the interpretive programs. A new question, “are park programs important to your trip?” was added to the interview instrument.

Not all the interviews were coded. After transcription, all the interviews were read to make sure relevant information could be found to answer the research questions of this study. Of the 57 interviews conducted, 17 were not coded due to factors such as the participant did not comprehend or answer the researcher’s interview questions, the responses to interview questions mostly “yes” and “no” answers, or the responses did not answer any of the research questions for this study.

As qualitative research is inseparable from its context (Creswell, 2007), the researcher used cumulative statements rather than generalizations to create strategies to relieve constraints to participating in interpretive programs. A cumulative statement answers the “what works in what situation for what type of visitor” question (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). These statements describe strategies for reducing constraints while maintaining the context of the situation.

Quantitative analysis was planned in the form of paired T-tests and chi-square using SPSS 18.0, comparing the groups that attended the interpretive programs with the

group that did not. Due to the high percentage of groups who identified themselves as users (91%), the aforementioned analysis were not run as these tests require a normal curve, and the curve for this data set is significantly skewed.

Reliability

In order to ensure reliability, the study employed a digital voice recorder, detailed notes taken during the interview, and adherence to an interview protocol. The interview questions were pilot tested to ensure the questions would elicit the desired information from the interview participants. The interview protocol form was designed to allow the needed flexibility to interview both campers who attend interpretive programs and those who do not attend.

Intercoder reliability was also employed on both selective and open coding. Intercoder reliability was required to reach 80% as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). Interviews were coded by the researcher and another person independently, and the results were compared. The percentage of agreement ranged from 53% to 70%. After discussing the discrepant codes, agreement reached between 81% and 90%. Some of the sources of disagreement were a miscommunication of the definition of a code, using a more general code rather than a more specific code, and simply missing an item that should have been coded.

Validity

In order to ensure validity, the study employed bracketing, memoing, debriefing, and triangulation. The researcher clarified her biases using the bracketing technique, where the “researcher sets aside, as humanly as possible, all preconceived experiences to

best understand the experiences of the participants in the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 235). The researcher kept a personal journal where she will purposefully explore and record her expectations and biases. This journal will be used to identify any interpretation that might be influenced by the researcher's expectations and biases.

During the data analysis stage, the researcher maintained a notebook that contains the evolving conclusions about the data and possible themes, "writing down ideas about… emerging categories or some aspects of the connection of the categories" (Creswell, 2007, p. 239). A field notebook was kept by the researcher for the duration of the study.

Debriefing occurred between the researcher and a debriefer; through these detailed discussions, the debriefer asked "difficult questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). The researcher kept a written account of these debriefings.

Results

Interview Results

An analysis of all codes and text created five themes. These themes represent some variety of constraint to participating in interpretive programming while staying at a developed campground.

1. <u>Environmental issues reveal an audience divide.</u>

Interpretation is a mission based communication process, and often the mission of parks includes the preservation or conservation of natural resources. It follows them that interpretation may include discussing environmental issues in the park. Some interpreters

may choose to discuss environmental issues on a global scale. Campers' receptivity to environmental issues programming generally fell into four categories: those who were unreservedly supportive, those who required a park-relevant component, those who required a park relevant component and a personal method of mitigation, and those who were against it.

The participants that were unreservedly supportive of environmental issues programming typically considered very appropriate for park programs, even if that environmental issue was not directly related to the park:

> I think the State Park system ought to be the leader in environmental education, or a leader. People have to understand that it's one big ecosystem. We need to take the lessons home, and my philosophy of adult learning is adults are smart. They can make connections. (Respondent 18)

Furthermore, several participants expressed the importance of educating the next generation concerning environmental conservation and stewardship:

> I still think it's alright because I think they [the kids] should learn. I work at a camp, so they do a lot of environmental things and stuff like that. I think it's all important. (Respondent 17)

Overall, this group of participants was receptive to all environmental issues programming, despite any political implications.

The second group of participants was supportive of environmental issues programming on the condition that the environmental issue being discussed was observable within the park; "If you can actually see it, touch it, have something to look at

that's relevant, I think that's good" (Respondent 43). The environmental issues were not to be a reminder of the world beyond the park, as these participants were on their vacations and were escaping from the stress of the home and workplace; "I want to do something that's related to my camping trip. I don't want to be sold something not part of my camping trip" (Respondent 2). Some of these participants were campers who had been coming to the same park for many years, care deeply for a specific park, and wanted to know when something was threatening the park.

