

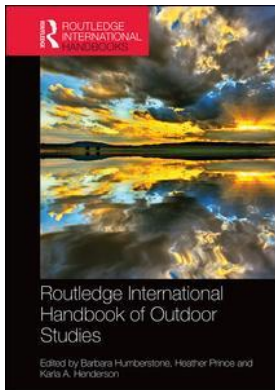
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# Foundation myths and the roots of adventure education in the Anglosphere

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The field of outdoor studies has its share of foundation narratives, including some focused on the inspiration and efforts of admired founders. Examples in the Anglophone world include Lord Baden-Powell and Kurt Hahn, both of whom, with good reason, are credited with great influence. As might be expected in the case of organisations framed as popular movements, it is not difficult to find somewhat heroic accounts, and even the most hagiographic interpretations of influential figures can help explain elements of outdoor practice and discourse. Foundation myths, Rippin and Fleming (2006) point out, are not only at the heart of Western civilisation but often central to organisational culture. While myths, by definition, probably overemphasise the influence of a single individual, read critically they can help explain and interpret current practice and rhetoric.

Advocates of more than one approach to organised outdoor education attribute philosophies or ascribe current practice to a founder, usually male. Lord Baden-Powell is one obvious founding figure, if one accepts that the Scouting Movement has contributed directly and indirectly to at least some forms of current outdoor education. Kurt Hahn, a founder of the Outward Bound movement is also a contender. The style of programme he introduced has long attracted adherents and also the attention of critics (see, for example, Drasdo, 1972). Introducing the most-cited outdoor education article published in the last twenty years, Hattie and colleagues (1997) take an adherent line:

*Most researchers trace the origin of modern adventure education to Kurt Hahn (1957). In 1941 Hahn devised the first Outward Bound program for the Blue Funnel Shipping Line to reduce the loss of lives due to sinkings of their ships in the Atlantic Ocean. A month-long course was designed to accelerate the development of independence, initiative, physical fitness, self-reliance, and resourcefulness. The success of these programs led Hahn to support the establishment of Outward Bound schools in England and then throughout the world; by 1995 there were 48 schools on five continents. In addition, Hahn set up many other schools . . . and helped to establish the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and the network of United World Colleges. These schools emphasize the role of character, service, challenge,*

and physical endeavor, and many have adopted the theme espoused by William James (1967) in his search for the ‘moral equivalent of war.’ Hahn claimed that the aim of Outward Bound was to ‘enthral and hold the young through active and willing Samaritan service, demanding care and skill, courage and endurance, discipline and initiative.’ (p. 44, my emphasis)

Hahn has undoubtedly influenced some approaches to adventure education, although even within the Anglosphere different influences on outdoor (and adventure) education have manifested themselves in different regions at different times, resulting in a diversity of approaches and philosophies (Lynch, 1999; Brookes, 2002).

Not all that is attributed to Hahn is supported by historical evidence (Veevers & Allison, 2011), although far less has been written at length about Hahn than about Lord Baden-Powell and the Scouting Movement. In the case of Baden-Powell, scholarship has been both extensive – Jeal’s (2007) definitive biography runs to more than 600 pages – and somewhat contested, particularly around themes of militarism, imperialism, masculinity, homophobia and racism (Macleod, 1983; Rosenthal, 1986; Springhall, 1987; Summers, 1987; Salzman, 1992; Dedman, 1993; MacDonald, 1993; Pryke, 1998). Scouting emerged earlier than Outward Bound, at the beginning of the 20th century in the context of British imperial struggles in Africa. It would be surprising if its origins did not reflect beliefs and values of the time. Outward Bound’s formation, shaped by concerns about survival of merchant marine crews in lifeboats during the Second World War, was somewhat different, reflected in its use of courses of a set length rather than ongoing involvement in a social movement. While the early emphasis of Scouting rhetoric was on instilling character, Outward Bound tended to emphasise character as an emergent by-product of self-actualisation (Millikan, 2006).

