

To Improve Compliance:
A Study of the Russian-Language Users
@ Priest Lake State Park
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Disclaimer: Priest Lake State Park Staff did not request this study. It was a voluntary, professional growth study for my future professional goals.

Introduction

Immigrants from various Slavic countries have made Priest Lake State Park a prime vacation spot for their community since the late 1990s. They make up a large portion of both the camper population and the day user population. With sizable family and church groups, they are a close-knit people group and active users of the park and its facilities. As the Russian-language community's usage of the park increases, it will add to the workload of park management and staff. As a park person, I am interested in building camper compliance to the regulations that make Priest Lake State Park a safe, clean, and family-friendly destination. As a psychology major, family dynamics are important factors to me and as a Biblical languages major, the tonality of the Russian language is another insightful tool related to my studies.

*“Language is the platter on which
culture is served.” --Fred Ramsey*

Purpose

The purpose of this observation study is to gain a deeper understanding primarily of the first-generation Russian-language community using two investigative methods: 1) observing the behavior of the people in the park; and 2) listening to interpersonal communications for tonal analysis of the Russian language. My aim is to delve into the aspects and dynamics that form the Russian-language community and contribute to their usage of the resources at Priest Lake State Park. This purpose includes:

- Park Resource Usage
 - Litter Disposal
 - Recreational and Educational Activities
 - Bicycle Safety Compliance
- Unique Russian-Language Familial Interactions
 - Paternal Pride
 - Maternal Nurturing
 - Shared-Rearing Roles
 - Gender Roles
- Vocal Tonality of the Russian Language
 - Communication Between Community Members
 - Interactions with Cross-Cultural, Cross-Language People

Group Identification

Because of the difficulty in discriminating between country of origin (e.g. Ukraine, Russia, and Croatia), I decided that the defining characteristic for the identified study group should be language as opposed to origin. The Slavic languages are very easy to identify among the traditional English-speaking population of the campers and the language differential was a helpful one to my study.

Location

As previously stated, the location of this study was Priest Lake State Park, Indian Creek and Lionhead Units. I was stationed for the majority of my three week study at the Lionhead Unit. Lionhead is a developed rustic campground with a Russian-language camper population. However, through various duties and appointments at the Indian Creek Unit, which has a higher density of Russian-language campers and day users, I was able to do many of my observations there. Some of my anecdotes are drawn from my experiences last year as an intern stationed at the Indian Creek Unit and from current reports of various park volunteers. This distinction is important because the two units attract their own subset of Russian-language campers. The Lionhead user is typically more self-contained within their family group and more independent in their activities at the park than the Indian Creek user. It should also be noted that nearly all of the Russian-language people were observed on or in campsites near the beaches at both units. In addition, the weather was a factor in my three-week study because the month of August was a rainy one at Priest Lake State Park, resulting in a lower density of campers overall.

Procedure

The procedure involved spending focused time in observation in addition to jotting down notes during my daily tasks as a Re-Creation Unlimited intern such as running programs and doing campground visitations around the campground. The weekly Priest Lake Style Volleyball tournament was one of the most helpful and consistent observation events due to the high attendance level from the Russian-language community.

Data and Analysis (Organized by Topic)

The Russian Language and First-Generation People

Total Russian-Language People Observed	First-Generation Russian-Language People Observed
57	21

The **first-generation** immigrants were typically people in their mid-twenties to late forties, while their children ranged from babyhood to early twenties. First-generation immigrants were identified primarily by their observed fluency with the English language. This differential included the correct use of syntax and the willingness to use English in interpersonal communication. A higher rate of compliance to park regulations was seen in second-generation people with a higher level of fluency in English. The tonality of the Russian language in interpersonal communications is commonly a tone used in bargaining, making offers and counter-offers.

Simply teaching English to the Russian-language community is not the complete solution. Rather, the observations I made seemed to support the idea that fluency in English is a companion to assimilation into Western culture. To better serve the needs of non-native English speakers, a system of requesting that the first-generation person repeat what they understood from a park person's verbal statement may help clarify communication. This system consists of asking open-ended questions such as “Could you please repeat what I said?” “What is your plan to take care of this?” and “Did I understand your answer correctly?” **The ultimate goal with this method is to initiate a verbal contract that promotes compliance with the rules and give the first-generation person a sense of personal responsibility and ownership over their actions.**

Gender Roles Within the Family

Russian-Language Males Observed	Russian-Language Females Observed
40	17

First-Generation Russian-Language Males	First-Generation Russian-Language Females
14	7

The first-generation Russian-language males that I observed were typically in leadership roles, either representing their families at the Volleyball tournaments or listening to my invitation to the various programs. They seemed to be fairly fluent in English and they acted as a park agent, translating what I had said into Russian for the family's benefit. Fathers in the Russian-language community tended to express their affection through physical gestures such as putting their arm around a child and holding a baby or toddler when he or she got fussy.