While similar to the second group, the third group imposed an additional restriction on environmental issues programming, in that the environmental issue had to be observable within the park and the issue had to be solvable by the campers before it was acceptable program content. In one interview, the husband provided a very concrete example to explain his position:

> Now, if we got hemlocks everywhere and they're all dying, and it's our fault, we need to know. If it's parasites, then it's kind of like the DNR's problem and the state's problem to fix and find to kill the parasite, personally…I'd be glad to help. If it was something, come out on Saturday and spray for bugs. Yeah, I'd be glad to help. I'll bring my bug sprayer. (Respondent 3)

The wife in the same interview gave a more generalized idea of what her husband was attempting to express; "if he [the ranger] would include a way for us to help. And I don't mind him giving us an update" (Respondent 3).This group further emphasized that they were on their vacations and did not want to hear about problems that they were unable to help solve; "if I can't help you do anything for it, to be aware of it, just makes it

another burden that I'm like 'wow, that is just terrible, but there's nothing I can do for you'" (Respondent 15). Similar to the second group, this group was typically characterized by returning campers who had come to care deeply for the park and wanted to maintain the park in the condition it was in when they first starting camping there. These individuals are willing to work to protect a place they love.

The final group was completely opposed to any type of environmental issues programming on the basis that they did not want to listen to environmental issues on their vacations. "No. We come here to get away from that stuff. We don't want to talk about it" (Respondent 10). This group was very focused in their ability to escape and relax during their leisure time and did not believe that their vacation was an appropriate time to discuss environmental issues.

2. Camping means unstructured time.

Some overnight park visitors explained that their purpose for camping was to experience relaxation and a lack of structure. Making the effort to attend a formal interpretive program, which takes place at a certain time at a certain place, would be to impose structure on their purposefully unstructured time. When asked about why she comes camping, one participant concluded her response with:

> And no organization. My life is full of organization, so I just like the flexibility and you know, just being able to relax…As far as an organized program, or whatever, I honestly would not be interested in that. (Respondent 1)

Some campers take what seem to be extreme measures to remove structure from their campground experiences, such as this camper who put away his watch for his camping

trip; “but I don’t even know what time is. I forget time when I go camping” (Respondent 31). The goal for these campers is to be impulsive and spontaneous, which necessitates the freedom not to plan and not to make commitments.

3. Interpretive programs should not compete with the main attraction at the park.

This theme concerns why visitors come to certain parks. As interpretive programs are not what draw overnight visitors to campgrounds, there is another attraction that is more important than programs. Each park has a different attraction for campers. At Tugaloo State Park, campers came to use their boats and swim, especially in the hot summer afternoons. These activities prevent attendance at afternoon interpretive programs. “The ones they had at 10 am seems like a good time. The ones at four in the afternoon, that time is like absolutely no way” (Respondent 15). When planning interpretive programs, staff persons must consider the motivation for overnight visitors at their park and work around that motivation if they hope to entice a broad cross section of visitors to participate in interpretive programming.

4. Campers do not have equal access to program information.

When advertising interpretive programs, staff persons attempt to be both effective and efficient by placing a few programs in locations that are heavily used, such as the bathhouse in the campground. However, some overnight visitors have all the facilities they need within their campers and do not visit the bathhouse. “We like to take our own bed where we go. We don’t like to sleep in motels. We like to use our own bathrooms” (Respondent 50). This segment of the overnight visitor population may remain uninformed about park programs due to their lack of use of the bathhouse.

Another bias in traditional program schedule distribution is when visitor centers will place the schedules on a counter or in a pamphlet holder and expect the campers to retrieve a schedule if they are interested in the programs. While many returning campers were perfectly satisfied with this arrangement, new visitors were unable to find the program information. A majority of the overnight park visitors had the same suggestion about publicizing park programs; "handing it to you without being asked would be helpful" (Respondent 17). Park staff needs to consider multiple avenues of advertising and publicity to create the best chance to reach the most people park visitors.

