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NAVIGATING THE OUTDOOR RECREATION FOLK GROUP: A FUNCTIONAL
ANALYSIS OF PERSONAL NARRATIVE

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

American Studies/Folklore

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Abstract

Among the participants of the outdoor recreation folk group, or people who participate regularly in human-powered outdoor recreation as a lifestyle, personal narratives are an integral and integrated part of interaction. This group is particularly rife with stories, because in the natural order of their lifestyle they regularly engage in activities filled with adventure and challenge. As members of this folk group engage in recreation together they share their personal narratives because it is the common tie between them, not only in interest, but in current participation and thus natural conversation. This common and simple tie sets the stage perfectly for the sharing of personal experiences, but more than that, within this folk group, the stories serve other crucial functions that play a role in the perpetuation of group dynamics, community development, community involvement, and social sorting within the group. This thesis discusses the findings of an analysis of 15 personal narratives, collected in natural context, and determined to play the primary roles of establishing or maintaining face, social sorting, and community building.

I find myself at the top of a zip-line at the Olympic Park in Park City, Utah, waiting with a friend and my son for our race to the bottom of the mountain. I'm teasing my son about the fact that his excuse for losing the last zip-line race is that a "branch hit him" during the first phase of the race and slowed him down. My friend *J.G.* begins to tell a story, and because I have my phone with me I record his narrative.

J.G.: Well speaking of branches, I was in Maui and we were mountain biking, actually we were on the island of Molaki, it's on the desert side and we were descending down to the ocean. So, you'd be in these big areas that you just kind of roll over, and it was kind of single track that would weave through these meadows. And my buddy stopped and goes "Oh, I gotta remind you of something. Don't...don't run into those bushes. He said, you're gonna see these bushes, they don't look harmful, but they are really going to hurt. And I'm goin and I see one that looks really painful and I'm like, "Oh, I'm going to avoid that." and then I run into the one doesn't look painful.

L.J. And it was?

J.G.: And it was like this shhhh, it literally grabbed me like hooks and shredded my arm.

L.J. Really?

J.G.: And I remember, I pull up and my buddy stops and he goes, "Oh, you got it, didn't Yeah ?" And I was literally bleeding. And I still have scars, here and here (points to arm)

just two lines that go like this (shows how long the cuts were). Because it just went shhhh. And it just ...

L.J. How did it do that?

J.G.: It was just like.....but it's funny, because if you bumped into it, it wouldn't do anything, but because you're moving it grabs you. It was just like shhhh.

L.J. What kind of plant was it?

J.G.: I don't know. Some tropical monster.

L.J. Huh!

J.G.: But Yeah know...talk about plants grabbing you! It slowed me down. I mean it grabbed me so much it almost ripped me off my bike. And I was just bleeding.

L.J. Where was it at? Hawaii?

J.G.: Maui, no, not Maui, it was Molaki.

At the end of his story we progress through the line and load up in our zip line chairs, egging each other on, and the conversation takes off in a different vein. This story, casually shared among friends, was told as a way to tie into a conversation that was already taking place, to validate another person in the party (my son), and to establish and maintain J.G's "face" as a recreationalist who is serious enough about his sports to participate in them while on vacation and in lands unfamiliar to him.

In this thesis I will explore 15 personal narratives within the outdoor recreation folk group, the functional roles the narratives play, and what these functions tell us about what the members of the outdoor recreation folk group value and the role the personal narrative plays in the social navigation of the group.

Introduction

In *Outside Magazine*, *National Geographic Adventure*, *BackPacker* or any other nationally produced outdoor recreation magazine, the stories told on the glossy pages are those of epic adventures and feats filled with danger, conquering, and often exotic travels. For example, the first issue I grabbed from my stack of *National Geographic Adventure* magazines contains articles about biking Italy, rafting the Grand Canyon, traveling in Thailand and kiteboarding the Sai Island in Cape Verde's Windward Islands. These stories establish an expectation within the folk group, as well as outside it, that real or serious outdoor recreationalist's narratives will be filled with these same extraordinary aspects. Just as Hollywood focuses on the most daring and exotic of circumstances to keep an audience entertained, so too have the national recreation magazines narrowed the stories they publish into the vein of the extreme adrenaline narratives. While many outdoor recreationalists do have such stories in their quiver of tales, often the stories told among themselves do not mirror the extreme nature of those that are published, rather they serve more mundane but important purposes centered on nuanced navigation within the folk group. Exploring these subtleties in group navigation shines a spotlight on the importance of the personal narrative for acceptance, maintenance, connection, and community building within the group. Evaluation of their personal narratives demonstrate the values within the tales; thus we begin to see which qualities are valued within this group. For example, if we find that all the personal narratives have an element of bravery, then we can safely conclude that this characteristic is important to group members. The analysis of their stories gives insight into the cogs of the outdoor recreation folk group machine and helps us understand social navigations within the group, what characteristics the group finds valuable in their participants, and how this group builds and prioritizes self and

community. Sherman Alexie said, “With the combined weight of stories, you can get at the truth.” The ethnographic approach to the personal narrative is done for this purpose –to “get at the truth” of what we value, how we navigate the social sphere, and what that means.

The Outdoor Recreation Folk Group

In the early years of the 20th century, when the daily grind of the agrarian lifestyle was pushed aside for the industrial age, free time or leisure time was suddenly available to the general populace of the United States. The use of this leisure time varies greatly by individual culture and person, but one of the factions that developed was the pursuit of play and challenge within nature, specifically mountain biking, hiking, white water rafting/kayaking, rock climbing, mountaineering, etc. – human-powered recreation. The outdoor recreation folk group engages in these activities as a regular lifestyle. “...serious leisure activities in natural settings...are a significant and important way in which people in the Western world (and increasingly in other parts of the world) enjoy their free time” (Davidson and Stebbins, 2011).

For purposes of this paper I have defined this group as: *people who specifically and regularly engage in human-powered sports, undertaken outdoors in wild places such as mountains, rivers, and deserts*. The personal narratives I collected for this research came from people who categorized themselves as participants in this folk group by making the choice to attend hiking Meet-Up groups, go on outdoor recreation adventure trips, and participate in groups of recreationalists where these stories were collected. My own involvement in this folk group must be noted, as must the emic perspective it gives me in data collection and analysis. My involvement in this folk group stems not only from my participation in a variety of these activities over the past twenty-five years, (such as rock climbing, mountaineering, ice climbing, mountain biking, road biking, extreme skiing, hiking, snowshoeing, and white water rafting) but

also working as a journalist within the industry itself, giving me media access to athletes, manufacturers, and recreationalists across the country. My emic involvement within the outdoor recreation industry and in established recreational groups, along with personal contacts within the folk group, has provided me with many avenues for accomplishing my research. It also provides me with a foundation of understanding regarding the workings of the folk group in general. It should be noted that due to my particular position as a published guidebook writer within this group, I am automatically afforded an established position of epistemic authority and privilege, which on the one hand affords me a certain amount of trust with informants—even new acquaintances within the folk group—but it can also have an effect on the social sorting that goes on around me and the personal narratives that are told to me. For this reason collecting the narratives covertly lends more of a natural context.

This thesis paper focuses on a collection of 15 personal narratives as they naturally occurred during participation in outdoor recreation activities among members of the outdoor recreation folk group. These stories were told by a variety of people ages 13-60, male and female, and included friends, family, and previously unknown participants. In order to truly evaluate the functional role these narratives play, I felt the stories must be collected without fanfare, as they were told, in their natural environment. In order for the stories to be naturally generated by the situation at hand, it is best if they are collected quietly, even unexpectedly, but of course, ethically. Kenneth Goldstein says, in *A Guide for Fieldworkers in Folklore*, that the only truly natural context for collecting is one in which the collector is not known to be present (82). For this reason, I entered these groups without telling them I was waiting to hear their stories. Rather I waited until the stories naturally generated from the situation at hand and then tried to record them. Goldstein further says that when comparing the natural or artificial

approach to collecting folklore, that the “natural context” is the ideal choice (82). For my research I felt this to be true. In order to define the functional role of a personal narrative with any chance at accuracy it must be naturally generated, taking into account the larger context of the situation. John Robinson, a folklorist reconsidering past parameters set up for the personal narrative explains,

“A proper account of everyday storytelling must take into consideration what story is being told, to whom, when and for what purpose. Furthermore, the contributions of the audience must be given equal consideration to those of the speaker or narrator. These factors are interdependent and cannot be suitably analyzed without reference to each other” (1981).

Because folklore is co-created between the audience and the story teller (Stahl, 1985; Georges, 1969), I believe this aspect of the data is vital in defining function. Briggs argues that it is important to record the audience and performer interchanges, or what he calls “back-channel” talk. Part of my fieldwork will be to note when and where the stories were told, at what point in the conversation the stories were told, who told them to whom, and any pertinent “back-channel” interchange. These details helped determine the specific role or function the personal narrative was meant to play. This situational context has been placed before each story so you can see how the story was generated. As such, the personal narratives I collected for this research study were collected without pretext and occasionally unbeknownst to the tellers, recorded and transcribed. All who shared stories gave post hoc verbal consent, but still no personal information has been recorded from the narrators other than first names, and sometimes not even those. The names of the contributors have been changed as an additional step toward privacy.

