COLLEGE LIFE THROUGH AN EXISTENTIAL LENS: A ROLE FOR ADVENTURE

PROGRAMMING

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University-San Marcos
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Science in Recreation and Leisure Services

by

Stephen A. Deringer, B.A.

San Marcos, Texas
May 2011

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Committee Members Approved:

_____
Stephen Awoniyi, Chair

_____
Elizabeth Kanon

_____
James Kimmel

Approved:

_____
J. Michael Willoughby
Dean of the Graduate College

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PREFACE

Adventure Trip Program at Texas State University-San Marcos

Texas State University-San Marcos has a long-standing tradition of outdoor

programming. Originally the outdoor programming at Texas State was student led

as an outing club in 1974. The student organization or "club program" gained

popularity and was eventually taken over by the Recreational Sports Department as

one of it's program areas in 1980. The director of the Recreational Sports

Department wanted to start doing some Outdoor Recreation programming. The

Recreational Sports Department took over the management of the club equipment

and began using the equipment to provide programming for students. Early trips

were undertaken to places such as Big Bend National Park, the Guadalupe River, and

some local state parks. The program took two or three outings a year and used

outfitters for some of the trips, since they were likely to have the necessary

equipment and expertise (J.K. Johnson, personal communication, November 26,

2010).

The first outdoor center was created in an existing football locker room. It

was quite small and had a very limited supply of equipment for student use. In 1983

the outdoor center relocated to a house on campus, where it was able to expand a

bit. Funds were presently dedicated to building a new facility, which opened in 1986 and this building still houses the current Outdoor Center. Once the Outdoor Center opened the Adventure Trip Program (ATP) began programming extended trips and more weekend trips throughout the semester (J. K. Johnson, personal communication, November 26, 2010).

Present Outdoor Recreation Program

The Outdoor Recreation Program at Texas State is now made up of six program areas. Outdoor Recreation is responsible for a challenge course program, a rock wall, a camp facility, a park, the Outdoor Center (OC), and an adventure trip program (ATP), the last being the focus of this study. The department is managed by Campus Recreation as a service to students, faculty, staff and alumni of Texas State.

The Adventure Trip Program articulates its purpose as follows:

- To promote active learning through direct personal experience.
- To instill in the participants a sense of community, teamwork and sharing.
- To promote environmental awareness and outdoor ethics.
- To help students grow in their leadership abilities and communication skills.
- To encourage self-sufficiency, independence, health, and confidence.
- To have fun.[1]

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[1] (Retrieved from, http://www.campusrecreation.txstate.edu/programs/outdoor/atp.html on November 26, 2010)

ATP runs over thirty-five trips a year. The trips span a range of outdoor engagements, including: backpacking, canoeing, kayaking, white water kayaking, rock climbing, and hiking. The trips vary in duration from four hours to twelve days. Trips are taken all over the state of Texas, and some to other parts of the United States.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction to the Study

The "college experience" is a complex, evolving, and delicate transition in the lives of many students. For some, it is a first chance at establishing a life away from the formative support system of childhood. This period of change presents conditions that can stimulate rapid growth, learning, and progress in a person's life. The period also allows for the possibility of failure. Even among students who attend a four-year college or university full-time, only six out of every ten earn a bachelor's degree within six years of starting (Carey, 2004). There are a large number of factors that contribute to the success or failure of a college student, factors with which the college student must, therefore, wrestle. Thus we present the student as an individual deeply involved in an authentic and purposeful enterprise of actualization and one engaged in actions that are intended to help her or him navigate the course of college life successfully. In this study we will attempt to examine how one opportunity for engagement, adventure programming, might be conceived as a mediating tool or process within the college experience

In the following sections, an overview of the history and purpose of adventure programming will be examined. The chapter will also provide an overview of themes of existentialism and how they pertain to the college student and adventure programming.

Section I: Adventure Programming

For many, experiencing nature, adventure, and getting outdoors is more than a pastime. Bound up within the experience (or phenomenon) are some substantial issues and significant conceptions, including but not limited to ones such as democracy, economics, moral action, centering, transcendence, and in fact, nothing less than the question of our vitally-networked existence within the world (or, to be particular, our essential environmental context). Recognizing the transpersonal value of the land or landscape, Lyndon B. Johnson said, "Let us proclaim a creed to preserve our natural heritage with rights and the duties to respect those rights" (Jensen & Thorstenson, 1972, pg. 3). One of those rights was "the right of easy access to places of beauty and tranquility where every family can find recreation and refreshment" (pg. 3). For over one hundred years[2] colleges have understood the importance of this right, and have responded by offering their students an

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[2] Based on timeline provided by Webb (2001).

opportunity for engagement with the landscape and nature. This is often accomplished through programs such as adventure programs.