5. Lifestage affects participation.

The daily schedule and habits of toddlers, teenagers, and senior citizens vary. Interpreters must take into account these differences when planning programs. One grandfather was asked if the mid-afternoon would be a good time to have a program for his grandchildren, who were toddlers. He said that after lunch the children would "nap two hours almost" (Respondent 2). When asked for a better time, his wife said that "four o'clock, after their nap" (Respondent 2) would be a better time to have a program for the young children. Conversely, when a mother of two teenagers was asked if she would attend an afternoon program, she said, "if there's anything at that would be more for the kids. That would be like, 'go.' We would send the kids off to something like that" (Respondent 19). When planning programs, interpreters need to consider how the lifestage of the visitors might impact the times that a particular group is available for a program.

Survey Results

Interest in interpretive programs is partly a function of delivery style, and delivery may be interesting enough to entice visitors to attend the interpretive program. Participants were asked to rank their interest in five different program delivery types from one to four with one meaning awful and four being excellent. The mean scores, from highest to lowest, for each delivery type are: hands-on activity = 3.60, demonstration = 3.45, interpretive talk = 2.95, social hour 2.84, and question hour 2.63.

The ratings for the program delivery types can be used as strategies to relieve structural constraints. While parents did not want to bring children to an interpretive talk because of the attention span of children, a hands-on activity on the same topic was an acceptable method to relieve this constraint. Similarly, parents were hesitant to rank the social hour very high due to their concern about the supervision and entertainment of their children. One father suggested that showing a G-rated film in the nature center at the same time as the social hour would free parents to socialize while the children were entertained watching the movie. If the participants were asked to repeat the ratings exercise with this change to the social-hour delivery type, it is possible that the preference rating could be higher.

Discussion

The themes above demonstrate the role of constraints in preventing participation in interpretive programming. Practitioners can employ different strategies for assisting park visitors in negotiating these constraints.

Implications for Practice

The "environmental issues reveal an audience divide" theme demonstrates how intrapersonal constraints can prevent some individuals from attending interpretive programs. Interpreters need to consider carefully if and how they will present environmental issues during their programming. The four distinct groups show that some park visitors do want to see environmental issues programming and interpretation; however, due to the fourth group's aversion to anything concerning environmental issues, environmental issues interpretation must not be hidden inside other programming. Also, interpreters may find that being very open about when environmental issues will be discussed may draw an audience who wants to see that type of programming. Providing a program that is dedicated to the discussion of environmental issues may open the door for visitor participation on a greater scale than during traditional interpretive talks. Environmental issues are particularly salient to visitors when they are also park management issues. If the solution to the park management issue lies in the hands of park visitors, then interpreters can both provoke visitors to consider the environmental issue while at the same time reducing the problem through increased visitor involvement and volunteerism.

For those overnight park visitors for whom camping means unstructured time, interpreters can engage this group by changing the structure of the interpretation. These visitors want to be impulsive about the activities they participate in, and formal interpretive programming does not allow this type of spontaneity. Engaging this group may be best accomplished through the use of roving interpretation, which is defined as

"impromptu communication by an interpreter as he/she walks through an area encountering different people" (Ham, 1992, p. 165). The use of roving interpretation is an emerging issue within the interpretive community, as this technique has been underutilized due to the "difficulty of the approach" (Knapp, 2007, p. 75). As less than 20% of park visitors will attend an interpretive program, roving interpretation is critical for expanding the park's message to more of the park visitors (Knapp, 2007). This unstructured and spontaneous interaction with a park interpreter provides services that these campers are missing by not attending the formal interpretive programs. Additionally, campers are able to ask questions and structure the interactions with the interpreter around their existing interests.

The theme "interpretive programs should not compete with the main attraction at the park" essentially means do not create structural constraints to participation in interpretive programs by holding programs during times when visitors are likely to have other goals or plans. Practitioners must carefully consider the time, location, delivery, and publicity of every interpretive program to ensure that the visitors have as few barriers as possible that are being created by the park. For example, at Tugaloo State Park where the majority of campers are at the park to play in the lake during hot summer afternoons, placing a park program at 2 pm at the Nature Hut would structurally constrain the camper because they must now choose between the main reason they came to the park – being the lake – and whatever topic the interpreter is presenting. Interpretive programs cannot compete with the major attraction at a park. In order to bolster attendance, programs need

to be at convenient times that are not competing with meals or other major activities at the park.