Folklore and the Study of Personal Narrative

The personal narrative, now widely recognized in folklore studies as a legitimate genre for informally transmitting our experiences, beliefs, identities and ideologies, is also fraught

with ritual (Goffman, 1967), and performs specific functions within different folk groups. Of particular interest to me is an exploration of the functions of the personal narrative within the outdoor recreation folk group and the information these stories give us on what the group values and how they navigate the social fabric of the group with their personal narratives. Within the outdoor recreation folk group, personal narratives are shared abundantly at all gatherings, including gatherings where group members participate in their sports together, and also when they gather together outside of recreation. Robinson notes that “When the narrator and the listener(s) share the same model of reality, then the “remarkableness” of events is consensually defined” (1981). In other words, sharing personal experience narratives within this group is a comfortable ritual exchange, because for those who are legitimate members of the group (personal narratives covertly serve to sort this out) there is a level of understanding from shared experiences and identity of place that naturally occurs.

The prolific nature of the personal narrative within this folk group establishes the importance of the personal narrative to this group, and as such legitimizes the necessity to study it. If these stories did not play a specific role for this segment of the population they would cease to tell and to listen to them, but they do not. As McInns has noted, “Stories should be studied first and foremost because they are there” (1996).

I believe there is merit in studying individual folk groups and the roles that the personal narrative specifically plays within these groups. If there is a unique set of functions within different folk groups, we can begin to do what folklorists do best: come to understand what is valued and what reasoning lies beneath the actions of individual cultures. Though a genre may be universal across all groups, the way it is used may be different, if not in whole, then in part, and these unique functions will allow better understanding of the folk group, as well as a better

understanding of the unique breadth of the role of the personal narrative, and human nature as a whole.

Other scholars have established a litany of functions the personal narrative plays. Since Sandra Stahl made her case for the personal narrative as folklore in 1977, a handful of papers and books have been written by academics further defining the many functions the personal narrative plays. This growing list reveals a depth and breadth to the uses of personal narrative that exhibits a genre of immense power. The following gives a taste of identified functions found by other researchers.

Sandra Stahl, in her research on the methodology of personal narratives study makes a case for intimacy being a primary function. She says,

“...it is always the case that “private” folklore will be shared only when the creation of intimacy is an explicit aim....The personal narrative is replete with “private” folklore. An individual who tells a personal narrative chooses to create a sense of intimacy, to share that “private” folklore....Without apology, the personal narrative makes a gesture toward intimacy (1985, 48).

She identifies more functions of the personal narrative when she states, “the personal narrative is instructive, cautionary, entertaining, reinforcing, illustrative, etc.” (1985, 48). Adding to this list a less obvious function is Jeannie Thomas, who stated in her collection of family personal narratives, “The narratives I include...show how they can function to destabilize and reveal uncertainty” (1997, 25). She explains, “What sometimes happens in these narrating situations is that a traditional form, such as a personal experience narrative, can be employed to present the unconventional, a strategy sometimes utilized in an attempt to change some traditional attitudes and to gain acceptance for the novel” (Thomas 1997, 17). Thomas studied a small group of

women inside her family which helped her to discover this less obvious function. Barbara Myerhoff, in her documentary and ethnographic work with elderly Jews in California adds her research to this growing list of functions with this explanation: “Their histories were not devoted to marking their successes or unusual merits. Rather they were efforts at ordering, sorting, explaining--rendering coherent their long life.” (Robinson 1981, 70). Myerhoff’s subjects had lived through WWII, immigration, and experienced long and complicated lives. That their personal narratives served to order and make sense of their life experiences shows the human need for self-clarification and identity. Adding still more to our list of functions the personal narrative plays, James Britton coined the term “talking to learn,” where personal narratives are shared in order to find answers to puzzling situations. This litany of identified functions is just a portion of the work scholars have done on this topic, but it clearly shows that the functions of personal narrative may differ widely in any given folk group. Though it is unnecessary to include all researched functions, of all personal narratives, in all folk groups, the idea that the personal narrative is found to play numerous functions depending upon the folk group, the situation, and its application suffices. It is a genre with a closet full of hats. The numerous functions begin to show the complex nature of the personal narrative as it serves its many potential purposes in building, sharing and making sense of our experiences of living, and how we individually use this genre to accomplish our own social goals, regardless of the folk group. Let’s look at the functions I’ve identified with my research.

During my analysis of the collected narratives I identified two basic groupings of functions. The first is self-oriented functions, which include establishing and maintaining face, (a social construct), and social sifting, which is covertly done through narrative in this folk group, to identify skill and interest levels of participants within the group for given sports. The second,

community oriented functions, include finding common ground and building relationships through an array of sharing techniques that I will explore in Part II.

Part I

Self-Oriented Functions: Establishing and Maintaining Face

Before a personal narrative makes it through the sifting process of the mind and the participant decides to share it, it must pass the test of whether or not it can establish or maintain the face of the teller, as desired by the teller. Goffman's book, *Interaction Ritual*, is a compilation of 6 papers previously written by the author. The first paper in this collection, *On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction*, explicates the most basic role of the shared personal narrative. Goffman discusses this careful process and the way we selectively choose what we share with others for the purpose of establishing face. This function of building and maintaining identity appears to be the first filtering process a personal narrative must make it through before it sees the light and is shared with others. This process of establishing face is a broadly applicable function that applied to all of the personal narratives I collected. For example, an interesting encounter with filtering stories to establish face came through a mishap while I was trying to record a narrative from my sister-in-law. This specific experience and Goffman's research on the *interaction ritual* played a dominate roll in understanding what turns out to be a primary function of the personal narrative.

My sister-in-law and I were hiking along a slot canyon together and she began to tell a story about her foot and a disease she has that causes her feet to swell in the heat. When she saw my recording device she pushed it away, stopped talking and was almost hostile in her refusal to continue. The next day, while on this same trip, she told another story that I recorded. I spoke with her later and inquired as to why she had reacted so evasive on Friday, but on Saturday she

was fine with me recording her story. She indicated that she hadn't had time to clearly think about whether or not the first story was one she would feel comfortable opening up to a larger audience. In this instance she had been denied the time needed to evaluate the face this story would portray to an unknown audience, and so she exited the ritual until she felt she could appropriately analyze the 'face' this story was establishing for her.

In Goffman's book the actual process of a conversation is broken down in detail to the level of ritual – move, counter move, purpose, and correction. Within this ritual lies first and foremost the establishing and maintaining of face. Sandra Stahl contributes to this idea in her research as well when she mentions that personal narratives function to “maintain the stability of that [the teller's] identity for both the teller and listener (1985). And Shaw contends that “personal narratives serve as representations of the roles people play and as the masks that they present as images of themselves” (1993).

To understand what this ritual involves let's look at a brief, incomplete, but for our purposes sufficient, example of Erving Goffman's breakdown of interaction into ritual face work:

To begin the examination of this ritual we will first acknowledge that in our day-to-day lives we each, regardless of the specific circles or folk groups we run in, engage daily in face-to-face social encounters or “the ritual”. Those who are not hampered by learning delays or handicaps, learn from the beginning of their socialization as small children, according to the rules of their own culture, how these face-to-face interactions are to play out in a manner acceptable to the people they interact with. These nuances, facial expressions, pauses, exchanges, cues, challenges etc. are so naturally intuited and ingrained as we grow from childhood into adulthood that most people are unaware there is ritual exchange taking place in each

conversation they engage in. Goffman points out, “In any society, whenever the physical possibility of spoken interaction arises, it seems that a system of practices, conventions and procedural rules comes into play which functions as a means of guiding and organizing the flow of messages” (33-34). He goes on to say, “As a main focus of attention talk is unique...for talk creates for the participant, a reality that has other participants in it” (113). In this reality, we and those we interact with, for as long as the interaction takes place, create a space of complex ritual exchange where verbal and non-verbal acts create, maintain, challenge and even destroy what Goffman calls face. The importance face plays in this ritual will become clear as we delve in further. Let’s begin with the following definitions to give clarity to the ritual:

Face: Positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the *line* others assume he has taken during a particular contact (5).

Line: A pattern of verbal and non-verbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation, and through this, also, his evaluation of the participants, especially himself (5).

In Face: If an encounter sustains an image of oneself that he takes for granted he is considered to be “in face”(6).

Maintain Face: When the line one takes presents an image that is internally consistent and is supported by judgment and evidence conveyed by other participants (6).

Wrong Face/Out of Face: When information is brought forth that does not sustain the face being held for a person (8).

Face Work: Actions taken to make whatever he is doing consistent with the face he has established (13).

Poise: Capacity to suppress and conceal any tendency to become shamefaced during encounters. (9).

To Lose Face: To be in “wrong face” or “out of face”, or “shame faced” (9).

To Save Face: Process by which a person sustains an impression for others that he has not lost face (9).

To Give Face: To arrange for another to get a better line than he could have gotten otherwise (9).

To Gain Face: There are different ways this can be done; one is to have face given to you by another (9).

Pride: When one maintains face from a compunction of duty to self (10).

Honor: When one maintains face because of duty to a wider social unit and receives support from these units (10).

Dignity: When one maintains face with expressive events derived from how one handles body, emotion, and the things with which he has physical contact (10).