History of Adventure Programming

In the late 1800's and early 1900's groups known as "Outing Clubs" began to emerge at colleges and universities around the country. These clubs had objectives such as skiing, climbing, canoeing and enjoying the outdoors with friends and comrades. Texas State University-San Marcos, formerly Southwest Texas State University, founded its club in 1974, though traditions of outdoor recreation existed well before the club was formed. In the early 20th century "Froggy" Sewell organized large swimming events and competitions at a pool on the San Marcos River that would hold 1,000 people. That spot in the river is now part of a university owned park called Sewell Park.

The early clubs had many things in common. Most clubs offered some baseline rules or "traditions," such as no drinking, no drugs, and no pairing off to the detriment of the group (Webb, 2001, p. 47). Many of the clubs offered chaperones, though the chaperones were to be silent observers and were only to intervene in the case of an emergency or if someone broke one of the rules of the group. Since during this time it was highly unlikely that a student would have personal transportation the clubs often provided transportation for the outing. Many of the clubs also offered some limited amount of gear for beginners (Webb, 2001).

Kurt Hahn is often noted as the "grandfather" of adventure programming. Born in Germany in 1886 to wealthy Jewish parents, Hahn was well educated. As a

young man Hahn was heavily influenced by Plato's *Republic*. The *Republic* discussed

the definition of justice, and the attributes that an individual must attain to become

a just person. The influence of the *Republic* is evident in some of Hahn's

philosophies throughout his life. In 1920 Hahn started a coed boarding school

called Salem Schule. Salem Schule "emphasized personal responsibility, equality,

social justice, respect, and service to the community" (Priest & Gass, 1997, p. 28),

goals undoubtedly grounded in the lessons of *Republic*. During World War I Hahn

was forced to flee to the United Kingdom, leaving behind Salem Schule. Hahn heard

that in the war when a ship would sink in the frigid water older sailors were more

likely to survive than younger ones. Hahn was discontent with this issue of young

men being weaker than their older comrades and started a program to help the

youth of England. That program would later be named Outward Bound, a term used

to describe a ship leaving the safety of the harbor (Priest & Gass, 1997).

Outward Bound began in 1941 and has been a benchmark outdoor program

since that time. Originally Outward Bound taught one-month courses that included

orienteering, search and rescue training, athletics, small boat sailing, ocean and

mountain expeditions, an obstacle course, and service to the local communities

(Priest & Gass, 1997). Two leaders of Outward Bound started a program called

National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). Paul Pedzoldt and Earnest Tapley

originally started NOLS in 1965 to train leaders in outdoor recreation and it has

since succeeded as one of the premier schools for outdoor leaders. Out of these two

programs, a great deal of the philosophy and practices of adventure programming in

the United States has been established (Priest & Gass, 1997).

It is important to note that the Scandinavian "*friluftsliv*" predates all of the forms recreation described above. *Friluftsliv* is literally translated, "open air life" (Reed & Rothenberg, 1993, p. 3). The traditions of *friluftsliv* date back to the 18th century. These traditions became more defined when, "*friluftsliv* was organized and developed by the world's first tourist organizations (1868 in Norway and 1885 in Sweden), and later (in 1892) the Swedish outdoor organization '*Friluftsfrämjandet*'" (Gelter, 2000, p. 79). *Friluftsliv* is a tradition of going outside and interacting with nature. The Norwegian tradition of "friluftsliv is about identity, expensive equipment, long approaches, arenas and indoor training are not needed. It is about touching and being touched by free Nature and thus the threshold for taking part is low. What is needed does not cost money nor has it any impact on free Nature" (Faarlund, Dahle, & Jensen, 2007, p. 393).

Philosophies and models of adventure programming. There are different models that are embraced by different outdoor programs. A few common models and some of the philosophies they are built around are described below.

1. Common Adventure – In this model, everything is shared, there is no chaperone or official leader, and all decisions are made democratically. Costs are also shared along with responsibilities and trip duties. In the common adventure model, no one person has a greater responsibility or duty than another (Webb, 2001). Many of the early clubs started as tack boards to which students would pin notes. A student might pin up a note saying where he or she would be going and what expenses were likely. Any student that wanted to go on the trip simply contacted the posting student and the trip

was made. The common adventure model allows students a great amount of authority. Often times, students have no restriction on where to go, when to go, or the choice of activity for a trip. Students who wish to take on unofficial leadership roles within the group have that opportunity with common adventure. This model allows groups to have a great amount of autonomy.

