



Kayaks to Canvassing

Outdoor experience,
sustainability, and political
empowerment among young adults

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COLORADO
COLLEGE

A UNIQUE INTELLECTUAL ADVENTURE



Theoretical Background

A). Environmental Values, Attitudes, and Behaviors

- Pro-environmental values account for some, but not all of pro-environmental behaviors.

B). Outdoor Recreation and Pro-Environmental Values and Behaviors

- Appreciative outdoor recreation in wilderness areas in childhood influences adult pro-environmental values and behaviors.

C). Youth Political Development: Social Media and Technology

- Modern youth are relatively politically disempowered, and social media has revolutionized their political activism.

Study 1

Quantitative Survey of entire Colorado College campus

April-May 2010.

n = 1381

19% of student body



Study 2

Qualitative interviews with Colorado College Environmental Program majors, Outdoor Recreation Club members & Sustainability Interns

April - May 2011

n = 23

Figure 1: What do you Like to do Outside?

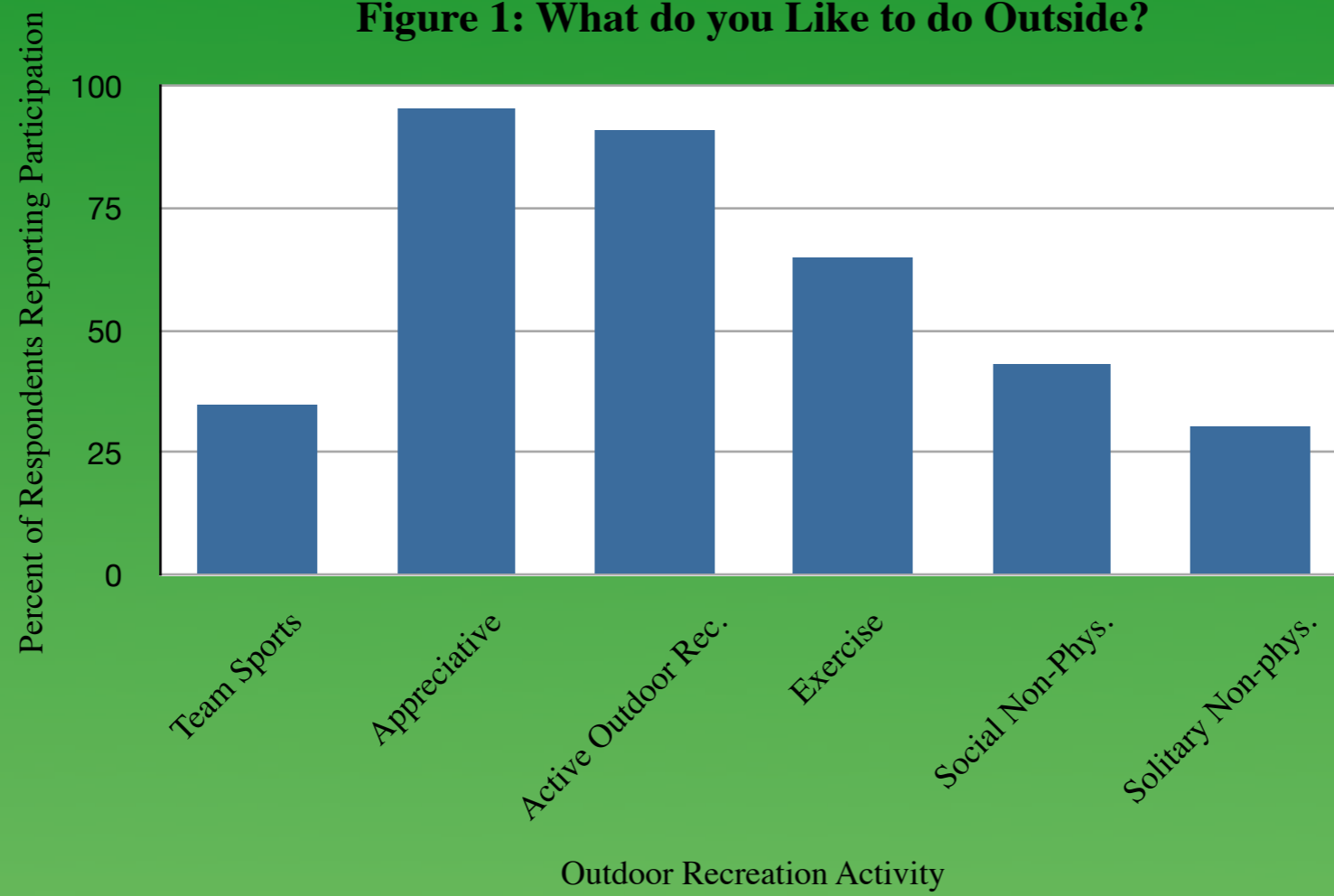


Figure 2: What Places are Special to You?