The social code that Goffman defines, and in which these definitions come into play, is complex with varying response and requirement according to the status of face of all involved at any given time as the ritual unfolds. The basics of the ritual include face-to-face conversation between two or more people and the series of actions and responses that take place unnoticed because of ritual familiarity. One example of a complexity of the ritual that one may not notice due to familiarity is that just as participants vary in ritual skill and personality, they also vary in social power. If one participant in the ritual holds more power than another, their feelings in the matter are generally given more care and consideration in the exchange. This is one small example. Because of the complexity of the ritual, vast variety of responses, and no need to simply restate Goffman’s entire paper, I will focus on the aspects of the interaction ritual that hit the highlights of greatest relevance to personal narrative sharing.

On Loan from Society: Why face matters in a group.

One of the important aspects of face that must be acknowledged is that while everyone varies to some degree in how much they claim to care about what others think, everyone has a vision of themselves they wish to portray. This self-image is deeply meaningful to each of us and emotional responses are attached to it. Goffman points out that when we are in social situations where our face plays out as it should, we feel good and confident in our behaviors. But if we are in an encounter where ordinary expectations of face are not maintained, we will feel bad, hurt or ashamed. These acknowledgements of the emotional import of maintaining face and its impact on our ability to function well, establish the serious nature of this ritual and ritual outcome. I believe it must be noted that the importance of identity established in these stories plays a doubly important role, because not only does the personal narrative help the narrator explain his identity through experience to those in the audience, but it is a part of his own identity that has been carefully constructed to make sense of his life for himself. "People are always trying to make sense of their own lives and the things they experience around them. The process of making sense of things involves a never-ending search for and construction of personal meaning" (Luckner and Nadler, 1995). Our own stories are the way we make sense of and order our own lives. Other researchers, Burner and Sarbin claim that story is the structure that we place our lived experience into in order to organize and understand new experiences in living (Bruner, 1985; Sarbin,1986). Because our stories not only explain to others how we want to be seen, but also explain how we see ourselves and make sense of our own experiences, they are inseparably tied to us with a strong emotional link. It is precarious that the maintenance of something so personal and powerful is not strictly within our own control: "while his social face can be his

most personal possession and center of security and pleasure, it is only on loan from society; it will be withdrawn unless he conducts himself in a way that is worthy of it”(Goffman, 10). For this reason success in relationships of all types depend upon one’s ability to navigate this ritual, and the telling of personal narratives is part of this exchange. In fact, Stahl suggests that intimacy is the primary function of the personal narrative (1985). A “major aim” of sharing what Stahl calls “private” folklore, or the telling and hearing of personal narratives “is the creation of a sense of intimacy between the teller and listener” (p. 51). She goes so far as to say, “Personal narratives facilitate the creation of intimacy, perhaps even more effectively than sex” (p. 47, 1985). Whether or not that is true, the point that personal narratives share a carefully considered and intimate self-image with the listener nods at the crucial importance placed on the personal narratives we share with one another, because they explain and provide proof of who we see ourselves to be, or want others to believe us to be. Shaw points out that “The narrative provides a clear image as the characteristic is seen “in action” (1993). Or in other words, the proof is in the story.

With the personal narrative’s ability to prove face by illustrating the narrator “in action” and with the extreme importance of proving oneself to be a legitimate member of this particular folk group rather than a poser, the ritual of storytelling becomes complex and natural at the same time. Goffman explains, “The socialized interactant comes to handle spoken interaction as he would any other kind, as something that must be pursued with ritual care” (36). This care is taken because one realizes consciously or unconsciously the power of the ritual on the rest of his or her social life. This navigation begins as two or more people begin an interaction, and continues forward as participants steer through any and all weavings that take place during the interaction. This constant aligning, adjusting and responding will always be unpredictable,

particularly with unknown associates and larger groups. But because of the potential impact on the social life of any participant (all of us), personal narratives will carefully, if quickly, be processed through a mental sifter which verifies for the teller whether or not this story will build or maintain the face he wishes to build with those in the conversation. This consideration includes such items as: Who is present? What are their moral and social codes? Will this story establish me with the 'face' I desire to portray? Will this story be offensive to anyone present? Do I care? And, maybe most important: What does this story say about who I am as a person and does that align with the face I have established, or wish to establish with this group? In a nutshell, people tell each other stories as a means of constructing and negotiating social identity (Bauman, 1986; Langellier, 1989, Shaw 1993)

In the following two stories you will see personal narratives shared by two different people in the same conversation, one after the other. Both wish to depict different "faces" to the audience. The first story is prefaced by a conversation that ends up painting one of the participants (Jeff) in a light that questions his cruelty to animals because of his love of catch-and-release fishing. At the end of that conversation where Jeff's face is being challenged in this regard, he chooses to share a story that shows that cruelty to fish is upsetting to him, and thus attempts to restore his face as a person who cares for life. In the story that follows, his wife helps him to keep this face and is comfortable portraying a face for herself that contrasts her less caring nature. I believe she shares this for the two-fold purpose of helping him establish the face he desires, and also because she wishes to portray a tough face for herself. I must note that part

of Goffman's research indicates a social code where others are expected to go to certain lengths to save the face and feelings of others present.^{1 2}

Jeff and Emily are sitting with a group of family and new acquaintances in a yurt and engaging in post dinner conversation after a day of mountain biking on the Gooseberry Mesa near St. George, Utah. The group is engaged in casual conversation.

Pre-story conversation: Jeff: So you throw them on there, they've got stripers, they are real, but they are dead and frozen. And so you throw them on your hook and then there's like these 2, 3, 4 foot stripers that just come nail 'em. And we would.... it was so fun. We were there for a whole week. We'd get up every morning and just go sit on the back of the boat and fish, drive around and fish, and park somewhere at night and fish.

Group: (laughs)

Jeff: And everybody would go for a hike and I'd sit there and fish.

Group: (laughs and everyone talks over each other)

Christian: This was before "Settlers" came out. (Reference to the board game Jeff likes to play.)

Group: laughs

Jeff: No, we took Settlers. We played that when it was too hot to fish. You would hit spots...so when they went on one of their hikes, I would sit there alone, and I'd throw it out, and within 60 seconds I'd have a hit. And they were these great big fish. Anyway it was so exciting. You'd reel them in and then throw it back out and do it again.

¹ The Rule of Self Respect and the Rule of Consideration state that a person must conduct himself during an encounter so as to maintain both his face and others' face. Goffman states, "He is expected to do this willingly and spontaneously because of emotional identification with the others and with their feelings" (10).

² In addition, she shares her story because it allows her to stay connected and involved in the conversation which we will discuss later in the second section *Community-Oriented functions*.

Lori: What did you do with all the fish?

Jeff and Harvey: Just threw them back in.

Lori: Catch and release.

Jeff: Yup

Lori: What's the purpose of that?

Jeff and Em: Kind of like riding a bike out and back

Group: (laughs)

Jeff: It's so exciting catching a fish.

Lori: And ripping out the inside of their mouths?

Jeff: No. I'm really gentle.

Harvey: You were, the hook wasn't.

Jeff: No, I was good at getting them out.

Lori: Why is it exciting?

Jeff: To catch a fish? A great big giant fish? I've always loved fishing, I've just never been able to catch them.

Group: (laughs)

Jeff then immediately transitions into the following story.

Narrative 1.1

Jeff: Remember – we hiked up to the reservoir in Malad all the time? Yeah, and then that one trip. That was bad. So, mom took all these scouts up on this little stream, I mean it was a little stream, but it had all these little trout that were migrating or something, so we got like eight of them, and we were too stupid to throw them back so we killed all these tiny little fish, they were like eight inches long, and then after that I don't think I fished again for like 15 years.

Lori: It was traumatic?

Jeff: It was.

Narrative 1.2

Em: When I was little, at ward parties, they'd bring in a....make a pool and bring in tons of trout and then for the entertainment for the kids we'd get in and catch them with our hands. And so that was my fishing experience as a little girl. We'd do it every (Sunday or Saturday – I couldn't hear) and then we'd go over to the curb and just bash their heads in. All the primary kids would be out there killing fish.....

Lori: Are you kidding?

Em: Yeah , and they were proud of this. And then we'd eat them there, so that was the meal.

Jeff: Yeah , all the primary kids beating the fishes' heads in.

Lori: The church is so not true (flippant/teasing tone).

Breanne: Yeah

Em: And then we'd go back out and get another one.

Jeff: And now they still do it but they sing (hums a song where Golum from *Lord of the Rings* is fishing, undecipherable; everyone laughs).

Em: That's funny.

Jeff: Yeah, that's pretty funny. Was there a gospel message with it?

Em: I don't think so. There were some kids who couldn't hit them hard enough.

Jeff: That's so sad. It's really rude.

Group: (laughs)

Em: I think you're a lot more sensitive than me.

In these two stories this “ritual care” is taken specifically around face of both one’s self and those in the conversation. Goffman explains this mental process of looking out for one’s self and the “other” as part of the social construct of acceptable behavior in the interaction ritual.

“By automatically appealing to face, he knows how to conduct himself in regard to talk. By repeatedly and automatically asking himself the questions, “If I do or do not act in this way, will I or others lose face?” he decides at each moment, consciously or unconsciously, how to behave” (36).