If campers do not have equal access to information about programs, opportunities to participate will be missed. When posting flyers, park staff needs to consider the locations that people naturally stop and stand, which does not include the bathhouse door. It does, however, include the spaces between the mirrors when people stop to wash their hands and on the insides of stall doors. Furthermore, a very effective way to reach as many people as possible is to give the program schedule to every camper that checks into the campground, unless they explicitly say that they do not want a schedule. Often, many campers do not know that programs are offered and will not request a schedule. However, check-in may not be the appropriate time to discuss the schedule with the camper.

Considering the lifestage of the target audience for a program is crucial to ensuring the visitors do not encounter the structural constraint of timing. Young children tend to nap in the afternoon, after eating lunch. This population will be excluding from a mid-afternoon program because of the napping. However, the mid-afternoon is an optimal time to attract older children, approximately eight years old through teenagers, for more advanced programming that the toddlers would be unable to participate in effectively. Although no data emerged to confirm it, the researcher suspects that senior citizens would enjoy an early morning program, as this population tends to be awake early in the morning.

The preference ratings for delivery styles also show that park visitors want to see demonstrations and engage in activities, which is consistent with the Ross, Norman, and

Dorsch (2003) findings about desired features of a visitor center. In order to provide more active programming, park interpreters need to be able to demonstrate and lead mission-relevant activities. This finding has implications particularly for the training of interpreters. Universities and other agencies training interpreters may need to shift focus onto more hands-on skills to complement didactic approaches. Also, agencies that employ interpreters may need to reallocate funds for interpreters to attend workshops to learn skills rather than conferences that focus on intellectual content.

These strategies may be employed to increase awareness of interpretive programs, access to information, and potentially increase attendance at interpretive programs. Outcomes of the strategies employed should be evaluated to determine their effectiveness at the specific park and adjusted for maximum effectiveness.

Limitations

The limitations of this study concern the limited scope of the study and the varied experiences of the participants. Data were collected at three mountain parks without any iconic elements. Also, data were collected during the summer months on certain days because those days were the only days the researcher was free to do the work. Participants self-reported their varied experiences, and social desirability bias could have influenced the participants' responses to interview questions.

Conclusion

Continued support by the public for parks is likely enhanced by visitor participation in interpretive programs. The constraints to leisure model was used as a conceptual framework for interviewing overnight park visitors who stayed at a developed

campground. This study validates, at a pragmatic level, the three forms of constraints to leisure and provides insights into visitor behavior in campgrounds set in the north Georgia mountains. Furthermore, this study could be used to create an evidence-aware practice. Extrapolations from this study to other settings could provide some insights for program scheduling and design. This straightforward method may prove to be a useful orientation tool for novice interpreters to listen to and consider the desires of visitors. A wide variety of literature concerning publicizing and creating interest that evolves into action is available for interpreters to create new strategies at their parks. Researchers need to repeat this study in other settings, including beach and iconic parks, and with populations who are not staying in campgrounds.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Script