The common adventure model also has several drawbacks. The model allows for the consequences of mistakes to be fully felt by the participants. Without a leader or chaperone to warn of dangers, participants can feel the full force of their mistakes. This allows students to learn from their mistakes but also presents danger if the mistakes are large enough. For less experienced students, the model can be difficult. For instance it might be hard for first time climbers to go on a climbing trip with limited knowledge of ropes or anchors. In sum, the common adventure model offers the highest amount of authority and risk to the participant.

2. Cooperative Wilderness Adventure With a Facilitator – Trips using this model often have a trip facilitator that goes along on the trip to insure all rules and guidelines are followed. The trip facilitator is not a leader and does not act to influence the group except in times of danger or when there is a threat of breaking rules. All decisions are still made cooperatively by participants. The trip facilitator may cover part of the expenses of the trip (Webb, 2001). Since the facilitator primarily works to manage risk for the group, the ideal scenario for this model is that the facilitator is silent in any decision-making and allows the group to function with full autonomy. This

model is well suited for experienced as well as non experienced students who want to maximize their authority and minimize risk.

3. Cooperative Wilderness Adventure With a Leader – In this model democratic decisions are made but a leader with superior training to the rest of the group takes a strong leadership role in helping the group achieve its goals (Webb, 2001). The leader may make decisions on where activities take place, how difficult they are, and may even help participants through difficult tasks. On a backpacking trip the leader may navigate, be in charge of first aid, and help participants size and adjust backpacks. This model may offer practical programming for beginner participants who are looking for instruction along with experience.

4. Guided/Packaged Trip – In this model few decisions are democratic. This model is often used by private guide services, and may include fully planned trips, prepared food, and even guides carrying most or all of the baggage for the participants. Group goals are achieved through professionally-guided leadership (Webb, 2001). The model takes much of the experience of decision making away from the group. It may be well suited for first time participants. Participants who are seeking to experience aspects of the trip such as the thrill of rafting or enjoyment of the scenery while hiking without the physical strain of paddling the raft or carrying the backpack may be well served by this model. The guided/packaged trip model offers the lowest amount of programming risk and the lowest amount of authority to the participant.

Definition and Structure of Adventure Programming

The form of adventure programming that will be examined in this study involves activities programmed in outdoor environments. Blanchard, Strong and Ford (2007) described such activities as "outdoor pursuits...within which stress or challenge are intentionally integrated into the curriculum as a means to enhance personal growth" (pp. 3-4).

Adventure as a subset of leisure. Simon Priest (1999) suggests that adventure is a subset of leisure. Priest first draws on John Nuelinger (1981), who proposed that leisure is defined by two conditions. The first is that activity and participation must be perceived as freely chosen and the second is that the engagement must be intrinsically motivated or not driven by rewards external to itself. Priest (1999) adds that, while adventure must meet both of Neulinger's criteria, it must also meet an additional one: it must be uncertain. For example if running were perceived as both free and intrinsically motivated for me, but I ran the same path each day and no uncertainty arose during the run, it is unlikely that I would classify the run as adventurous. If one day on my run I decided to take a new route which I knew very little about, it is possible that I could perceive my run that day as adventurous.

Elements of successful adventure programming. Simon Priest and Michael Gass (1997) suggest several elements of successful adventure programming that are common among many adventure programs. Good adventure programming is usually:

1. Experiential: Participants learn by doing.

2. Dramatic: It tends to focus attention and sharpens the mind.

3. Consequential: An important part of adventure programming is that errors result in consequences. For instance, an error when canoeing might result in falling into the water if the canoe tips over.

4. Metaphoric and Transferable: Activities and challenges should be able to be linked and should be microcosms of real life struggles and celebrations.

5. Voluntary: Participation should be freely decided by participant.

Different types of adventure programming. Adventure programs may be classified according to their different goals. Priest and Gass (1997) break adventure programming down in to four types:.

1. Recreational adventure programming is centered mostly on fun and learning new activities. Facilitators in recreational adventure programming hope to provide an energizing experience.

2. Educational adventure programming is focused on gaining new understanding. It is centered on the teaching of specific concepts.

3. Developmental adventure programming is focused on improving functional behaviors and training people to act in new ways.

4. Therapeutic adventure programming is aimed at trying to change dysfunctional behaviors.

Priest and Gass' (1997) model provide one system of conceptualizing programming. Articulated goals define and provide structure for pragmatic adventure programs.

Conclusion

Adventure programming is a growing and dynamic field. The foregoing exploration provides useful insight into how the field may be defined, described or understood and how strategies of operation may be implemented to accomplish purposeful ends. Priest (1999) defines adventure programming as, "the deliberate use of adventurous experiences to create learning in individuals or groups, that results in change for society and communities" (Priest, 1999, xiii). It is understood by Priest's notion of *learning* that it is not just about formal knowledge acquisition alone, but it is extended to and bound up with experiences and goals such as enjoyment, accomplishment, individual life improvement and so on.