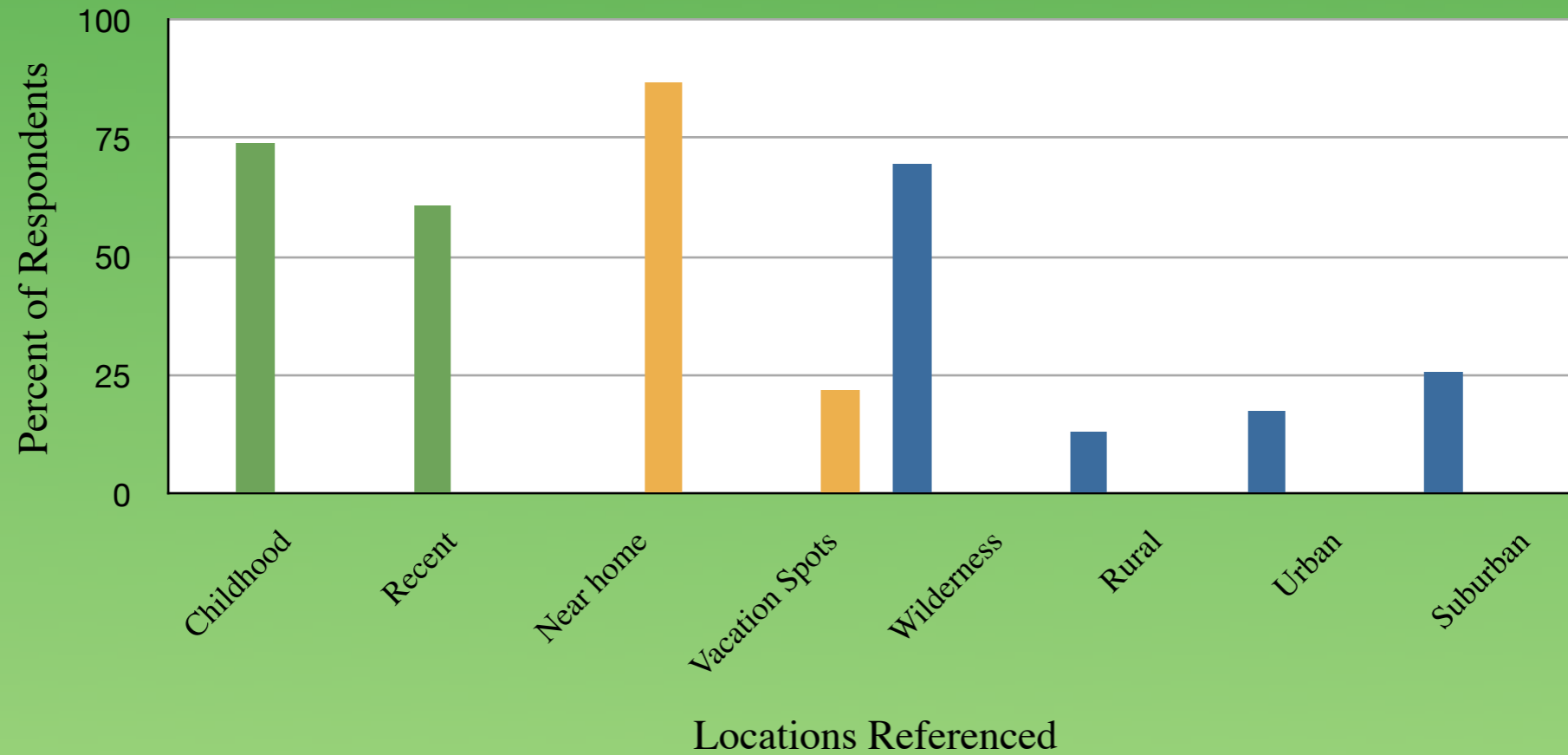


Figure 3: Are you an Activist?