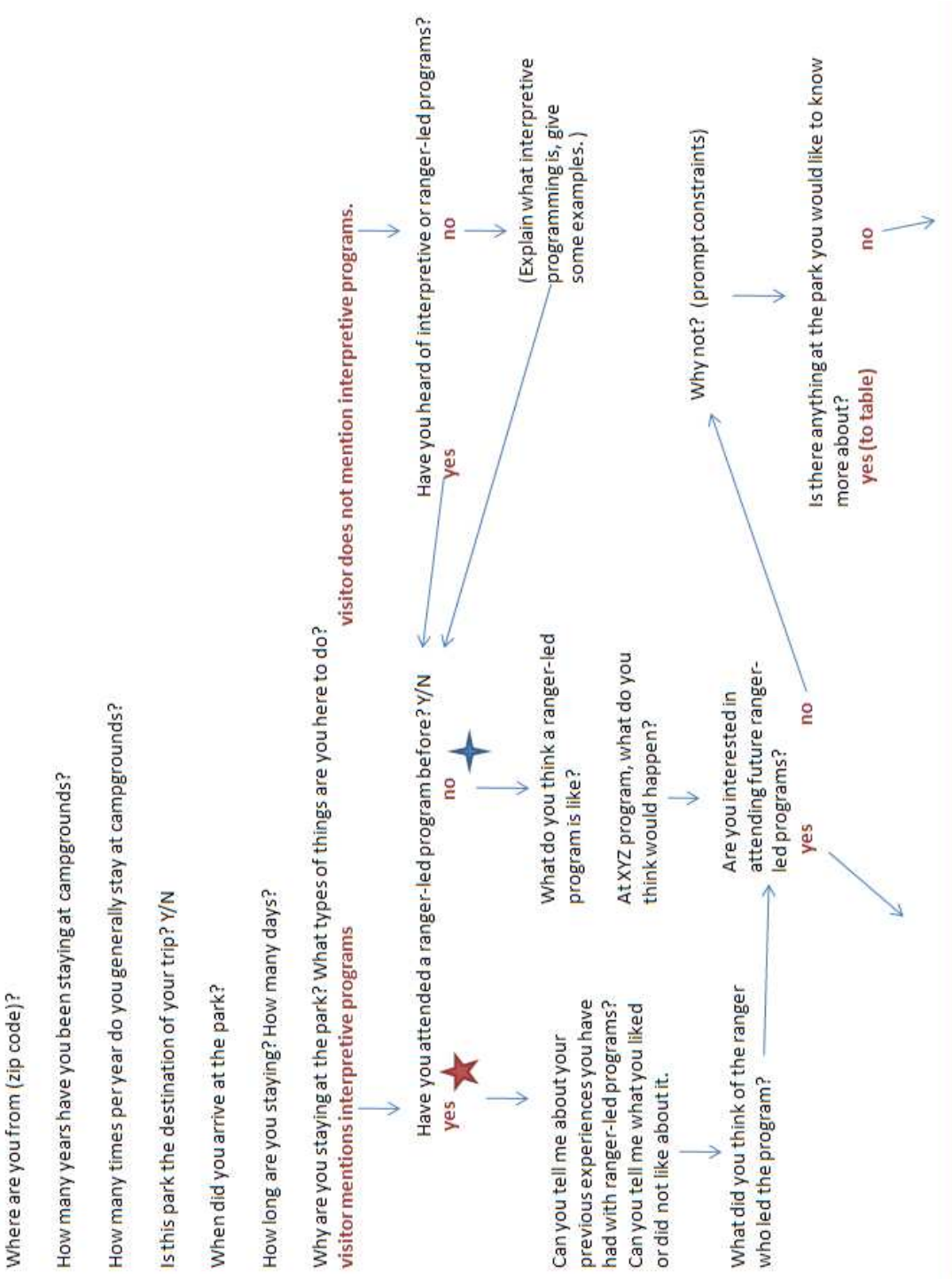
"Hi, my name is Jessica, I'm a park management researcher from Clemson University and I was hoping to get a few minutes of your time. I'm doing a research project for Georgia State Parks to help them answer questions about services they provide visitors, your participation is completely voluntary but would be very helpful to the state parks and the families and friends who visit here. I have some interview questions that should take us about twenty minutes to complete. The parks would really appreciate your help."

(If visitor does not have time) "If now is not a good time, when would you like me to come back? I'm at the park until 1:00pm today."

"To make this interview go quickly, may I record this interview? This means I don't have to take many notes, which really slows down this process. I will delete the file after I have taken notes from the recording."

Appendix B

Interview Script



Are you interested in attending future ranger-led programs?

yes

What could park staff do to make it easier for you to come to programs?

What types of things might keep you from going to a program?

How might you get around some of these things? (use a specific example provided by the participant)

Is there anything at the park you would like to know more about?

no

Why do you come to the park?
(ladder, find attribute or topic)

If there program was a program about (topic), would you go?

If there was a program that did (attribute) would you go?

What type of program would you like? (please rate these from 1 meaning "awful, I would never go" to 4 being "That sounds great!"

A program where you sit and a ranger talks and the ranger might have some interesting things to look at	1	2	3	4
A demonstration where the ranger shows you how to do something or how something was done (cordage, shingles)	1	2	3	4
A hands-on activity where you get to do the activity (make cordage, shingles)	1	2	3	4
A set time where the ranger is "in" and available to answer your questions at the nature center	1	2	3	4
A drop-in social event centered around a topic, and other people interested in that topic would attend (Tea and Trout)	1	2	3	4

Are park programs important to your trip?

When you went to the ranger-led program, what types of people were there?

Since you have never been to a program offered by the park, please guess as to what sorts of people you believe go to these programs.