Section II: A Theoretical Lens: An Existential Perspective on College life and Adventure Programming

College move in day is perhaps one of the most despairing moments of any eighteen-year-old[3] student's life. An uncertain future and a familiar past momentarily meet and presently separate. Parents sometimes fear this moment, fret and often display their emotions in presence of the departing child, thus compounding the student's anxiety. On this day, the student begins a new journey in life. Years of parental grooming and preparation will be tested, starting on move

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[3] Generic college freshman age.

in day and the student will find out if she or he is ready to be faced with the question of survival under a new set of circumstances on a day-to-day basis. The college student must survive academia, a new world away from the support system of parents, while continuing to develop personally.

As soon as the parents depart for the first time, the reality of the situation begins to be grasped in its profound complexity. The student soon finds himself with few or no friends in a place that does not resemble anything he has known in the first eighteen years of life. Without parental guidance the pitfalls and traps of life might become harder to see than ever before. A myriad ways to spend money, time, and energy become instantly available. Soon, there will arrive a keen awareness that what is done in the ensuing four years will affect the rest of one's life. In addition, the college student will begin to learn new information and take on different political, religious, and social personas than the ones that were borne growing up with the family. Each person in college must eventually discover who she or he *is*. The question is constructible as an existential one.

Some Themes of Existentialism

A perpetual project of self-definition. Existentialism revolves around the idea that we must define ourselves. We are *not*, *a priori*; rather, our essence is a *posteriori*. Jean Paul Sartre said that "man first exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards" (Sartre, 1966, p. 290). We are nothing before we are something. It is an important contradiction of the concept that our lives are determined. Existentialism holds that we must be constantly

moving toward definition, toward meaning, but never succeeding completely.

Frankl (1967) says that we can never reach homeostasis. If a person could satisfy

every one of his needs he would create an "existential vacuum" (Frankl, 1967, p. 42).

Therefore, the project of self-definition is a perpetual one and, like everybody else,

the college student is caught up in the process.

The system. This term refers to any type of determinism. The existentialist

stresses utter freedom of choice and so any type of determinism is the system. "The

System" can include, religion, materialism, certain forms of biological determinism

and even environmental systems. The existentialist believes that the only systems

that determine us are the ones that we choose to be determined by.

In an adolescent's life parents or guardians plan many of the day-to-day

activities. Many parents have specific bedtimes or curfews for their children. Many

adolescents do not pick what they are going to eat for dinner each night, nor do they

plan where they will spend leisure time such as vacations. When a student enters

college for the first time he or she realizes that almost everything is available to him

or her. New students realize that they are no longer confined by the rules that their

parents set for their family. The college experience is a form of experiment in free

choice, and it can be said that manifestations of control change. In the process and

over time, such things as moral values, ideologies, and even parental wisdom can be

called into question and tested.

Freedom. Existentialists believe in freedom from the system. Humans

always have the ability to transcend their situation by making decisions about their

own lives. Sartre's proposition that "existence precedes essence" (Kelly, 2004, p. 271) illustrates this position. We are nothing prior to individual choices. Our choices are free in that no outside factors determine our will. We could have, in any given situation, acted otherwise.

According to some adherents, part of this freedom to determine our lives is that we also end up being responsible for much of the way the world around us appears to us. Kierkegaard said that we have a "sphere of influence" that we can manipulate (Craig, 1998, p. 497). For example, a person who seeks only pleasure will likely see the world differently than the duty-bound ethical person.

Borchert (2006) has written that "if any single thesis could be said to constitute the doctrine of existentialism, it would be that the possibility of choice is the central fact of human nature" (p. 502). Simultaneous with the notion of freedom, however, is that we are morally responsible for blame or praise based on our actions (Craig, 1998, p. 496).

Exercises in freedom and choice are at the center of the college experience-- or, at least, becoming aware of the significance of it. College is one of the early opportunities to reinvent, realize, and become whoever a person wants to be. A freshman might come home for the first Christmas break with a new haircut, new fashions, piercings or tattoos. With less supervision from guardians, community, and schools, college years are time for a student to be free to recreate himself. In the words of Sartre, it is the first time a person has a chance to build his or her "essence" (Macquarrie, 1972, p. 13).

Man [Human] in the world. The human is a being seeking order in a world that is free of the imposition of such order. Science, for instance, spends a great deal of time systematizing the world, trying to develop concepts and theories through which the world can be seen more clearly. Systematization makes the world seem smaller, less complex, easier to understand, and sometimes even predictable. Existentialists cast doubt on such abstractions. "In their [the existentialists'] view, the concern with subsuming all particulars under concepts and building systems tends to conceal crucial features of our lives as individuals" (Craig, 1998, p. 495).