An early film about the original Outward Bound School, *The Blue Peter* (Rilla, 1954), exhibits elements of Outward Bound absent or overlooked in Hattie *et al.*’s (1997) introduction. Although from the merchant marine rather than the military, staff are uniformed and addressed by rank. The boys are required to ‘fall out, on the double’. Important characters are defined by wartime experience. There is laughter at a foreign name. A boy who enquires about visitor days is asked if he can’t get along without his mother. Women appear on the margins, but the courses are male only and run by males. Rosenthal (1986) has pointed out that the evident success of Scouting for boys can be explained by its appeal rather than its achievements. *The Blue Peter* shows the extent to which Outward Bound, by accident or design, appealed to prevailing beliefs.

Foundation narratives become myths when they over-attribute to one individual aspect of programmes contributed to by hundreds of individuals with diverse motivations and beliefs, which over time depart significantly from the original vision. Moreover, as Hoberman (1995) observed:

The Olympic (1894), Scouting (1908), and Esperanto (1887) movements . . . have all benefitted from benign myths of origin rooted in reverential attitudes toward the personal qualities of their respective founding fathers and the salvational doctrines they created. One result of such cults of personality is a ‘halo effect’ that can confer on such movements a degree of immunity to critical examination. (p. 3)

Scouting has seen its share of criticism since those comments were made, but the value of critical examination remains, with less emphasis on uncovering what a founding figure believed (cf. Jeal, 2007; Veevers & Allison, 2011) than on what influence they have

had. In this chapter, I explore two examples of how insights from historical studies can point to potentially enlightening critiques of contemporary programmes or rhetoric, first, through militaristic influences and, second, in the role anxieties play about youth and masculinity.

### **Militarism in contemporary outdoor programmes**

Some forms of outdoor education are undoubtedly used as part of military training, but most outdoor education is not overtly militaristic. The Scouting Movement adopted some military trappings, such as uniforms. Dedman (1993) argued it was less militarily conceived than popularly supposed, but Summers (1987) contended that, at grass-roots level, it was more militaristic than its founders intended. Both Scouting and Outward Bound have changed over time. Freeman (2010) describes shifts, albeit contested, within Outward Bound as it moved away from a Hahnian legacy:

[T]he movement combined some older aspects of muscular Christianity with more historically specific concerns, rooted in the experience and aftermath of war. The faith of the movement's early leaders in the promotion of character and leadership ensured the maintenance of training programmes based on exposure to challenging and potentially dangerous situations, and the explicit promotion of 'Character Training Through Adventure'. However, by the mid-1960s, the language of character and leadership, and other aspects of the Hahnian educational vision, had come under sustained challenge from both outside and within the organisation, and the rhetoric of character-training was gradually abandoned, replaced with an emphasis on the 'softer' aims of 'self-discovery' and 'personal growth'. (p. 23, in-text citations omitted)

Changes in emphasis notwithstanding, 20th century Anglo societies are so steeped in historical military influences (Howard, 2001 orig. 1977) that their elimination from adventure education may be partial: '[militarism is] simply an acceptance of the values of the military subculture as the dominant values of society: a stress on hierarchy and subordination in organization, on physical courage and self-sacrifice in personal behaviour, on the need for heroic leadership in situations of extreme stress . . .' (p. 109).

A distinctive form of militarism shaped Anglosphere outdoor education. The modern experiences of land war of those nations were almost entirely on foreign soil (Bourne, 1997; Dyer, 2004). In earlier times irregular war, or small-scale local wars, have characterised almost all human societies (Dyer, 2004). Adventure education, a sub-section of outdoor education, borrowed ontological and epistemological frames from expeditionary military adventures: through a presumption that environments will be unfamiliar and by using an assumption that leadership requires skills and personal qualities – the right stuff – rather than local knowledge. The British (Schools) Exploring Society application form for leaders, for example, does not emphasise local knowledge and experience (British Exploring Society, 2014). The idea of the transformative journey into the unknown is, of course, a universal template in popular culture (Vogler, 2007; Smelser, 2009), no doubt contributing to acceptance of adventure education, but it does not explain why leaders should not have a good knowledge of their workplace.