Jeff’s quick follow up story about how he is still traumatized by the boys at the Malad reservoir killing small fish with abandon helps him reclaim footing as being a person who cares about fish. When Jeff says we were “to stupid to throw them back” and “I don’t think I fished again for like 15 years” he expresses his negative feelings about the event and begins to reform his face within the group. Emily’s addition of an equally cruel fish killing story shows her attempting to support her husband’s claim to caring by showing her lack of concern for killing fish as a comparison. When she brutally says we “just bashed their heads in” and “I think you’re a lot more sensitive than me” to Jeff, she is using blunt expression and direct statement to help him reclaim the face he desires. Both are engaged in the ritual of seamlessly building face and helping others to build face with the stories they share. We do not see the internal and automatic dialog that serves as the sorting part of the ritual, but this unseen aspect is a key component in the decision of which personal narrative to share at a given time to a given audience. It illustrates how constant our internal evaluation and careful consideration must be as we share and build reputation through narrative. But there is more. Within the outdoor recreation folk group stories serve another purpose closely linked to the establishment of a desired face--that of social sorting.

Self-Orienting Function: Social Sorting

The next self-oriented function I will discuss is that of social sorting. Though done covertly, a major function of the outdoor recreation personal narrative is one of social sorting through stories that allow members of the folk group to establish their level of experience and expertise in order to place themselves, or for others to place them, on the social ladder within a given group. For example, within this folk group one might explain how he/she mountain biked the Wasatch Crest trail last weekend for the fourth time. This may be done in a casual conversational manner while discussing the group they rode with, the shape the trail was in, or the wonderful wildflowers. But by telling this story the narrator covertly points out a number of things, namely that the narrator is a strong enough rider to have ridden this 13 mile trail with a sustained climb and rocky knife edge section that requires technical riding skill to cross without incident. By sharing this personal experience tale of this ride the narrator has, at a minimum, established his minimum riding ability, his dedication to biking (four attempts of the trail this season), and his knowledge of trails in the area. The details of the personal narrative itself will determine other details of face and specific experience. This type of personal experience narrative allows others in the folk group to gauge where one stands in level of skill and dedication to any given sport, which then serves the function of establishing who might be a match in skill for partnering up for future outings, and with whom they may have sports in common. In Radnar's *Feminist Messages* she highlights coding, "a set of signals – words, forms, behaviors, signifiers of some kind—that protect the creator from the consequences of openly expressing a particular message" (3). In this case, establishing one's credentials (so to speak) by sharing them in a narrative, is a type of coding that allows others in the group, who, in the case of the previous example, will through their own emic understanding of the trails spoken of,

understand what sorting information has been shared. If the narrator were simply to state something like, “I am a dedicated mountain biker who can ride knife edge rock paths and pump out Puke Hill, and I have done it four times this season,” others in the group would be severely put off by the arrogance. Therefore, the coding that goes on in the narrative, is as Radner suggests, a way to “protect the creator from the consequences of openly expressing a particular message.” Radner explains further, “Coding occurs in the context of complex audiences in which some members may be competent and willing to decode the message, but others are not” (3). She is pointing out that others who are legitimate members of the group will have knowledge of the trail and thus understand the significance of the details of the narrative, while others who are not true members of the group will not have this emic perspective. This unacknowledged sorting process is an important part of building the community and the associations within it. In the following narrative told on a hike to Desolation Peak, we see an example of this.

There is a group of hikers in Utah County who met one another through on-line groups and social networking. This group posts a hike or snowshoe outing each week. Today there is a group of six people. Fred, a new leader within the group and leader of the hike today, has led a few hikes with them in the past month and he is enjoying some notoriety among the group. The conversation previous to this story is one where two different men share stories of climbing different peaks: Lone Peak and Timpanogos in the winter. Fred follows up with the following story. (In a later interview he claims that the function of his personal narrative was to add to the winter climbing stories (plug into the conversation) and to share the awe of a winter climb (community building)). I propose that it also gave Fred the opportunity to establish face by showing that he too is a hard-core winter climber who does not balk at difficult snowy conditions.

Narrative 2

Fred: So I went up to Emerald Lake on June 15th.

Darren: Was it completely covered in snow?

Fred: I was looking for the shelter.

Darren: Oh! The round Quonset hut type.

Fred: So I look back on my GPS tracks and I was standing on it and didn't know it.

Darren: Ohwww! (Appreciative noise).

Fred: It was at least 12-feet deep.

Darren: Down at Emerald Lake, that building is literally about 25 feet tall.

Fred: Naaa.. it's about 12.

Darren: Is it? At the peak?

Fred: About 12. I mean there wasn't even a bump in the snow.

Darren: Wow. Did you snowshoe back in?

Fred: I used crampons up the Primrose Cirque and then I put snowshoes on and started postholing. Up on the flat part. Then I was in snowshoes...

Darren: Who's with you?

Fred: Me, myself and I.

Darren: Oh. Good place to be in that kind of conditions (sarcastic tone of voice).

End of Story

In the following story we see Fred building face by including a story of himself hiking a mountain trail during difficult winter conditions. He starts the story by saying "So I went up to Emerald Lake on June 15th." For the insider this signals a trip to Timpanogos, and the date indicates that through summer is in full swing in the valley that this trail is high enough that on

June 15th snow is still an issue – thus this trail is not your normal hiking trail, but at this time of year requires special skill or equipment to navigate. The social sorting cues indicate that Fred is brave enough to hike alone, serious/hard core enough to go during winter, and it illustrates Fred using a GPS when he says “I looked back on my GPS tracks,” and crampons, then snowshoes. The use of both these pieces of foot gear indicate that Fred is knowledgeable about which technical gear to bring, and savvy enough to bring both with him. These comments quickly establishes him as someone who knows how to use technical gear. When Fred quickly refers to “post holing” he uses emic jargon that an outsider may not understand. This use of vocabulary also establishes him as a legitimate participant in winter hiking. Others who are listening in can determine if Fred might be a good match for future hikes with them according to the cues he has given in this story. For example, if another folk group participant prefers warm, easy, summer hikes he/she will automatically know that Fred may not enjoy their style of hiking. If another folk group participant regularly uses technical gear and climbs during winter months he/she may identify Fred as a future potential partner and/or someone to swap stories with. In addition, we see that when Fred blatantly contradicts Darren’s claim that the hut at the base of Emerald Lake is “25 feet tall”, there introduces some male positioning. The backlash from Darren when he then questions Fred’s decision-making at going alone into the backcountry, exhibits a defensive move that parries Mike’s previous rebuttal in an attempt to defend his own face.

The self-oriented functions identified in these examples fall into two categories. The first—face and its maintenance, is one that you will see in other folk groups as well. The second—social sorting, is more specific to this particular folk group because of the natural need for identifying and classifying a range of participants who have diverse skill and interest levels, but need one another for participation in their sports and community. This sorting is a crucial and

necessary aspect of navigation within the folk group for the propagation of further participation within the community established among the members. Let's look at that community.

Part 2

Community-Oriented Functions

The second category of functions I identified were community-oriented functions. These include tales that build community by validating others (branch story on the zipline), helping others to maintain or establish face (Emily's fish story that showed Jeff as being sensitive), connecting into conversation to become a part of the community, sharing learning situations, sharing "like" experiences, sharing awe inspiring tales of the beauty of nature and tales to encourage others.

Community-Oriented Functions: Playing off the Domino Train

First I'd like to discuss a simple interactive community technique--that of choosing to connect into a conversation to contribute to the community at hand. Identifying the simplicity of this interaction was somewhat surprising to me. I expected the personal narratives told to primarily focus on more extreme experiences and to appear simply because someone wanted to share that experience; but what I found was that often the personal narrative in this folk group was unexotic, unlike the tales shared in the glossy magazines. Labov, Waletzky, and vanDijk agree, "events must be "remarkable" in order to succeed as personal narratives (Robinson, 1981). But I did not find this to be necessarily true. Often the personal narrative was simply a plug into an ongoing conversation, which allowed the narrator to engage in a sense of community building and connection with others in the group, and this required nothing more than a story that could tie in with the topic at hand. Brian Sutton-Smith coined the term "triviality barrier" when referring to adults who do not take the play of children seriously and thus overlook it as a viable

form to be researched (1970). In this case we see a similar triviality barrier to the simple conversational narrative, where these every day situational narratives have been overlooked as viable research fodder because of their simple, natural occurrence. Robinson, as he takes issue with Labov, Waletzky and vanDijk says, “We can readily agree that unusual or unexpected experiences are common candidates for storytelling, but it seriously misrepresents the diversity of everyday discourse to assert that such incidents are the only ones people tell stories about” (60). This basic observation bears weight because it differs so drastically from the expectation we have established from popular media.

In the following example, Jeff, the same story teller quoted earlier, is telling a story to this same group. Jeff and a few of the other members of the group quit mountain biking earlier in the day and returned to the yurt. He is telling the members of the group who continued to bike, what happened to him while they were out biking and how he had an interaction with an older couple driving a Mule (4-wheel drive outback rover) across the mesa. He makes the comment that “old people” like to talk with him. As his story plays out others in the audience automatically sift through their stash of stories³ looking for their own personal narrative that will juxtapose itself with any part of the on-going conversation so they can add-to and be considered part of the conversation. During one of the lulls spoken of by Goffman (in the next section), the others in the group could have plugged into this line of conversation in any number of ways: someone could have had a story about a Mule, about the mesa, about their own solitary jaunt, or any other number of potential topics related to the story Jeff is telling. Like a line of dominoes where one can play off of any number of entry points along the domino (or story) train, others can add to the conversation. In this case, someone in the audience had a personal experience about how “old

³ In the Psychology of Life Stories, Dan P. McAdams notes, “People carry with them and bring into conversation a wide range of self-stories, and these stories are nested in larger and overlapping stories, creating ultimately a kind of anthology of the self.”

people” also like to talk to him, and so the conversation heads in that direction as this new person plugs into the conversation with their own story about “old people.” Robinson mentions in his research, “In more spontaneous situations, the narrator is typically reacting to the current topic of conversation” (1981; 69). This function –conversation contribution—makes the previous conversation vital to understanding the function of a given personal narrative. Without knowledge of the conversation that led to the story, one cannot get a clear picture of the role the story played. And, without this pre-story conversation I would not have been able to identify this function.