College students take many classes that create questions about what they might previously have thought of as "natural order." Science classes teach about the intricacies of sub-atomic physics, philosophy classes teach about logic, and math classes teach us new ways to restructure or abstract the world in general. With such a great expansion of knowledge it is not surprising that some students might begin to question "natural order."

Authenticity. The philosopher Karl Jaspers explored the question of authenticity of human experience and knowledge. In some of his later work, he argued that humans are "distinguished by the fact that they have authentic attributes of existence and transcendence" (Jaspers, 2006, para. 23). This means that the individual has capacity to raise questions about self and his or her own freedoms, is able to act decisively about self and in such processes, and is able to engage what is described as the authenticity of own life. In Heidegger's formulation (and, to a point, Sartre's), loss of my self and identity ("nothingness") under anxiety

instigates self-awareness and commits me to face up to the realities of my existence, thereby re-establishing or restoring authenticity to my existence (Existentialism, 2010).

Jaspers argued that humans tend to construct world views into which they withdraw as a strategy of obtaining, as one author expresses it, security among the "frighteningly limitless possibilities of human existence" (Jaspers, 2006, para. 9). In doing that, however, they form mental limits. Jaspers advocated intervention to guide human existence beyond such limits in order to be able to "decisively...confront the more authentic possibilities" of subjective and objective life (para. 9). He further argued that "experience and committed actions are formative of authentic knowledge" (para. 10).

Absurdity, as a concept, is integral to existentialism. It would be disingenuous not to recognize this aspect of the literature. However, this study suggests that recognizing what the existentialists meant by absurdity is sufficient and that it need not dwell upon the implications of this concept in relation to self-definition. What follows is a quick summation of the concept of absurdity.

Albert Camus argued that life is absurd because humans have expectations that the world refuses to meet (Gordon, 1999, p. 68-69). Camus spoke of the great joys and great tragedies of life. Camus speaks of the opposing extremes of life, he wrote a series of short stories that describe these apparent contradictions in life. One example that Camus discusses is the ever-present impending death that everyone faces at some point in comparison with the joy of youthfulness (Gordon, 1999, p. 68-69). Sartre writes that freedom itself is absurd because even in freedom we do not

have the choice not to choose. Sartre is described as believing that, "The choice is 'absurd' not because it is without 'reason' but because there is no possibility of not choosing, and the fact of being unable to avoid making a choice lies beyond all reason" (Grimsley, 1967, p. 134-135). The juxtaposition of the things that a person seeks, and the impossibility of getting those things, is a part of the philosophy of several existentialists. The focus of this study will be to draw out the constructive implications of existentialism, the challenge of self-definition, and the learning that takes place in struggle. Absurdity, while a prevalent theme of existentialism, is beyond the scope of this study.

The existentialist spends time addressing specific questions that come out of every day life as it actually happens. "An inquiry of this sort is needed, existentialists claim, because the standard way of thinking about human beings – the conception of humans as members of a species or instances of a natural kind – generally leaves out of account such dimensions of life as passion, integrity, authenticity and commitment" (Guignon, 2004, p. 1). Some of these dimensions of existentialism are dimensions that are useful for gaining insight into the college experience.

College Experience: Challenges and Struggles

The college experience is both a substantive life experience in itself and a microcosm of the greater life experience. The notion of striving in a bid to navigate one's existence is of interest. The experience places challenging demands on the college student. For some modern-day students, the challenges have often had psychological impact and have often led to seeking some form of counseling. In a

revealing summary of data derived from clinic and counseling center surveys over the last few decades, Kitzrow (2009) furnished a list of symptoms and behaviors presented by college students. The list is extensive: anxiety, depression, alcohol problems, eating disorders, gambling, illicit drug use and other substance abuse, learning disability, eating disorder, self-injury, sexual assault concerns and suicidality, among others. Other important issues such as "career and developmental needs [and] life transitions" (p. 647) frame the college student's experience. A survey of administrators, according to Kitzrow, reported an increase in time spent dealing with "troubled students" (p. 648). In one national survey, twenty-eight percent of freshmen polled reported "feeling frequently overwhelmed" (p. 648).

While the foregoing does not represent the totality of student life, it provides insight into a real or substantive dimension of the "life struggle" as faced by many students. Significant life changes and significant issues that are faced paint a graphic picture of the stirrings of a persistent struggle. A theme of existentialism is that we face a life of struggle and we cannot escape that fact. The challenges that are faced by the human establish themselves as part of the struggle that surrounds survival.