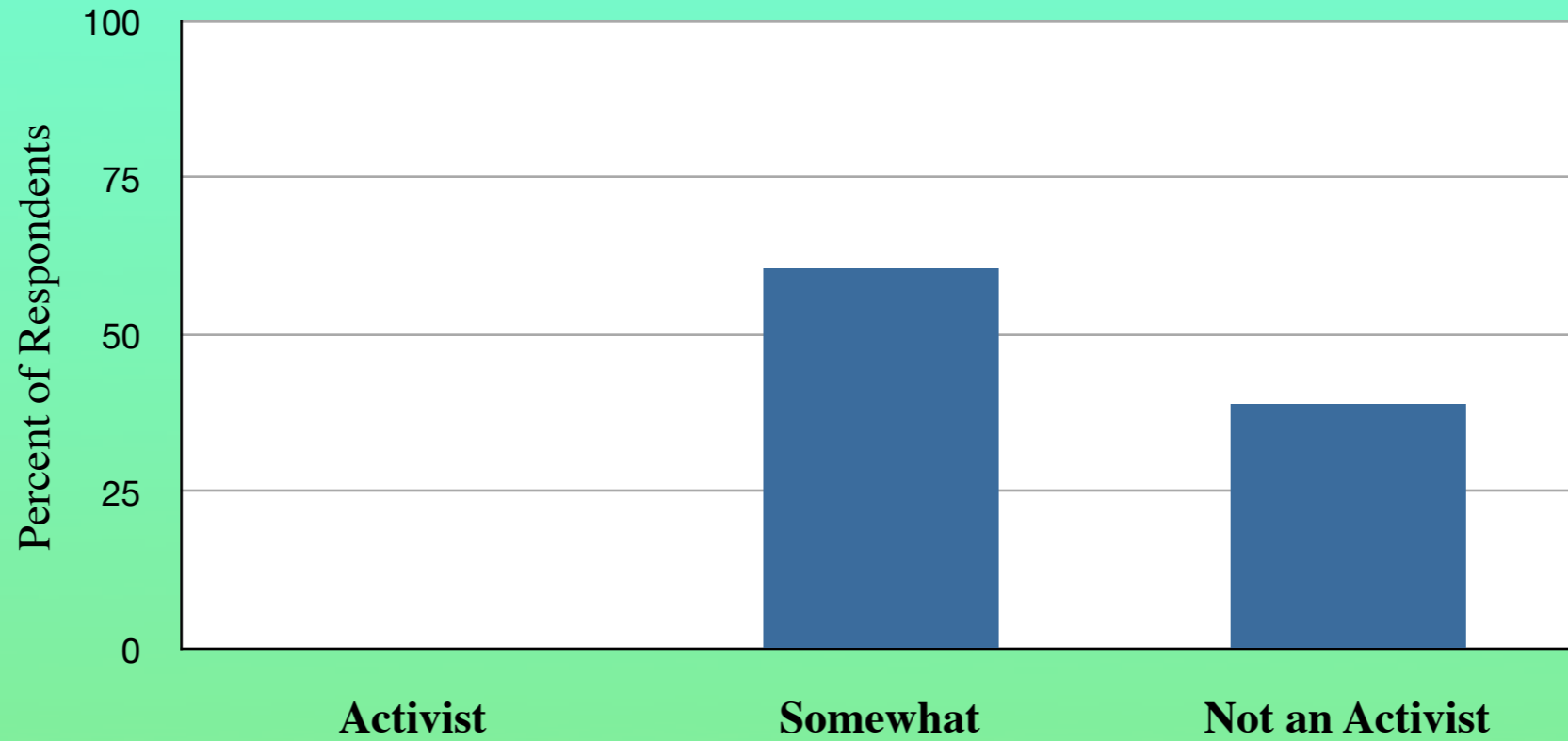
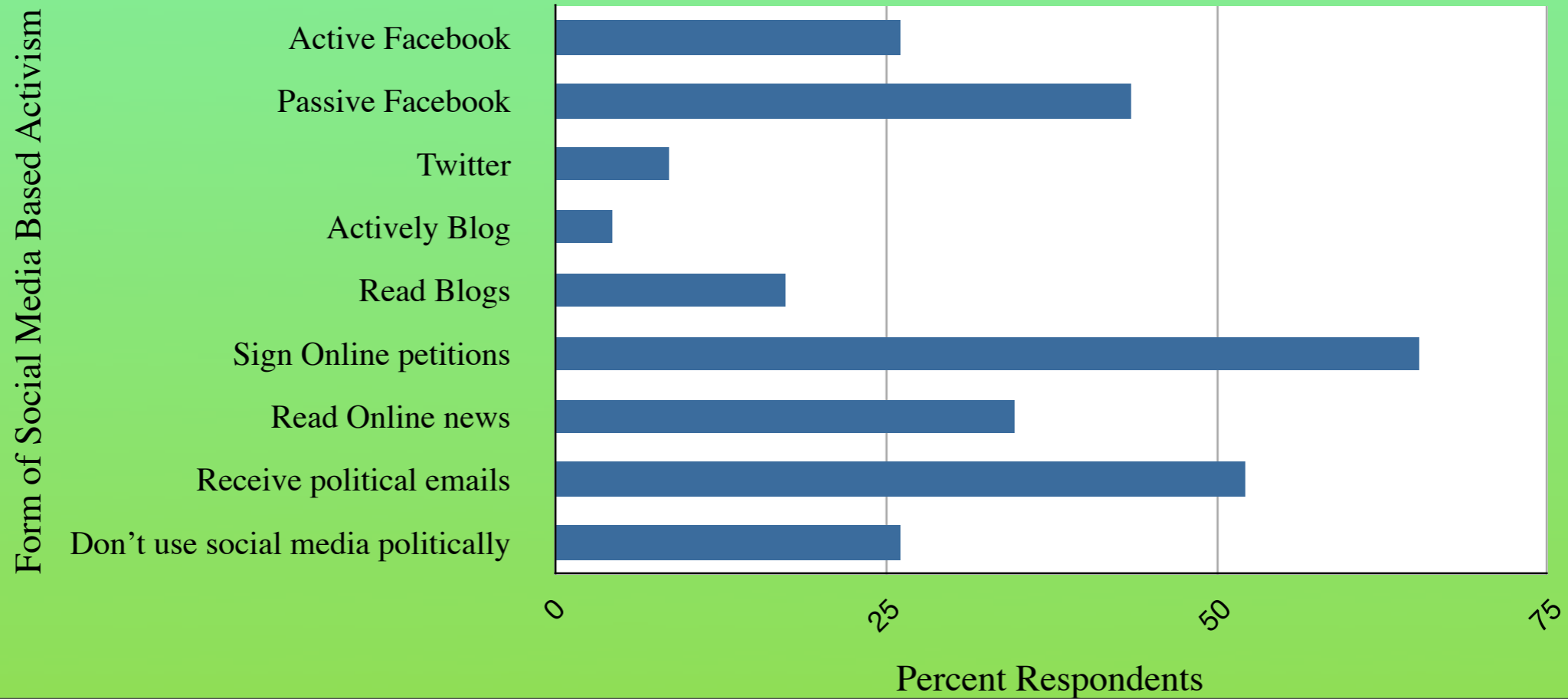