The first-generation Russian-language females that I observed were all mothers. They typically acted in more family-oriented roles such as cheering for their family at the Volleyball tournaments or preparing food and looking after small children at their campsites. The two first-generation women whom I directly encountered through my campsite visitations seemed less fluent in the English language, using their children as translators from English to Russian, while the other five were watching a volleyball game and speaking among themselves in Russian.

Gender roles are apparent in the dynamics of first-generation families. The father is held as head of the family, acting as a representative of his family and a liason between them and the outside world. He is the leader in the social unit, while the mother is at the center of her household. Her role, though equally important, is one more focused on supporting

her family in whatever they do. This eagerness to support may be a contributing factor to deviant behavior such as setting toilet paper on fire in the vault toilets, stealing, and high-risk bicycle behavior among this community. **A possible way to maintain compliance could be to earn the trust of a male translator who would act as an agent of the park for education and enforcement among their family members and peer group.** Another aspect of this community worth noting is that they use security and closeness as methods of managing their children. I did not witness any explicit discipline being meted out, but I did see the parents cultivating an environment of safety. **This information could be applied to compliance issues by recognizing that, in this people group, *confrontation is met with defiance, but trusted relationships meet with compliance.***

Volleyball and The Team Effect

Total Volleyball Tournaments Observed	Tournaments Won by Russian-Language Teams
3	2

The Russian-language teams who played spanned first and second generation individuals. The teenagers on the court seemed to readily accept and incorporate older family group members. The team members and their accompanying family members frequently encouraged each other verbally in both English and Russian. Their praises were typically no more than three words long. On the rare occasion that the Russian-language teams lost a game, they spent a few minutes to analyze their previous failures and verbally reassign positions to maximize their chances. They called all of their hits, followed their assignments, and won graciously. The Russian-language people at Lionhead also spent a significant amount of time on the volleyball court on days when there were no tournaments scheduled. Other displays of athleticism included slack-lining (a form of tightrope walking between two trees) and wake-boarding.

Athletic prowess is an outsized aspect of the Russian-language community. Often, paternal pride and maternal pride are tied to displays of athletics. An example comes to mind when a first-generation father won our drawing for the grand prize, an EGO fishing net, at the weekly Volleyball Tournament. He proudly presented the net to one of his sons for distinguishing himself on the court. This



emphasis on athleticism may also be tied directly to the setting of the study, since the outdoors lends itself to more athletic activities. Another point worth noting is that recreational intellectual activities such as reading and writing are minimal. **Therefore, traditional posted signage will**

neither be noticed by nor motivate compliance among this particular community. Picture campaigns have been successful in parks in the past (e.g. Smokey Bear, Woodsy Owl, etc.) and may be beneficial in this community. Team sports such as volleyball and basketball seemed to be encouraged. Even sporting activities that were designed to be solitary such as slack-lining were made into community events by drawing an audience of peers, waiting for their turn and watching the other person take his. In these contexts, they did not cheer the person on, rather analyzed his performance and applied it to their own methods. Competitive pressure tends to highlight the strengths and weaknesses in a particular identity group. **In this case, the team effect among the Russian-language community came to the forefront, demonstrating how well they can work together *when motivated*.** The steps to aiding this team effect in other circumstances are:

- Creating a sense of personal responsibility.
- Encouraging the other person in achieving excellence.
- Equipping the other person to move forward to self-management.

Food Waste Litter

Observed Sunflower Seed Eaters	Male to Female Ratio of Sunflower Seed Eaters
8	3-to-5

Approximately 38% of the first-generation Russian-language community in my observation study were observed snacking on sunflower seeds. This frequency is remarkable because the behavior was seen at a variety of times and locations, or in layman's terms, “everywhere and all the time.” All of the people observed in this behavior also discarded the shells on the ground, irregardless of the proximity of the dumpsters or family trash receptacles.