Strategies for Coping with Life's Challenges: Adventure Experience as Opportunity for College Students

It may be useful to consider some of the strategies that people employ in facing struggles to succeed in life. Peacock, Wong and Reker (1993) presented several schemata of coping, including problem-focused coping, emotion-focused

coping, preventive coping, and spiritual coping. These schemata provide a framework for examining how, like other people, college students cope with life's challenges. The schemata, however, also offer an opportunity for adventure programmers to develop programs that support college students in dealing with the struggles of college life. Some of these schemata undoubtedly involve making meaning out of life's experiences. For instance, for one person, opportunities for reflection that the wilderness experience offers, could help the college student resolve issues pertaining to self and struggle. For another, development of an environmental ethic may assist her in placing her lifestyle and life in context.

Exploring the history of outdoor recreation programming, Webb (1999) noted that one of the "key factors that stimulated growth of early Outing Clubs was a desire to... enjoy the out of doors with friends and comrades" (p. 42). The club, he added, "facilitated *friendships* among those enjoying outdoor activities" (p. 42). Although programming outdoor and adventure programs has evolved over the years, the desire to enjoy comradeship remains today and it highlights one of the strategies by which individuals cope with life by feeding the desire to lead an active social life.

Webb (1999) also observed that formation of an outdoor club "stimulated and facilitated *planning and participation* [emphasis added]" (p. 42). Common Adventure, a widely used trip model in the early days, was organized democratically. As Webb wrote, "costs were shared, group decisions were made, trip members accepted stewardship of duties to accomplish the group and trip goals" (p. 51). Planning and participation offer opportunity to develop the

psychological self through recognizing a sense of control over things and enjoying a sense of relatedness with others. Some contemporary outdoor programs continue with this philosophy of participant self-development.

There are other benefits of adventure programming that can enhance a student's capacity to cope with personal challenges. A few are presented below.

1. Bahaeloo-Horeh and Assari (2008), for instance, in a study of college students found that self-esteem was gained during mountaineering.

2. Potential lessons about social life and democracy are learnable through outdoor encounter. Nicholson (2004) elaborated on the philosophy of park designer Frederick Law Olmsted. Two main themes, she wrote, "inspired Olmsted's work in landscape architecture: his conviction that nature has healing and restorative psychological effects on the individual and his equally strong belief that nature is a civilizing force in society" (p. 337). In her view, one of Olmsted's most original contributions was the idea that "public parks are essential to the ideal of democracy" (p. 340). Social interactions afforded by the outdoors, whether in the urban setting or in remote wilderness areas, reinforce their own forms of inter-human relationships and teach lessons about recognizing the worth of others while living with them in the same environment.

3. Although Nicholson emphasized the idea of a civilizing force in the preceding paragraph, it should be noted that Olmsted's belief in the restorative psychological value of nature was also mentioned. Two related forms of psychological restoration are the spiritual and transcendental. The notion of transcendence, wrote Edie (1964), is interlocked with that of experience and is

concerned with going "beyond and [beneath] the ordinary, common-sense, taken-for-granted evidences of daily life" (p. 53). The college student, like anybody else, searches beyond self in a bid to come to grips with self in the world.

Nature also provides spiritual experience. Spiritual, wrote Schroeder (1992) "refers to the experience of being related to or in touch with an 'other' that transcends one's individual sense of self and gives meaning to one's life at a deeper than intellectual level" (p. 25). As with transcendence, the spiritual enables one to encounter "something larger or greater than" oneself (p. 25).

4. Experiencing and connecting with nature has been reasoned as an existential strategy. In the everyday life that is common and practical (lifeworld), one can come in direct contact with nature and thus overcome the kind of abstraction of the world steeped in the objectiveness of science. Through the act of interacting with the world, the notion of meaninglessness of one's universe is confronted and wrestled against. The college student in nature makes that kind of connection.

5. Watters (1999) listed the following among the individual, social and environmental value systems supported or yielded by the outdoors: independence, personal responsibility, creativity, empathy, self-directed learning, cooperation, teamwork, care.

In summary, benefits derivable through adventure programming and outdoor encounter are foundations for establishing personal stability that is essential for dealing with life's challenges. The college student who participates in adventure programming has opportunity to derive those benefits. The notion of

authenticity about life was mentioned above. The adventure program is one form of

purposeful intervention which, through its capacity to frame engaging experience,

also provides opportunity for rehearsal of freedom, commitment and responsibility

in the processes that foster such things as an ethic directed at a manifest (i.e. the

outdoor environment) rather than abstract object, that afford evolution of

comradeship, and that create other opportunities for decisive action. It can thus

play a vital role in concretizing the student's active engagement of the authentic

possibilities of her or his life. Choice may be made, for instance, about how to

regard the outdoors--while in the very process of encountering it--as whether

threatening, alien or even beautiful, with no pre-ordained motive imposing the

choice. The key issue, for the existentialist, is less the ethic itself than the capacity to

make and the process of making the decision. This form of "taking hold" of life can

be actively and, perhaps, resiliently rehearsed because the context of the outdoors is

able to intensify the experience.

