

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As skiing diversifies into sub-types, it is important to understand each type of skier, and how they identify with their sport of choice. Backcountry skiing is growing at a rate of 500,000 new participants every 2 seasons³, while lift-service skiing has leveled off in Vermont over the last 10 years¹. This understanding can diversifying management of recreation areas.

Through Tajfel's⁶ social identity theory and Stryker's^{4,2} structural symbolic interactionism, utilizing surveys and focus groups during the 2017/2018 season, this pilot study explores:

- **Intrinsic commitment:** internal affective significance
- **Extrinsic commitment:** social ties
- **Salience of skier identity:** Prominence among other identities

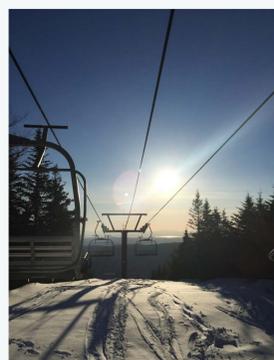
We believe backcountry skiers will have higher levels of intrinsic commitment, extrinsic commitment (social ties), and salience of skier identity than lift-service skiers. Both groups will display similar monetary commitment to skiing. Information gathered from this pilot study will be used to focus research questions for the 2018/2019 season.

METHODS

- Participants were surveyed at three data collection sites, base lodge or trail head. Convenience sampling was used to create a sampling methodology for the full study.
- Survey included questions about demographics, frequency of skiing, type of skiing, monetary input into skiing, extrinsic commitment, and intrinsic commitment.
- A focus group was held to shape future questions on how lift-serve and backcountry skiers view skiing.



Lift-Serve skiers. Smuggler's Notch, Vermont



Ski Lift. Bolton, Vermont



Backcountry skier. Nebraska Notch, Vermont

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

58 users partook, with an overall 73% response rate. 41 lift-service skiers, 17 backcountry skiers. 34 were male, 24 were female (Figure 1).

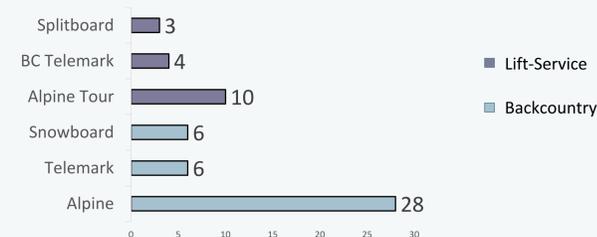


Figure 1. Number of participants in each activity classification.

Survey: It was found that backcountry skiers responded with significantly higher levels of intrinsic commitment and significantly more social ties through skiing than lift-service skiers did (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1.

Mean scores of intrinsic measures of commitment. Measured agreeability on likert scales from -2 to +2.

Statement	Lift-Service	Backcountry
I make personal sacrifices to ski	-0.87	-0.20*
I am happiest when I ski	0.46	1.20**
I don't have any clear feelings about skiing	-0.95	-1.67**
Skiing is more than just an activity	0.65	1.60**

Note. * denotes significance at p=.1, ** denotes significance at .05.

Table 2.

Mean scores of extrinsic measures of commitment. Measured quantity on likert scales from 0 to 4, monetary sum in U.S. dollars.

Statement	Lift-Service	Backcountry
How many of your relatives ski	1.84	2.53*
How many friends have you met through skiing	0.90	1.67**
How many friends would you lose if you stopped skiing	0.49	1.20**
How much money did you spend on skiing in the last 12 months	\$1001.59	\$1451.33*

Note. * denotes significance at p=.1, ** denotes significance at .05.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Five participants conveyed key themes about backcountry and lift-service skiers during a focus group.

Backcountry: Community and friendliness:

"...there is a good community in skiers, like the RASTA trails..."

"... I feel like backcountry skiers are a lot more aware... I see them at like...trail clean up days, I think they are more involved in the community"

Lift-Service: Less aware of others:

"They are not looking where they are going... They tend to cut you off, they tend to just not be very aware of their surroundings."

"They run around like they own the place...They just don't really have an idea of how to behave in the outdoors"

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Backcountry skiers had higher levels of intrinsic commitment and social ties to skiing, though did not have a relationship to level of experience with skiing.

- Backcountry skiers spent more on skiing than lift-service skiers did, though not a significantly different portion of their income.
- Higher levels of commitment could reveal a more salient skier identity in backcountry skiers.
- Catering towards these commitment factors when managing recreation areas could improve user experience.

The preliminary survey revealed measures of commitment, but failed to measure how high in a salience hierarchy the skier identity was for both lift-service and backcountry skiers. Commitment and salience will be measured during the winter 2018/2019 season.

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