Some park rangers talk about environmental issues during their programs. Do you think this is appropriate? (Why or why not?)
(examples: people not carpooling or taking mass transit vs. the mass die off of the hemlock trees)

Appendix B (con't)

If there was an "ask the ranger a question" time when the ranger would walk through the campground, would you occasionally have a question for the ranger?

What would your ideal program look like?

If you were to go (even if you are not interested right now), what times would you prefer ranger-led programs to happen in this campground?

Where would you like information to be available about the times and topics of ranger-led programs in this campground?
Is this information easy to find and convenient?

Who is included in your group?
- Immediate family
- Just friends
- Family and friends
- Immediate and extended family

How many children with you are:
0-5 years? _____ 6-10 years? _____ 11-14 years? _____ 15-18 years? _____

Appendix C

All Codes and Definitions

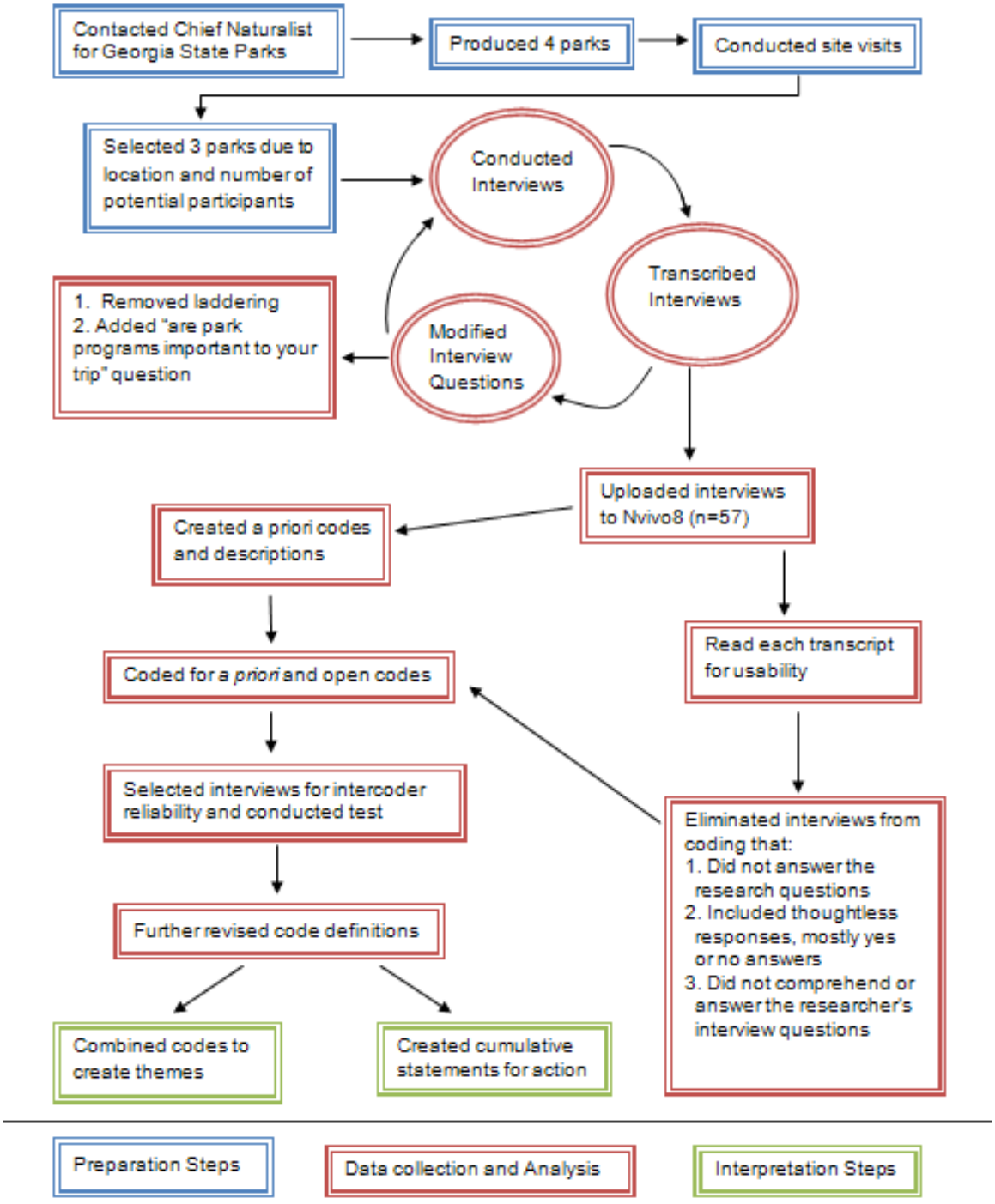
Code	Description
Adult Programs	These are programs that adults find interesting. These could also be ideas for new programs that are meant for adults
Environmental Issues	Responses to the "are environmental issues appropriate to talk about in a park" question of the interview. This code looks for the real opinion of the participant. Also includes the "criteria" for making an environmental issue appropriate to talk about (ie, must be a local issue, must be visible, participants must be able to do something about it)
Favorite Programs	The programs that are currently offered that people really enjoy
Improve program attendance	Suggestions for how to get more people to attend programs
Interp is for Kids	Statements that show that people believe children are the target audience for interpretation. Includes "I take my kids to those," "educate children," "children should learn" etc
Interpersonal constraint	The person might be interested in the program, but they will not go because either someone keeps them from going or they do not have anyone to go with them. Includes "if the grandchildren were here, I'd would take them." Also, dislike of crowds fits here
Intrapersonal contraint	The person does not show interest or is not motivated to go. Includes being too tired. May dislike having structure
Large group constraint	This occurs when a single family camps with a large group of other families, and they don't go to the programs
New Program	New ideas and topics generated by campers
Nonpersonal interp	Comments about reading the interpretive signage (bulletin boards) or literature (pamphlets) available in the visitor center.