Statement of Purpose

Through this study, it is hoped that an understanding of the relationship

between adventure programming and a successful college experience can be

attained.

Researcher's vantage point. Adventure programming is my chosen field. I

hope that findings of this study will help my colleagues and me better understand

how we can more effectively positively influence college students that participate in

adventure trip programs. Through my own experience, I have come to posit that the

adventure trip program may have marked impact on some participants. This study

will provide an opportunity to investigate that judgment. It also carries the hope

that what is discovered may be tapped to best serve students who participate in

such programs.

Objectives

There are two main objectives:

1. To present study findings as sources of recommendations which will serve

as useful design or programming strategies for adventure trip managers

through investigation of experiences of students who have participated in

adventure trip programs.

The Adventure Trip Program at Texas State, for instance, has among others, goals

such as promoting active learning through personal experience, instilling in

participants a sense of community, promoting environmental awareness, and so on.[4]

It is useful to find out if these goals are being met through the current programs as

designed and as implemented or if modifications should be made in design,

implementation or both.

2. To extend theoretical discourse surrounding the value of an adventure trip

program through examining the adventure trip experience as a medium in

which the student acquires or advances behaviors and strategies of success

in coping with life in college.

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[4] (Retrieved from, http://www.campusrecreation.txstate.edu/programs/outdoor/atp.html on November 26, 2010)

A relevant question that may be asked is this: Do students benefit from participation in the adventure program simply in terms of the kinds of benefits discussed as goals above (in item 1) or are those goals complemented, augmented or expanded by other intrinsic values that may be found in participation? Part of the purpose of this study is to examine if there are added benefits that the adventure trip program may latently embed and, as a result, offer the possibility of expanding articulation of the set of benefits that the program may promise for students who participate in it.

Significance and Rationale

As noted in the introduction, the student is confronted by a host of factors that must be negotiated in a movement towards success. Universities and colleges are partners with students and are concurrently engaged in concrete efforts that support student-centered goals such as academic success, retention, healthy living, coping, and so on. One structural intervention, for instance, is the provision of tutoring or mentoring services (Collier & Fellows, 2008). Another is provision of counseling services to assist in accomplishing academic, personal and career goals (Kitzrow, 2009). A third form of institutional intervention is the provision of recreational services for students. The adventure trip program, which is the subject of this study, is typically a component of university recreational services for students.

This study, as stated above, intends to examine adventure trip programming with the aim of:

- Identifying useful programming strategies for adventure trip managers through investigation of experiences of students who have participated in adventure trip programs.

- Constructing a concept of the adventure trip experience as a medium in which the student acquires or advances behaviors or strategies of success in coping with life in college.

Both outcomes can be seen pragmatically as program development goals because, by becoming aware of them, adventure trip planners can improve their programming strategies and universities, thereby, can more effectively improve their efforts to facilitate student success.

Research Questions

It has been stated above that there are two frameworks of inquiry:

1. The first addresses current intentional practice in adventure trip programming. It will examine the purpose of the adventure trip program largely, and more specifically at Texas State. It will attempt to determine if that purpose is being fulfilled. It is the aim that findings will be useful in further programmatic development of the adventure trip program.

2. The second framework is constructed around exploration of a deeper understanding of the nature and implications of the adventure trip program with the aim of articulating other latent or less directly visible benefits (or disadvantages) of participation in the program. This dimension of the inquiry aims

to serve two ends: (a) further assist in adventure trip program development and (b) contribute to *extension* of theoretical discourse on the adventure trip experience and programming. The value of this ought to be obvious, as conceptual evolution is crucial for growth within any discipline or field of practice. If findings lead to formerly-unaddressed issues or phenomena, then new information may be added to the body of knowledge surrounding adventure trip programming.

Out of these two frameworks, two primary questions emerge:

Question 1. To what degree is the Adventure Trip Program [at Texas State] effective in meeting/fulfilling its stated goals, as indicated from the viewpoint of the participant?

In order to engage this primary question, specific sub-questions which address adventure trip programming goals such as environmental awareness, active learning, community, teamwork and so on will be employed. (These questions may be found in the appendix.)

Question 2. Are there other latent or hidden means through which the adventure program is beneficial for participants, but which are not manifest in its stated goals or purposes?

To address this primary question, sub-questions that explore deliberate or unplanned utilization of strategies or behaviors elaborated by existential themes will be drawn upon as tools of investigation. (Specific questions may also be found in the appendix.)