These historical influences can partly explain specific programme elements, such as map-reading exercises, which use topographical maps, rather than wayfinding based on familiarity and landmarks. One reason to examine to consider alternatives, since women are now included

in many of these programmes, is that females do better at landmark-based way finding than the more geometric military style (Schmitz, 1999).

The venture-into-the-unknown model has consequences for curriculum aims and purposes, particularly understandings of place, but it also has a material effect on safety and safety planning, particularly when programmes define leadership responsibilities around personal qualities and skills rather than local knowledge. Following a tragedy on the Mangatepopo River in New Zealand in which six students and one teacher drowned, the Independent Review Team reported: '[the] programs emphasized skills, adventure, and group processes more than environmental understanding through outdoor activities . . . programs focussed on environmental knowledge and understanding are inherently more likely to be attentive to environmental circumstances and hazards' (Brookes, Corkill QC & Smith, 2009, p. 36). Following the death of a student on a World Challenge Expedition in Vietnam, the leader reportedly: 'wouldn't have chosen that route if [he] had known what it was like . . . [the leader] who had led expeditions to Malaysia, Kenya and Madagascar, had not taken an expedition up the 9,800ft (3,000m) Fansipan mountain before' (Judd, 2001). Many other examples of failures due to lack of local environmental knowledge have been reported (Brookes, 2011).

A second implication of militarism in outdoor education derives from Dyer's observations about military training (2004):

[T]he armed forces of every country can still take almost any young male civilian and in only a few weeks turn him into a soldier with all the right reflexes and attitudes. Their recruits usually have no more than twenty years' experience of the world, most of it as children, while the armies have had all of history to practise and perfect their techniques. (p. 31)

He points out that the principal focus is on changing values and loyalties. The almost unmatched effectiveness of military training, particularly in comparison to most education, is reason to consider what power outdoor education programmes derive from militaristic methods even when no militaristic ends are evident, some signs of militarism are absent, and foundation myths direct attention elsewhere.

Boot camp programmes for young offenders obviously borrow from military training, but programmes that seem to eschew military influences might still be understood as working in much the same way. The *Brat Camp* series of TV shows (Whittaker & Abood, 2005), versions of which have aired around the world, focused not on induction into a military organisation, but on US-based programmes intended to be therapeutic for troubled teens. A report by the United States Government Accountability Office on deaths in such programmes (Kutz & O'Connell, 2007) should be required reading for anyone studying such programmes, but here I consider only whether there are elements of military training in programmes that superficially eschew it. In the first series of *Brat Camp*, staff are referred to by (lower case) monikers such as rhythm otter, bright dragon, mountain spirit, silver heart and stone bear. Staff appear never to raise their voices. Staff do not wear uniforms, and look more like the hippies who protested the Vietnam war than the soldiers who fought it. There appear to be no military drills. In short, there is a distinct – perhaps deliberate – absence of the visible signs of boot camp. Nevertheless there is a form to the experience portrayed that fits with some essential elements of military boot camp, including the strangeness of the situation for participants; complete lack of any alternative courses of action for the participants (other than compliance), control by staff of the explanatory frameworks and language, and complete dependence of participants on staff for material needs and comfort. A ritual removal of jewellery, distinctive clothing, and other symbols of individual personality

parallel boot camp, as does the lack of contact with the outside world. Physical hardships, daily routines and exercise, insistence on attention to detail and a steady diet of small triumphs are also features of military training (Dyer, 2004), and involve, to an extent, devices not available to those conducting everyday schooling or even parenting. None of these observations is definitive, of course, and in any case they are based on what the filmmakers were allowed to film and what they chose to include in the programme, but they point firmly in the direction of militaristic methods, particularly those that employ what are now understood as coercive or persuasive social situations (see, for example, Ross & Nisbett, 1991; Zimbardo, 2007).