Outside use of Interpretation	These individuals are motivated to attend interpretive programs or volunteer to use that knowledge in a different organization (Vacation Bible School) or use the time/activity as a requirement for a different organization (Scouts)
Park Improvements	General improvements for the park that would make the experience for these campers better. Comments most likely do not have any relation with park programs.
Park Praise	Comments about how campers love the park. These comments would be nice for park staff to hear.
Perceptions of Interpretation	Comments about what people expect to get out of interpretation or what they thing the purpose of interpretation is. Note: "interp is for kids" is a more specific code for that perception and should not be coded here. Value statements (nice to have, nice bonus) go into the "Value of interpretation" code
Perceptions of Rangers	Any statement about the friendliness or helpfulness of any park staff member or volunteer
Preserve what you enjoy	Statements about visitors taking care of the park or assisting in improvements because they like to visit.
Publicizing	Statements about getting the word out about interpretive programs, problems as well as suggestions.
Purpose of Camping	Explains why people come camping, what they hope to get out of it.
Reservations	Comments about making reservations for individual campsites

Roving Interpretation	Roving Interpretation is when the naturalist walks around and people can approach him or her to ask questions. There is no set time for a formal program, but people are still interacting with the interpreter. Comments about whether people like roving interp (never called that in the transcript) or not. Directly answers the "wandering naturalist" question.
Selective Attention	Instances where people see but do not read the program schedule
Structural Constraint	Some condition that prevents a person that is interested and willing to attend from participating, such as time of day, previously planned activity, mobility or medical condition, etc.
Summary Statement	A lot of suggestions about making programs better in 1 block of text. (not really a code)
Value of Interpretation	Answers to "are park programs important" question

Appendix D

Diagram of Qualitative Analysis



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The research conducted at the Georgia State Parks is not presented here in its entirety. While all of the questions that were asked are represented on the interview script, several elements not related to the conceptual framework of this thesis have been excluded from the research analysis. These elements were disseminated to practictioners through more direct avenues.

Each study park received a customized report detailing insightful visitor responses and strategies that may increase the number of campers that utilize interpretive programming. The reports included publicizing suggestions, delivery style alternatives, and topics that visitors, particularly those not currently attending interpretive programs, want to see interpreted.

The results of this thesis were presented at the National Association for Interpretation Region III Conference in February 2011, held in Jekyll Island, Georgia. The professionals at the presentation found the information insightful and compelling. Due to the enthusiastic response, an article was submitted to the professional newsletter for National Association for Interpretation Region III.

Further publication for this thesis is being sought through the Journal of Interpretation Research and *Legacy,* the professional magazine for the National Association for Interpretation.