Figure 4: Does Social Media Play a Role in Your Political Activism?



Path to Activism I

Early Childhood Institutional Involvement

“ Love for those [rural] areas [around my house] made me really love my neighborhood and my town. There was a cornfield across the street... that got developed when I was 9, and my neighborhood fought it, so that was my initial thing. I wrote a letter to the editor when I was 9, and they published it, about the development. It was more the neighbors than my parents -- there were some neighbors that were super vocal, and I know my parents helped me send the letter... ”

Path to Activism II

Late-Development Institutional Development

“ I got more concerned about [taking sustainability actions] as I learned more about the state of the environment and our country and society and meeting people at CC who are really passionate about those things inspired me. Studying the science of climate change and coming to my own conclusion that it is significant and worthy of taking action against definitely gives me a perspective on why I must be doing these things. ”

Path to Activism III

Outdoor Enthusiasts

“ *My mom... grew up in Colorado and has sort of raised my sister and I to have [the outdoors] be ingrained in our lives. We've camped since we were little and as soon as we were able to plan things and be a part of this process she took us on long trips, and especially now that I'm at CC I can contribute a new facet of outdoor experience that she's never seen and we sort of collaborate.* ”

Path to Activism IV

Politically Inactive Outdoor Enthusiasts

“ *I do spend so much time in the outdoors, like frisbee, and I work in the climbing gym -- most of my activities are more extracurricular fun featured than they are politically involved, and I think I would like to change that, but that's just the path I've taken.* ”

Path to Activism V

Non-Outdoors Enthusiasts

“I really love animals and I think that that actually has a bigger effect on my environmentalism than a love of the outdoors... One of the major things that drove me to be an environmentalist was this feeling that I had in high school that humans were ruining the planet and that it would be better if the supervolcano (super cool, by the way) just erupted and wiped us all out. Being an environmentalist was a way to not feel that kind of despair, but still try to help solve the things that I thought were wrong in the world.”

Key Findings

1. The type of outdoor activity (appreciative/non-appreciative) may be more likely to influence PEBs than the location of the outdoor activity (wilderness vs urban).
2. Institutional drivers making PEBs or environmental activism a pro-social activity are likely successful in students developing habits of activism/PEBs.
3. Even if they engage in substantial PEBs on their own, many young people are hesitant to actively encourage others to engage in PEBs based on a fear of being perceived as pushy or aggressive. These results are true across genders, but female respondents were somewhat more likely than males to talk to others about sustainability issues in both public and private settings.
4. Young people tend to underreport their level of political activism, potentially because they equate activism with a "60's model," rather than with the online and social media platforms for activism that they tend to utilize.
5. Young people are relatively politically disengaged. A key aspect highlighting their disengagement is a sense of not feeling knowledgeable enough about environmental and political issues

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