In looking at how these plug-ins naturally occur, Goffman says that the ritual interchange “tends to proceed in spurts” (37). Each conversation topic is considered a separate unit, or one of these “spurts.” A conversation is a chain of these spurts linked together for as long as the interactants care to transition from one topic to the next, or from one story teller to the next. Lulls are a ritual aspect of a successful conversation. Goffman claims that “lulls between interchanges tend to be greater than the lull between turns at talking in an interchange...(37)” These lulls serve as unconscious signals as to what is going on to all involved in the conversation. In other words, these ritual lulls indicate when a topic in a conversation will change, and when ideas are simply transitioning within a topic. It is within these lulls that participants transition between personal narratives that they plug in to a given conversation in order that the conversation may continue. The personal narrative serves not only as a way to plug into a conversation, but in some cases to actually connect specifically with another individual in the community by finding this same type of common ground with a specific person. In the following example two hikers who do not know one another find common ground through their chit chat on the trail. This

common ground serves as the catalyst for one of the participants to share a personal narrative in order to prove this common ground.

I am on a hike with Davis County Meet-up group⁴ and I'm listening in on other people as they tell stories. One of the women in the group works at Hill Air Force Base (Dawn) and when one of the men she is speaking to finds out about this he tells her how he was in the Air Force for many years. He then shares the following story with her. I didn't get it recorded the first time he told it, so I asked him to share it with me later on the trail.

Narrative 3

Brendon: So I was halfway between Greenland and Canada and I realized that all three of my external tanks were not feeding, so I was about 2000 pounds shy of making land either way, but we had a tanker with us so I ended up doing 21 air refuelings.

Lori: What's a tanker?

Brendon: Air tanker. An air refueling tanker. It's a big plane with a gas tank in the air.

Lori: You were doing it in the air?

Brendon: Right, uh huh.

Lori: Can't you just do one and fill up? Why do you have to do 21?

Brendon: Because I had 8000 lbs internal, with another 10K extra, but I didn't have access to the 10K extra because they were frozen up...

Lori: Ohhh (indicates understanding), so you can't put too much weight on?

Brendon: So I needed 6000 lbs. If I dropped everything...I needed 8000 lbs to get all the way, but I only had 6000 lbs. so I just sat behind and every time it got down to about 500 lbs I just plugged in and pwwwt pwwt pwwt, all the way across. The tanker was really great. They

⁴ A group of recreational hikers who organize themselves on-line through the Meet-Up group format. They organize and hike the trails of Davis County in Utah.

brought me all the way in to Indiana. The other part of the story was that it was my first ocean crossing, and as I went to put my anti-exposure suit on that morning in Germany, I ripped the neck gasket. I probably should have told somebody, but I didn't have a spare and they probably wouldn't have let me go, so I went ahead anyway. It was December in the North Atlantic, so

Lori: And then you got in that pinch and you were thinking, "Oops, I should have ..."

Brendon: I had a great plan – I'd just put my radar in sea mode and just keep track of all the ships. Yeah.

know, and if my single engine started to burp I'd just go by the ship and go "Here I am, watch out." I never saw one ship across the whole Northern Atlantic.

Other Guy: That's a cold time.

Brendon: I'd a been dead if I'd a gone in. There's no way I woulda survived.

Other Guy: Yeah.

Brendon: But, I did.

End of Story

I see this story as having multiple functions, as they all do. First, he is making a connection with this fellow hiker on the trail (community building). They find something in common (the military) and this man tells a story to her to prove that he is to be taken seriously in this common field they have found they share (establishing face). The story depicts him in a serious scene of transatlantic flying, in peril that he bravely deals with. At the end he uses the equalizer comment (see Part 3) to show his foolish judgment at having not put on his equalizer suit before such a dangerous mission. His statement, "I'd a been dead if I'd a gone in. There's no way I woulda survived" shows us his inexperience in flying over the north Atlantic and his limitations in judgment at the time, but because he comes out of it safely the drama adds to the

story while establishing him with a face that exhibits risk taking and foolhardiness by his decision to fly regardless of his torn suit. This establishes him with a face both brave and humble (acknowledgement of error) at the same time. He plugged into the conversational domino train with a narrative that helped him connect with another, build a face he was comfortable with, and add to the community conversation along the trail.

The transitional state of the domino train and the way participants play off of it according to the experiences and stories they have in common creates a ritual whose direction is always undetermined. Goffman points out, “Conversation has a life of its own and makes demands on its own behalf. It is a little social system with its own boundary-maintaining tendencies; it is a little patch of commitment and loyalty with its own heroes and its own villains.” (113-114). These heroes and villains are discovered as the conversation plays out and community is built as those present share experiences, help one another maintain face, validate each other, indirectly show new-comers how things are done, and find common ground from which to build upon.

Community-Oriented Functions: Sharing – A Way to Build Community

Within the outdoor recreation folk group I’ve identified that narratives often share warnings, suggestions for places to go, encouragement and moments of awe. Stahl and van Dijk note similar findings in their research where the personal narrative is instructive, cautionary, used to inform, advise, to alert and warn” (van Dijk 1980, Dolby-Stahl 1986). This sharing is an important aspect of community building within the outdoor recreation folk group as is manifested by the number of stories that play this role. When one tells a story of the beautiful view of Mount Superior from Twin Lakes Pass, they are often encouraging others to explore and enjoy something they all value (as well as building face and setting out social sorting cues). When one shares a story of how they made it up a certain climb, oft times it is followed by “if I

can do it, you can do it.” When one tells about a harrowing trip down the Snake River and the danger at a certain set of rapids during June, they may be warning the listener, or giving beta (experiential first-hand advice) so the other will not have similar difficulties. McAdams reminds us that “Life stories are psychosocial texts that are jointly crafted by the individual himself or herself and the culture within which the individual’s life has meaning” (2001). In this case, not only is the culture or community reflected in the tales and their functions, but the sharing of the narrative serves to actually build this community. Nelson discusses how in the course of human evolution, memory was specifically put to use for the sharing of knowledge across a social group (2003); within the outdoor recreation folk group this seems to be a major aspect of creating their community. These functions are a strand in the intricately interwoven braid of function including establishing face and self-oriented functions, but they also serve to unite.

In the following example we see Bill trying to share his experience in a way he hopes will encourage another to go to a trail he is recommending. The Davis County Hiking Meet-Up group meets at the mouth of Ogden Canyon for a group hike in May of 2014. The participants in this group are all different from those in the previous Davis County Meet-Up group hike. I discover that the group leader is a man named Bill whom I know from past hikes and snowshoe outings over the years. Bill is a gregarious man who enjoys taking others out into the wilderness. Bill tells this personal narrative with the express purpose of establishing face as someone who knows the area, as someone who served in a hero role, and to prove to me that the hike he is recommending is dramatic enough to deserve my attention. Two counts of social sorting, and one count of attempting to inspire awe and additional exploration.

Narrative 4

Bill: Diane and I were up on that trail and we were, you know, going from 22nd St. to Nevada View Point.

Lori: K

Bill: And she dropped her brand new pair of gloves that she didn't want to part with. And they had gone off the edge....

Lori: Was this in the winter or in the summer?

Bill: It was.....it was in the winter.... there was snow.

Lori: Winter gloves, ok.

Bill: Yeah . And so it was cold, she had these brand new gloves and they fell off the edge of the trail, I mean two feet from the edge of the trail. K. That's how....I mean, the trail is just gorgeous. When you get up there there is no other canyon out here that looks like that from that trail...it's just gorgeous.

Lori: I don't understand...

Bill: But anyway, she goes to reach for the gloves and I just freak. Cause I was afraid she would step off...

Lori: Because she was so close to the edge?

Bill: Yeah ,

Lori: Up on the cliffs?

Bill: Yeah. And in one of those areas it's just, it's just a skree field, and it made me.....it's just a drop. And when you, as you look down the skree field, all of the sudden a hundred – 200-feet down, it just ends. You can't see it. But when you look at it from the other side, like here, you look up there and you see these sheer cliffs, and that's where we were. And she went to step off and I was like "Stop! Stop!" Oh, she scared me so bad. So we went through the process of

getting a branch and trying to get the glove and we knocked it down further, I finally grabbed her belt.

Lori: And then held her down there?

Bill: And she leaned out. It was still nerve racking. I was so scared, cause it was just her and I and I didn't have any rope with me or nothing, and I was just like.....

Lori: Is a glove worth it?

Bill: YEAH AAA! I was so mad at her. But that part of the trail is not like anything you've seen. And the neat things it that when you get back over to Nevada View Point your like *holy cow, look at those cliffs underneath that trail*. I mean....

Lori: Didn't we.....we crossed some section of cliffs coming to Nevada View Point?

Bill: Yeah , But not like this section....This section is...it is....it is gorgeous. It is gorgeous.