The pollution problem that is posed by the Russian-language community is one that may need to be addressed; the sunflower seed shells example is only an example of this litter issue. Tom Renzi, a volunteer camp host at the Indian Creek Unit, described a cabin that had a pile of seed shells beside the porch, heaps of rubbish inside the cabin area and the firepit, and a ineffective burial of discarded food scraps in the ground outside the cabin. Since the data suggests that the pollution problem has nothing to do with the frequency or location of trash receptacles, it seems that the pollution problem lies within the mindset of the community itself. This apparent non-compliance with litter reduction impact appear to be selective, demonstrated by the fact that when Fred Ramsey, who facilitates the weekly Priest Lake-Style Volleyball Tournament at the Indian Creek Unit, kept the games from starting until the beach was entirely clean, they were meticulous in their trash reduction. He was able to bring about compliance with minimal pushback because of the trust relationships that he had built over several summers and because of the anticipation



of a positive experience. **Seed-spitting contests where a small prize is awarded to the person who can spit the farthest and an even bigger prize is awarded to the person who can clean up the residue the fastest have been used to address similar non-compliance issues in an Oregon school system. *Increasing positive rewards for positive behaviors may help to motivate compliance among this people group.***

High-Risk Bicycle Behavior and Children's Safety

Males Demonstrating High-Risk Bicycle Behavior	Females Demonstrating High-Risk Bicycle Behavior
7	5

These high-risk bicycle behaviors were all observed in the Indian Creek Unit. The people observed were under the age of 15. The behaviors included riding with no hands on the handlebars while standing up on the axles of the back wheels and a particularly memorable instance where an approximately ten-year-old Russian-language female was observed pulling her 2-4 year-old sister in a stroller with one hand while she steered her bicycle with the other hand. It should also be noted that none of these children were wearing helmets or any other protective gear while engaging in the aforementioned high-risk behavior.

This high-risk bicycle behavior could indicate a deeper need for adrenaline rushes in the Russian-language community, especially in the younger members. The most troubling aspect is when younger siblings are involved as in the stroller-towing incident. **A suggestion for solving this problem would be to appeal to the Russian-language community's *love of family*. Letting the older campers, especially the first-generation males, know that they are role models for their children could inspire them to better compliance in this area. Signage throughout the park reminding drivers of cyclists in the park may help as well.**

Recreational and Educational Program Attendance

Russian-Language Attendees at Recreational and Educational Events	First-Generation Russian-Language Attendees at Recreational and Educational Events
6	0

These observations were made at the Lionhead Unit, where 50% of the Russian-language attendees were children who reported that their parents sent them. The other 50% were two second-generation parents and their baby boy.

The lack of attendance of first-generation Russian-language people at the Re-Creation Unlimited programs at Lionhead may indicate a different type

of user than at the Indian Creek Unit. Recalling from my last summer stationed at Indian Creek, several of the attendees throughout the summer were Russian-language people, with parents and children alike sharing in the experience. The data



suggests that the Russian-language users at the Lionhead Unit are more personally active and self-contained. They may assume that they have all of the equipment and knowledge that they need to use the resources in the park without outside help. I was encouraged by three instances of the children being sent to the programs because it shows a parental desire among some members of the Russian-language community for their children to assimilate into Western culture even on a camping vacation. Perhaps scheduling more active programs such as multiple Volleyball Tournaments, canoe outings, and fishing contests may boost Russian-language attendance at the Re-Creation Unlimited programs.

Points For Discussion

- Would it be possible for a **question-based system** of clarifying camper communication to become common practice?
- In your experience, does a verbal **contract-style agreement** work effectively with this people group?
- What would be the benefits or consequences of singling out **first-generation males** to become agents for the park for enforcement and education?
- Is building **a trust relationship** with the Russian-language community more effective than direct confrontation?
- In your opinion, what are some possible causes for the **rise in deviant behavior** among Russian young people?
- Would a **picture-based signage system** as opposed to a word-based signage system be a feasible solution in this park?
- What are some ways to use the **team effect** to motivate compliance among the Russian-language community?
- Would a program like a **camper of the week contest** based on compliance be a possible way to motivate compliance by providing anticipation of a positive experience?
- Though it may require more effort, would it be beneficial to the campers to look more equally for **positive behavior to reward** instead of negative behavior to punish?
- Is appealing to the **sense of family** in the Russian-language community effective?