### Playing on anxieties in the community

Outward Bound and, especially, the Scouts were conceived and gained traction from anxieties about perceived ‘declines’ in youth, particularly in masculinity. Neither programme relied on or required what would count today as evidence in the social sciences for the problems they constructed or the solutions they advanced, but instead appealed very successfully to popular beliefs and concerns:

It may be, however, that masculinity is always in crisis, at least in the United States during the twentieth century . . . the decade preceding the introduction of Outward Bound to the United States was marked by a high level of anxiety about the disappearance of manly virtue . . . [l]ike the Boy Scouts, Outward Bound was but one of many responses to a crisis of masculinity . . . [m]agazine articles that introduced the Outward Bound idea to the America public bore titles such as ‘Is Our Youth Going Soft?’, ‘Character, the Hard Way’, ‘Marshmallow Becomes a Man’, ‘Outward Bound: How to Build a Man the Hard Way’ and ‘Rugged Camps Turn Boys in Iron Men’; clearly articulating Outward Bound as a method for shoring up American manhood. (Millikan, 2006, pp. 842–843)

Citing a speech made by Hahn in 1960, McKenzie (2003) records that he saw physical fitness, self-discipline, craftsmanship and service as necessary because of ‘declines of a diseased civilization’ (p. 9). Freeman (2010) observes that, in the early years, the Outward Bound movement ‘combined some older aspects of muscular Christianity with more historically specific concerns, rooted in the experience and aftermath of war’ (p. 23), echoing, he noted, earlier Edwardian concerns about the declining character of young men.

A great deal has been written about the connections between the Scout Movement’s foundation and ideas of manliness. According to Baden-Powell, ‘God made men to be men . . . We badly need some training for our lads if we are to keep up manliness in our race instead of lapsing into a nation of soft, sloppy cigarette suckers’ (cited by Warren, 1800, p. 203).

Anxieties about youth recur every generation, which makes them a natural focus for educational rhetoric of any stripe. Winton (2008) has argued that more recent popular arguments for character education gained adherents in spite of ‘conceptual problems and a limited knowledge base’ because the rhetoric character education appealed to ‘Canadian and American insecurities about social cohesion, academic achievement, economic competitiveness, civic engagement, personal safety, moral decline, and the loss of a common culture’ (p. 307).

On the face of it, specific anxieties about manliness have receded. Both Scouting and Outward Bound have moved away from gendered rhetoric. Here I consider what role contemporary anxieties about youth might have in driving support for outdoor programmes, and whether those concerns remain gendered.

Gill's (2007/2008) *No Fear: Growing Up in a Risk Averse Society* is one contribution to popular literature and community debates about risk and adventure in childhood, particularly in the UK. There is no hint of concerns about manliness in the book, and very little gendered language. Gill's work is cited approvingly on the website of *The Campaign for Adventure* (Campaign for Adventure, 2005), and in other blogs, news reports and websites, although it has also been cited in the scholarly literature. Another contribution to overall debate about childhood, from the USA, Louv's (2008) *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature Deficit Disorder* reworks and modernises the anxiety theme. The use of the term 'deficit' foregrounds an implicit theme in earlier youth movement rhetoric, similarly linked to a movement (the Children and Nature Network), and also contributing to community debate. Nature deficit disorder is not a recognised medical condition, but is a registered trademark. Louv is a journalist, and does not represent his work as scholarly or peer reviewed, but it has nevertheless been cited more than 2000 times in the scholarly literature. It is not overtly gendered; indeed, references to boys and girls, mothers and fathers, are balanced.