Lori: K. Let's do it. Next time I see it up on the meet-up. I'll sign up.

Bill: I'll tell you what. I'll call you, cause I don't want to schedule it if you can't be there. I still have your info.

End of Story

In this narrative Bill attempts to build a face that validates him as a legitimate trail guide who knows beautiful trails in the area. He further builds a hero face by sharing how he helps his hiking companion save her glove. He uses the opportunity not only to build face, but also to share the awe and beauty of a trail he find extraordinarily beautiful, by encouraging others to share in the recommended trail he has pointed out. When Bill says, "I mean, the trail is just gorgeous. When you get up there there is no other canyon out here that looks like that from that trail...it's just gorgeous" he is drawing attention to the primary reason for his story-to share beta regarding a beautiful trail he'd like others to visit. Later when Bill says, "I was so mad at her.

But that part of the trail is not like anything you've seen. And the neat things it that when you get back over to Nevada View Point your like *holy cow, look at those cliffs underneath that trail*. I mean....” this point of his story is driven home again by his quick transition from being mad at his companion, straight into the beauty of the trail. Though the story of the lost glove infuses the story with a little drama and allows Bill to build a heroic face, these are side benefits he is managing, while the many references to the beauty of the trail indicate his primary narrative purpose.

Within the outdoor recreation folk group stories of this type that tell of beautiful sunsets, mountain views, unforgettable summer lakes, tumbling waterfalls and an endless list of additional natural land features serve to build community by showing others where to find beauty and how to gain rich experiences members of this folk group value.

Part 3

Self-Oriented Functions and Community-Oriented Functions: the Overlap

As we have discussed, personal narratives, often used to establish a participant's level of experience and expertise in this folk group, are an acceptable and indirect way for the narrator to share his exploits and build face. But I also identified tools within the personal narratives that served both the function of management of face and the function of building community. In reference back to the idea that, “It is often difficult to talk about self without appearing to be self-centered – a characteristic that is not valued in American culture” (Markham Shaw 303), Sawin (1992) points out that tellers are able to promote a positive self-image through the use of narrative and the reported speech of others; hence avoiding a violation of the restrictions on self-praise” (Shaw, 1993). But, through analysis of my collected narratives, I found that there is another communication technique that is used to soften the personal brag tale. This item of

interest braids both primary functional groups, namely self-oriented and community oriented functions, and assists with further navigation of this community.

The Equalizer

I found in my research that when a personal narrative paints the teller in a positive light, that story will often include reference to some equalizing fact, usually at the end of the story, that brings the protagonist down a notch by acknowledging an error of judgment, or some limit, in order to maintain a balance of face within the group. A story teller who paints himself in a strictly positive light may be quietly determined to be too arrogant, apparently a social faux pas in this folk group. I will call this *hero management*. I suggest that this is done as a way of navigating community. A self-deprecating comment naturally shows limits, questions judgment, or shows some type of weakness that allows an equilibrium with the self-promotion, which helps others to digest something that could be considered heavy in ego. This step is one that again includes the careful navigation of maintaining face as well as the contribution to societal relations. Though the equalizers are often small, off hand comments, the fact that I found them so often in such a small sampling of stories gives them great weight.

The following three stories will highlight how this is done. But in evaluating them I will also point out the basic functions I have discussed previously as well.

A group of seven people, including family and new acquaintances, of whom I am one, have traveled to the Goosebery Mesa yurt near St. George, Utah. Conversation and events have led to one participant, Jeff (the same one we have seen previously), proving himself to be a less experienced biker than others in the group. The plug-in to conversation travels from him walking his bike and ending up talking to “old people,” where he then shares a story with us that will help

him build face as being valued in other situations despite the fact that he hasn't performed at the level of others in the biking group today.

Narrative 5.1

Jeff: Robert would rather have gone (died) sky diving.

Lori: Who's Robert?

Jeff: Robert was the little old man I took care of while I was going to school.

Lori: Oh

Jeff: He, uh, he was a PhD teacher, so he was a teacher all his life, his wife was too, so they were intellectual and they, um, he had Parkinson's and they tried to do a research surgery on him and it totally killed his speech, and it just did way more damage than it did good, and so yeah, after that he couldn't talk, he couldn't do anything for the last 20 years of his life. He was really in good shape and he would have been Ok, but they tried to...for science.

Lori: Were there any repercussions for them...the people who did it and screwed it up?

Jeff: Uh uh – none, because there was one of those waiver things and it was disclosed as purely experimental.

Lori: Why did he do it? Why did he let them do it?

Jeff: They just believed in advancing science, and it was worth a try. And, he ended up dying from one of the other caretakers feeding him something too big and he choked to death.

Lori: Really?

Jeff: Yeah . So he choked on it, and then they brought the ambulance down, which was stupid, his wife was really upset.

Lori: Why, because he was already dead, or what?

Jeff: They had both said, “If we are going we don’t want to be kept alive by artificial means,” so they took him up there for a couple of days and then his wife said, “take him off and let him die.”

I was supposed to be one of his pall bearers at the funeral, and I got the address wrong.

Group (laughs)

Jeff: Yeah , that sucked...

Lori: Is that really true?

Emily: Yeah it was. It was a sad thing.

Group: Sad supportive noises.

Jeff: So I show up at the funeral home and they are like “Oh, it’s up at Bear Lake”, and I’m like, hmmm, that sucks. I’ve got 15 minutes to get there.

Group: laughs

Lori: Oh, bummer. Well, at least he was dead, so he didn’t know you missed his funeral.

Jeff: Yeah,

Emily: His wife did though and she was really mad.

Jeff: Yeah . She gave me an earful.

Lori: What did you say to that?

Jeff: I said: it was your 90-year-old sister that told me when and where. She argued “I did not.”

[said in an old lady voice]

Lori: Cause she had dementia and she’d forgotten? [group laughs]

Jeff: Yeah , when you are dealing with a bunch of 90 year olds it’s a hard game to win.

In this story we can see Jeff takes the topic of “old people” that has been introduced, and then shares a personal narrative where he had an important life relationship with an older person.

The conversation had turned from old people to adrenaline sports such as sky diving and base

jumping. Jeff ties these two ideas together in order to introduce his “old person” narrative that will help him build a positive face while tying into the conversational domino train. His final comments about missing the funeral, serve to put him in the light of making an unfortunate error. This is the comment I identify as the *equalizer*. Though the story seeks to build face in one way (he was valued by his “old people”) he tempers the face-building with the equalizer statement at the end, which is a community-building skill of balance. This equalizer statement allows a person to tell a face building story and then shows a limitation or error at the end to neutralize any excessively positive spin others might find heavy handed.

The following story is the second example of this hero management tool. During discussion among this same group at the yurt Emily, Jeff’s wife, makes a statement that she doesn’t like to “feel out of control.” She then tells a story that she feels will be appropriate in this group, because it is action adventure based and serves to prove her previous point (face) of getting out of a situation where she feels “out of control.”

Narrative 5.2

Emily: We rented a cabin and rented snowmobiles for the day. So each couple had one and we rode from this cabin over to Bear Lake and had some hot chocolate, and then we were coming back and on the trails we go to the basins just to ride the snowmobiles. And, Liza and Sheldon, he’s from West Yellowstone, so they are totally comfortable on them, so they just go shooting up these huge...I mean it’s like straight up these hills. Jeff and I never do this, so I was very uncomfortable and at first I’m like *let’s not even do that* and he’s like, *we’ll just take it easy and do little ones*, so we start off with some little ones and then he’s getting more and more comfortable, and I’m getting a little bit more comfortable, but...so we shoot up this one and Rachel and Aaron are behind us on a snowmobile, following us, and so we go shooting up and it

was the steepest one we had done. We go up and it was making me really nervous, we get up to the top and it doesn't level out, it's a drop off and it's steeper and longer on the other side and you couldn't see it coming at all, going up this thing, so we get to the top, and we didn't even touch, we just start flying over,

Jeff: (laughs)

Em: and it scared me so much, I could just see the whole thing coming...

Jeff: She screams and shoves off

Em: I jumped off the back of the snowmobile because I'm thinking "He's going to roll this all the way down and I don't want to go with him." So I turn and jump up the hill...

Jeff: She yells "So long loser."

Group: laughs

Em: I land in snow up to my chest, and then it hits me that Rachel and Aaron are right behind us. And I am right where they will land. And so, then I'm terrified. I'm thinking "I just saved my life" and then I'm thinking "I'm going to die for sure."

Jeff: Laughs

Em: And so I'm trying to move and everything I do I'm just sinking further and getting more stuck and I can't see over the ledge. They can't see me. So I'm just praying. I just start praying. And they luckily saw us disappear and slowed down just enough that when they got up there they could stop. So they stopped and were able to throw me some...

Lori: Throw you a rope?

Em: Stuff to pull me up. Yeah!

Lori: And did you land it ok down the other side (to Jeff)?

Jeff: It was awesome.

Em: He did, He was just fine. It was wonderful. He loved it.

Jeff: I went down the other side and they had me go clear down around to get back up. It was awesome. It was amazing.

[Group is laughing through the last part of the story.]

Jeff: That “so long loser” hurt my feelings. (He laughs along with everyone else.)

