

ESSAY 3 PHASE 1

Student 2 • Prof. Mani • Fall 2020

Introduction

r/campingandhiking is an online community on the website Reddit.com. The community has a focus on discussing outdoor topics, questions related to the same topic, and sharing experiences. Many users on the subreddit post pictures of views from places they have been and these are one of the most popular types of post. The community is very centric to the goals of sharing experience and knowledge about subjects like camping, hiking, and other outdoor activities. There is a clear hierarchy in the community based on the experience a person has with the community subject matter.

Based on observations made while studying the community, aspects of the person that are not relevant to the subject of the subreddit are not important, and any identification of the self made during a community interaction has a relevance to the discussion. What this means is users do not identify factors about themselves when they are not relevant to the conversation. These factors of the person include gender, race, creed, and social status. When one of these is mentioned it means that it is important to the discussion in some way, even if the reason cannot be seen at face value. In the threads examined, this trend becomes apparent on a few notable occasions.

Methods

To perform this ethnography, all primary research was done observing the community. Over the course of three months, I have observed the community r/campingandhiking to draw conclusions about how it operates. My ethnographic observations were made over the course of one week, and the field notes were done over 3 weeks; the first week observation, the second week analysis, and the third week any trends that arose. I observed the three threads over the course of a few hours, to try to ascertain any motives, or nuances in them. At no point did I make my presence known to the participants, or contribute in any way to the threads. Being that I was there as a clandestine observer, the interaction in each thread was unadulterated and genuine in theory, given no external factors.

ESSAY 3 PHASE 1

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Because of this the observation methods were ethical, and changed no interaction. All three threads were inactive by the time of observation.

Results

The results of the collective observation of the three threads are displayed below. There is no attempt made to analyze yet, and these are just observations and notes. No secondary research is included in the below results.

The user in the first thread examined is a self identified woman from the Pacific Northwest, who has experience camping, and is 40 years old. She is looking for a place to have an outing not far from Northwest Washington. She prefers to be in a place away from large numbers of people. She owns a tent, and a car, but she prefers to “glamp” and stay in a small cabin if possible because she is going alone. Glamping being a term to describe a situation like camping, where one is staying in the woods, but having added amenities. Four users answer her thread and all of them offer helpful solutions. u/bob_lala suggests going to either Oregon or Washington which have many campgrounds and opportunities for Glamping. The second user recommends going to Washington where one can rent cabins and “yurts”. A yurt essentially being a dome shaped large tent. The second responder adds links to booking a yurt or cabin and instructs the user to book one soon because they are popular and availability runs out fast. The third response suggests renting a cabin at Kalaloch, Sol Duc hot springs. The final response is very short and suggests Ruby beach.

u/Z010011010 makes no identification of their gender, race, or age. They make a post concerned that too many people are going unprepared into the wilderness and the poster is worried that this could be a fatal mistake. He does identify himself as an amateur because he says that he is not an expert guide. He also makes it clear that he is not trying to “gatekeep”. A gatekeeper being someone who judges a person's status in the community. This term is used to identify a toxic person in the community. His main question is how to let people know they are underprepared without being rude or condescending. The top comment instructs the user that most of the people who are underprepared come out safe, and if the user really wants to help, they can bring extra water to give to passersby. The next

ESSAY 3 PHASE 1

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comment says that they believe the original poster is being too nitpicky, and that these people will be just fine. The third commenter adds that it may be a good idea to let underprepared people know what the poster carries so they get an idea that they may be lacking. The next commenter u/woodbarber volunteers for SAR which stands for search and rescue, an organization that finds lost people in the outdoors. This user immediately gets noticeable respect from the previous commenter and the original poster for their occupation. This user adds to the discussion by saying they would never tell anyone to leave the trail, but they also compare gear to give them an idea that they are underprepared. All three of these users had an emphasis in their writing about being as polite as possible.

The final thread is a gear discussion thread about what to keep in a car at the trailhead. Gear posts like these are popular with the users, who use it as an opportunity to give advice, and to show off their experience and knowledge. The original poster does not identify anything about themselves not directly relevant to the post. The post is a list of the users' typical list of items they leave in the car while on hikes and while camping. The user also asks other users what they leave in their cars to get an idea of what he could add. The first suggestion is a change of clothes and a way to clean eyeglasses. Several users recommend leaving information in the car for rangers to find the user should they become lost, and detailed descriptions of where they will be. One user from Canada does not identify their gender but mentions that they do have a wife. This user suggests leaving a cooler with drinks of choice and ice in it for a reward at the end of the trail. Everyone on the thread remains gender neutral, and few users identify anything about themselves not related to the subreddit. All posts try to contribute to what the original poster is asking. There is very little evidence on this thread of any blatant hierarchy.