In both works and the debates associated with them, traditional anxieties about youth have been reworked into anxiety about overprotectiveness, in effect anxiety about over-anxiety, in communal discourse that has laid the groundwork for outdoor programmes that purport to offer adventure or even risk. Neither publication focuses overtly on gender, but parental overprotectiveness has gendered connotations. Gill's book, immediately on publication, prompted a BBC headline, 'Do we mollycoddle our children?' (Croft, 2007), and was cited in more than 100 blogs and news reports that used the term 'mollycoddle'. Numerous responses to Louv's book used the same term, which derives from 'moll' meaning girl or prostitute, and as a noun (mollycoddle) means an effeminate man or boy, synonymous with terms such as nancy-boy, milksop or mummy's boy (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014). Gill's book refers to 'the nanny-state', another gendered term frequently teamed with the more neutral terms bubble-wrap kids and helicopter parent. Concerns about over-regulation and parental overprotectiveness are not one and the same, of course, but both persist with connotations of the overprotective *mother* (producing a generation of *sissties*, another synonym for mollycoddle). Articles such as 'Are we suffering from mollycodditis?' (Mayhew, 2007), which argues that risk aversion is damaging individual children and is itself a risk to society, appear to be whistling the overprotective mother tune.

The solution to a lack of manliness has consistently been removal of boys from maternal care and into male institutions. Maternal overprotectiveness appears in the scholarly literature as a condition, albeit a contested one (Gerard, 1944). I could find ten times the number of scholarly references to maternal overprotectiveness than to paternal overprotectiveness. A search on the exact phrase 'overprotective mother' produced three times as many hits as a search for 'overprotective father', consistent with the gendered roots of terms such as paranoid parents and bubble-wrap kids.

Simplistic appeals to old biases about mothering impede careful debate about real dilemmas around risk, safety and opportunity. Zelizer (1985) points out that, in the USA, typical families in the 17th and 18th centuries would experience two or three child deaths under ten. Indeed, overt mourning for child deaths tended not to occur at all until child health improvements in the late 19th century greatly improved child mortality. However, in the early 20th century an epidemic of child deaths in New York resulted from the introduction of railways, trolley cars, cars and trucks on to roads and streets that had hitherto been children's playgrounds. By 1927 in New York State more than 20,000 were killed or injured annually – nearly three times the cause of death for 5 to 14 year olds than any single disease, and these deaths were not accepted in the way deaths in earlier centuries had been.



Mothers were blamed, not for overprotectiveness but for neglect: '[m]others were urged to 'take the burden of death of the shoulders of the Lord', by accepting that their children's accidents had preventable causes' (Zelizer, 1985, p. 44). Lower-class deaths were blamed on mothers. One writer in 1922 opined: 'women so often neglect or refuse their obvious duty . . . until a limp crushed body has been put in their arms' (Zelizer, 1985, p. 47). Children lost the contest for public space and were moved indoors. Summer camps were attractive because children would be safe (Van Slyck, 2006). The neglectful mother has not vanished; indeed, there is at least an implication in more recent public discussions that the overprotective mother is, in effect, neglectful.

Generalised attitudes towards risk and overprotectiveness provide no useful guidance in making any particular decision about what a child should or should not do in any given situation, and can be implicated in seriously unsafe and unnecessary choices (Brookes, 2011). Putting the words of a paranoid parenting song to an overprotective mother tune appeals to old prejudices, and potentially interferes with legitimate debate about risk and safety.

### Final comments

Summers (1987) and Perry (1993) have shown that, to understand the Scouting Movement, it is necessary to move beyond the organisation and the founder, and investigate what took place on the ground under the influence of myriad leaders and communities. Van Slyck (2006) has made a similar point about the influence of individuals on summer camp programmes in the USA. Too much can be made of foundational narratives. By the same token, too much can be made of critiques of those narratives. Programmes on the ground might be inadequately represented by generalised accounts, and inaccurately portrayed by generalised critiques. My purpose is not to replace one set of generalisations with another, but to open lines of enquiry that foundational narratives might close off as somehow disrespectful, improper or disloyal.

Programme choices between treating the outdoors as a dangerous unknown or learning to feel safe, and at home, in the outdoors are important. If the power of outdoor programmes can be better understood by examining parallels with military training, then that question should be explored. If old prejudices about removing boys from their mothers are being repackaged with gender-free labels, any implications should be reviewed. In each case the purpose of critique is to improve the field, even if it means reconsidering cherished narratives.

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