End of Story

Emily’s story includes other participants and establishes not only an acceptable face for her (daring, other outdoor adventure experience, action oriented), but a favorable face for others as well (capable, adventurous, helpful). Toward the end she throws in the comment “I’m going to die for sure” because of something she did, which throws a question upon her own judgment. This is the self-deprecating equalizer that balances a positive face building narrative with a humanizing factor so the audience does not deem the narrator to be overly arrogant. This is her hero management.

The third example of the “equalizer” as a hero management tool is shown in the following story.

On another hike with the Davis County Hiking Meet-Up Group done on the East Mountain Wilderness Park trail in Kaysville May, 2014. I am speaking to a woman I don’t know on the trail. There is a man along the trail, unrelated to the Meet-Up group, who is searching for his lost dog. We have seen him a number of times and are feeling empathetic and concerned for him and his dog. The conversation between us naturally comes around to dog stories, and she ties into this topic with a story of a time she lost her dog.

Narrative 5.3

Juliette: So me and my dog were out hiking and I could see a storm coming in, so I turned around, but it came in really fast. And when the wind and the hail hit it was ...the wind was so noisy, I was calling for her, but I don't think she could hear me. It was...I lost her for about 3 hours. It was a blizzard, and I was just sick. I thought, I can't leave. I can't go home. I can't leave her out here. She'll die.

Lori: Yeah , what did you do?

Juliette: I stayed and I looked, and I searched and I finally found her. What I've learned with her, is if I actually just wait long enough, she always comes back to the last place she saw me,

Lori: She's smart.

Juliette: But sometimes it takes 4 or 5 hours.

Lori: Really?

Juliette: Yeah

Lori: It's a good idea to put on the bell. (Her dog has a bell on its collar and it jingles with every step it takes).

Juliette: That's why I have the bell. I also have....I bought a GPS tracking system for her collar, but it's a cheap one and it's not very good so I don't use it. I'd like a good one, but they are \$800.

I notice two things about the function of her story. The first is that it establishes her in a positive light as a caring owner of her dog. When she says, "It was a blizzard, and I was just sick. I thought, I can't leave. I can't go home. I can't leave her out here. She'll die" we see that despite horrible conditions she is unwilling to leave and seek shelter for herself when she is unable to find her dog. Second, because she has painted herself in this positive light, as the protagonist

proving she will go above and beyond to save her dog, in the end she makes an equalizing comment. We see this in her final comment where she says “That’s why I have the bell. I also have....I bought a GPS tracking system for her collar, but it’s a cheap one and it’s not very good so I don’t use it. I’d like a good one, but they are \$800.” Here she acknowledges that she has limits as to what she will spend to track her dog. She is willing to buy a bell and a “cheap” GPS system for her dog, but \$800 is too much.

In these stories you can see the establishment of face, conversational tie in, and community building through equalizing comments. These examples of personal narratives illustrate these self-oriented and community-oriented functions repeatedly, but if we take it a step further and look at what traits the personal narratives exemplify, we can get a peek into the traits the members of this folk group value.

Part 4

Values of the Outdoor Recreation Folk Group Established via Narrative

What constitutes face in a given group will show us what characteristics the group, and in all cases, the individual, deem important. Robinson says, “It (personal narrative sharing) is a semi-ritualized means of reaffirming both one’s personal identity and socially sanctioned beliefs and values...”(64). After coding the values of the tales I collected by identifying the main themes of the stories and how often those themes appeared, I found the following values repeated themselves most often: 1. Experience 2. Caring about Wildlife and 3. Toughness.

First we’ll look at experience. Most of the tales shared illustrate past experience in the field. Clearly having experience in past outdoor recreation adventuring helps to position the narrator as someone who is a legitimate participant in the group rather than a poser. The importance of sharing experience tales within this group plays other roles as well, such as the

social sifting we discussed earlier. Experience narratives illustrate for the audience the type of sports the narrator participates in, their dedication by time and involvement to the folk group, how serious they can be taken as participants of the folk group, as well as to what level others might trust their expertise, and naturally this throws them into the sorting process of quiet determining among participants as to whether the narrator may be a potential fit for future participation with any given member of the group. Personal narratives illustrating past outdoor recreation experience provide heavy legitimacy to the narrator. This is the overwhelming winner. In second place was the idea of caring about wildlife: Three of the 15 tales had aspects where the narrator wanted to specifically show that he/she was a legitimate part of the group because they felt a reverence for life of all types. Whether it was a fish, a spider or a dog, personal narratives that show the narrator as one who respects nature and those who call it home, help validate membership in this folk group. Often the choice to participate in human powered recreation over choices to bring machines onto the land to tear up the ground, to pollute with exhaust and noise, and to displace flora and fauna by the intrusion, are based on this respect and awareness. For participants to use their narratives to show that they can be taken seriously as a part of the group because they understand and honor nature, including all forms of life, appears to be key in proving credibility within the group.

The third most oft seen value was that of being tough. There are few outdoor recreation pursuits that don't require a strong body and mind to participate. Strength allows a participant to overcome fear, to embrace speed or heights, to live in primitive conditions and survive, and to power up hills on a mountain bike, paddle rivers, or climb cliff faces or miles of terrain. In order to participate in outdoor recreation activities on a regular basis, and thus be considered a

legitimate member of this folk group, proving or illustrating strength and toughness is a key value. Without it your lifespan in the group is severely limited.

These themes, found in the personal narratives, help us to define what characteristics are valued in the outdoor recreation folk group. In a larger research study we would no doubt be introduced to other values of the group. Understanding these values can be significant in understanding the most basic tenants of value to these “folks” and thus show us how to gain trust, market to them, speak their language and communicate within their ranks.

Conclusion

The stories the outdoor recreationalists in my research pool shared among themselves while recreating have been identified as playing an important role in orienting self within the group by establishing and maintaining a “face” the individual wants to portray, and by building community through strategically supportive sharing, validation, teaching and connection. Unlike the adrenaline tales about exotic travels and death defying feats found in the glossy magazines, most of the narratives shared between members of this folk group took on more mundane themes as they proceeded to accomplish more complex issues such as “hero management” with use of the “equalizer” and social sorting through back-channel coding. Within the outdoor recreation folk group, where undertaking the recreation activities are usually done with other participants for safety, association and logistical reasons (i.e. needing a belay partner), this back-channel sorting goes on within the group through narrative, helping to define who might have similar interest in specific sports and who has the appropriate skill level to be a match with any given person.

The values of the outdoor recreation folk group can be determined by looking at the values we see illustrated in the personal narratives as the members create and maintain face.

Value patterns I found in the personal narratives included such things as past experience in outdoor recreation which positions the narrator as someone who is a legitimate participant in the group rather than a poser. Caring about wildlife, which legitimizes the participant as being in-tune and caring for the natural world. Being tough on the trail was prominent in the stories establishing the protagonist as someone who can walk the talk. Being able to take action, knowing an area, showing bravery, and illustrating how to use gear were other values that were manifest in the stories and thus we see are important to those in this folk group.

The totality of this research shows the vital role personal narratives play in creating community within this folk group, and the importance of positioning oneself as a legitimate participant. This foundational understanding defines an invisible network of navigation for success in the group, which is beneficial to understanding how the group functions, the importance of reputation and community within the group, and the careful balance of self and other. These understandings help us to see what is important and thus allow us to better understand how to manage, interact, and market within this folk group, but in addition it also sheds an important light on community building, specific to this folk group, but similar patterns could be determined in the larger community as a whole. By using collections of personal narratives to pinpoint the values of a group valuable information is acquired as to what truly matters and defines these folks, not what society may claim their values to be.

Unlike the quantitative research that is often undertaken in the study of outdoor recreation from the natural lands management and natural resource stand point, this qualitative research from a folklore perspective adds a dimension that gives insight that could not be quantitatively identified. Research regarding outdoor recreation is often undertaken by departments concerned with land management, societal demand of outdoor recreation, policy

issues, and resource allocation. These hard sciences rely on quantitative data. “Outdoor recreation research has a strong tradition of being an applied science with a positivistic scientific perspective” (Kaltenborn 1993). Even when research has been done on outdoor recreation within the social sciences the studies often use quantitative data collected by large-scale surveys (for example, Ferriss, 1970). While quantitative research is the preferred methodology used in the hard sciences and even the social sciences on this topic, we see here how qualitative research can add valuable information to that conversation.

My folkloric approach looks at the context of the narratives, and the narrative functions of participants in the field, providing a fresh perspective on the inside workings of the community, including identifying how participants covertly position themselves, how they build community, and what they actually value over what they might claim to value in a quantitative survey. I have also identified things that participants may very well be unaware of such as the “equalizer” statement, so naturally employed in covert hero management; as well as bringing to light the social positioning that quantitative research would most likely not get participants to confess to, either because they are unaware they are doing it, or to admit to it would build an undesirable face. Either way, this qualitative approach has garnered insights and information that could not have been identified through quantitative methodological approaches, but the study of which can inform future qualitative and quantitative research. By watching, listening, recording and analyzing in a natural context I have engaged in an ethnographic approach that unveils in a way surveys, interviews, and more up-front questioning is unable to get to the bottom of with any effectiveness.

The function of the personal narrative within the outdoor recreation folk group has proven to be diverse, entrenched, and key to navigating and creating the community. Before

completing this research I knew stories were prevalent, but had no idea the broad role they played in the basic functioning of the folk group, or the understanding and insight we would gain from the narratives themselves. Though these 15 collected stories are a miniscule sampling compared to the millions of personal narratives shared in the larger folk group of outdoor recreation participants in the United States, my personal experience in traveling across the country and participating with other recreationalists around the country, show me that the sharing of personal narratives within this folk group is a crucial and universal cohesive aspect within the group, regardless of the location. For this purpose I feel the microcosm is reasonably representative of the functions you would expect to find in other samplings. This foray into the analysis of the function of the personal narrative within the outdoor recreation folk group has shown how much we can learn about people, social networks, values, social positioning and the power of nuances within ritual speech for establishing the very social fabric in which we function.

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Story Appendix:

This is an appendix of the personal narratives collected that were not directly used in the paper as samples.

Situational Context: A group of seven people, of whom I am one, have traveled to the Gooseberry Mesa yurt near St. George, Utah. One evening while playing a game of *Catch Phrase* to pass the evening hours the word *porcupine* comes up in the game as a word to describe to the group. This word, along with the fact that we are currently in a yurt, reminds one of the group members of a time they were in a yurt that was being eaten by porcupines. The situation at hand thus instigates the story, but the reason it was approved for sharing, or in other words, the reason this story makes it through the face filter and is actually told, is because it establishes the narrator as having previous experience in yurting, and thus helps to establish the outdoor recreation credentials of the teller. In addition the tale has an element of excitement and the unknown that will entertain others in the group. Both of these items make the story an acceptable personal narrative for the group, because it works to the benefit of the narrator and establishing his/her previous experience and thus educates those around him that he/she is not a first timer at this, while it should be noted that the others in the group were first timers. The entertainment value of the story creates a sense of community and sharing among those sitting in the yurt that evening.

Story shared by E.H. (13 years old) and continued by his mother L.J. in a joint story telling from two different perspectives – one providing more detail. Story was told to J.T.

E. H.: Ok, so we went up to this other yurt and there were like these weird like (makes chomping sounds) sounds, and so

J.T. You were inside the yurt? And you heard it outside the yurt?

EH - Yeah

L.J. : Sleeping and it's totally in the middle of the night.

EH – Yeah , and so we went outside and couldn't figure out what it was and so did we ummm call some people? (looks to his mom Lori Lee) Mom.

L.J. Yeah

EH: We called some people and they came up and they found the porcupines. There were two of them. eating the wood that was holding up our yurt...

J.T. Wow

EH: And then the two people that came up shot the two porcupines.

J.T. Is it illegal to shoot porcupines?

L.J. : I don't think so, plus it was on their property, so...

EH: Yeah . So they shot the 2 porcupines, so me and Christian both slept through the shooting...

J.T. Oh really?

EH: Yeah , and Yup.

J.T. So what did they do with them after they shot them?

EH: Left them there and me and Christian got some porcupine quills and stuff.

L.J. I had no idea that porcupines ate wood.

J.T. Me either.

L.J. So it was freaky, freaky, I mean it sounded like something big, like some big animal was trying to eat up through the floor, so it was totally bizarre, and we had no idea what it could be.

J.T. Yeah , and you would think that they would want good wood, not treated construction wood.

Lori : Yeah , but apparently I think there is something in like the trex decking stuff that they...

J.T. that attracts them?

L.J. Yeah , likesalt or something in the finishes or something

J.T. So was it Trex that they were chewing on?

L.J. Yeah , I mean it was underneath the wood...I can't remember it now because it's been a few years, but it seems like they were saying that the treated kind of wood was particularly yummy to them.

J.T. Makes affirmative hums (hmmmm. hmmmm.)

L.J. But it was bizarre because we were freaking out. Christian and Ethan actually slept through it and Gene and I were just trying to figure out what to do, right? Because what if something eats up through the floor in the middle of the night, and what was it... a giant tiger? (laughs)

E.H. says an animal name at the same time Lori says tiger so it's unclear what he says, but they both laugh a bit.

L.J. So we like...there was a coffee maker there so we heated up some hot water and poured it through the, like where we could hear them, poured it through the floor boards of the yurt...

J.T. Yeah , uh huh!

L.J. hoping it would...

J.T. dissuade them?

L.J. Yeah , hoping they would run away, then he went outside and he got down below the yurt to look in there, it wasn't as exposed as this one is – Yeah know, so here you can just look under, but he could just see these eyes, these shining eyes....

J.T. NO WAY!

L.J. BUT WE COULDN'T TELL WHAT IT WAS! So we are still so freaked. So I'm calling the yurt owners, there was a little cell phone reception...

J.T. What time?

L.J. This was like 1:00 in the morning

J.T. Oh Goll

L.J. I don't know what it is but something is eating your yurt. I thought you might want to know. Trying to be diplomatic about it all. So they were like, "OK we'll be up in a bit". They showed up about 20 minutes later. ... with their guns.

J.T. Wow! So they were close by then..

L.J. Yeah . So we stayed inside...This one was up in Park City so you could actually drive up to it. We hadn't, that was actually Ethan's first backpack trip.

J.T. hmmm

L.J. and he had his little teeny batman backpack, it was his first backpack trip...

E.H. I was just a young 'un.

L.J. We made him pack in his own treats. (laughs) Um, and they, anyway, so they shot it.

J.T. Did they have big lights that they shown in there?

L.J. Yeah , and when they shot them and pulled them out, they were HUGE porcupines. (emphasizes huge) I mean they were mother porcupines...

E.H. Big, fat ...

J.T : Did they climb under there and pull them out?

L.J. No, I think they shot at them and chased them out

E.H. Yeah , because one of them was more down the road.

L.J. Yeah

E.H. One of them got a little bit down the road and then they shot them down there.

L.J. Yeah , they definitely killed them both.

Situational Context: The Meet-Up hiking group is sitting at the top of the hike eating cheese and drinking wine while taking in the sunset. Stories are being told about various things and this guy I don't know says, "I have a story" and proceeds to tell the following story. Clearly he wanted to be involved with group and what was going on around him (community building/involvement). The previous conversation had been about getting hurt on the trail, and so he chose to tell a story about his father getting hurt. The story shows his dad in a brave/tough light while also showing the group that he and his family ride dirt bikes. I feel like this story presents two aspects of face

for him. First that he recreates outdoors in more than just this forum, and second, that he comes from a tough family. The wind is loud so I don't get all the words on the recording.

Dude: Anyway, so my dad around this corner....snowed....truck was coming up the other side. He just slide out. I pretty much just had to lift the bike off of him before the 4-wheeler come over.

Lori: You guys were on 4-wheeler?

Dude: No. We were on motorcycles.

Bill: My neighbor busted up his ankle on that Sessions road, but he, they were coming up from Farmington side and he did it last fall. Were you up there last fall?

Dude: Uh....No,..it was like a spring time thing.

Bill: Oh was it.

Dude: Yeah . Anyway, he dislocated his shoulder and we had to ride another 20 miles to get down from where we were at.

Bill: He road down on the Bike?

Dude: He road down on the bike with a broken shoulder and collarbone.

Lori: Motorbike?

Dude: And I know for a fact that he was in pain the entire time.

Bill: Oh, he had to be. Did he (can't understand because the wind blocked out the recording).

Dude: Uh No.

Bill: He didn't?

Dude: He's not that kind of person.

Bill: Dang! I would have been. They would have heard me....they would have heard me....in North Salt Lake.

Situational Context: These two stories are told along the Kaysville hiking trails with the Davis County Hiking Meet-Up group. I am hiking with the man who told the story about his flight across the Atlantic. Conversation continues, after the first story, about other things he'd done in his life besides the air force. We talked about RE because I am a Realtor and he had his real estate license at one time. He went into detail as to why he didn't feel he was cut out for RE. We discussed the current state of RE. Finding this common area of interest is a conversational plug in for the story, but you'll notice he tells two stories and both back up the claim that he is not cut out for real estate. He uses the following personal narratives to connect with me and to prove his point and establish the face he has proclaimed for himself.

Man: I remember I sold this one house, I was the listing agent, but in order for it to pass the VA inspection there had to be a gravel underneath the foundation, lowering it , guess what I got to do? What am I doing this for?

Lori: How come you had to?

Man: Otherwise it wouldn't get sold.

Lori: And they left it up to you?

Man: Yup.

Lori: Why didn't you say, "That's not my job description. Hire someone."

Man: Well.... I needed the money

Lori: So you were okay with it? (both laugh)

Man: Well, one guy finally said, just get down there and spread some gravel about 5 or 6 feet around, the inspector won't look for the....

Lori: Seriously? Did you do that?

Man: I can't remember. I think I did most of it, cause I mean it was there for a purpose. What a pain in the butt. I should have been paid. You are selling this house. This is your house, you need to take care of that. But I didn't know what I was doing.

Lori: That's certainly how it would be now.

Man: Right, but I didn't know anything about financing... I met this one couple and they were interested in this house I was doing, and then another guy in the office basically got them to buy the house and everything. I was kind of pissed off and he was like, look man you've got to be able to sell the financing to them. And he was right. Yeah know, cause he was able to sit down, "your house is worth this much, we'll sell it and get this much out of it and then we'll put this much out of it and put this much down..."

Lori: Kind of slimy of him to undercut you....

Man: Well he was a slime dog anyway, but...

Lori: Yeah , Darn it.

Man: Ah...Who knows, Yeah ... but in the end I was like, Yeah , he knew what he was doing. That's how you learn sometimes. People school Yeah .