Assumptions

1.   Day-to-day living (existence) on the college campus will be regarded as a journey through a meaningful or significant portion of life, complete with its associated struggles. Therefore, the college experience may be conceived as a microcosm of life itself and may be conceptualized as an existential phenomenon.

2.   It is speculated that the adventure trip is an instance of a condition for intensification of certain forms of experience. Therefore, it enables certain forms or subjects of discourse (e.g. those that revolve around heightened experiences--for instance, awareness of self as an object within nature) to emerge.

3.   Due to its argued property as a state of intensification, it is speculated that the adventure trip program provides an opportunity for enlargement of dimensions of living, learning and struggle such as development and exercise of coping strategies.

Delimitations

1.   This study represents only a part of what could be constructed as a complex study involving perspectives of program participants, programmers, trip leaders or researchers combined to generate a total picture of the adventure trip program. Due to the need to contain the study in order to work within time and other resource frameworks of a thesis, it will be considered as a first step to a broader

investigation and will, therefore, be limited to indications provided from the viewpoint of program participants only. This boundary also makes sense in consideration of an analysis that focuses on individuals engaged with living through personal acts and personal experience.

2. There are different discursive frameworks that may be employed in investigating and interpreting the phenomena revealed in a study such as this one. This researcher has chosen to employ a framework of existentialism as a lens for making sense of the indicators yielded by this study.

Limitations

1. In this study, the question and its constitutive parts (sub-questions) are investigated from answers provided from the viewpoint of the participant. Such a point of view could be incomplete, biased or idiosyncratic. In that regard, in each case, indicators might not convey a full picture of the phenomenon. Future studies will need to corroborate these findings through methodological triangulation (e.g. researcher observation, interview of other people familiar with the participant).

2. Sample sizes are small. While this is necessary in order to be able to conduct in-depth investigation with selected participants, it limits the extent to which findings and interpretations may be generalized.

Definitions

1. College experience: A reference to all aspects of college life--academics, friendship, leisure time and many other aspects of life.

2. Adventure programming: It describes the activities of planning and implementing programs as provided by an adventure trip program. This study will focus on extended trips of seven or more days offered by the Adventure Trip Program (ATP) at Texas State University-San Marcos. The trips are designed to use adventurous experiences as tools for learning.

3. Adventure trip experience: The range of experiences acquired by a person or group during one of the extended trips in which they participate.

CHAPTER 2

Methods

This chapter provides a description of data collection methods, data analysis methods, and sample.

Sample Description

Demographic information. All students chosen are traditional students of Texas State University-San Marcos. Participants ranged in age from 18-31 yrs. Each participant has attended the university since at least August of 2010. Each student selected has participated in an adventure trip lasting more than one week. All students who participated in the study were undergraduate students.

Sampling strategy. Given the intent of in-depth interviewing, it was decided that a large sample would not be feasible. First, all participants were selected purposefully with a goal: that core participants must have been active participants in adventure programming at Texas State University-San Marcos. Participants were chosen by convenience. Due to the relatively small number of students that participate in extended adventure trips each year, less than forty, participants were chosen based on availability and willingness to participate. Students selected ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-three years old, and from freshman to seniors in class. All participants have attended at least one trip lasting five or more days, in the last two years. It should be noted that each student was a student that

has been on a trip with the researcher, and was known to the researcher before the study.

Sample size. According to Patton (2002), "meaningfulness...and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected...than with sample size" (p. 245). In this study, there is an aim for richness of data that will yield primary descriptive information about a delimited population. Richness of information is approached through conducting in-depth interviews. Intensity of the in-depth interview process, however, asserts limits of feasibility on sample size.

Gerish and Lacey (2006) presented the argument (referenced to DePaulo) that, if concern is not about variability within the group, but about typicality, a small sample size would be adequate. In this study, participants in Adventure Programming are being described as a category of people using affordances of a particular type of activity to negotiate aspects of college life. The aim is to describe a group framed or linked by a set of phenomena rather than explore variability within the group.

Gerrish and Lacey (2006) also offered Silverman's argument that some qualitative researchers, particularly those interested in theoretical interpretation of data, "are not convinced by arguments for saturation or capturing maximum variation." It is possible, those researchers assert, to derive theoretical insights from fragments of "naturally occurring data or the in-depth study of a single case" (p. 150).

In a first descriptive investigation, such as this study, establishing incidence of a phenomenon (e.g. behavior, choice, etc. of adventure trip participants) is more relevant than variability. In fact, given its apparently pioneering role, it is considered also reasonable that establishing such incidence is the first goal rather than pursuing a claim for widespread pattern. The latter is a task for a further stage of research. Identification (i.e. description of incidence) is the first step.

Another argument that should be made is that the sample in this study is purposive. The chances of missing a phenomenon that is emergent from this population is much less than it would be if one were conducting random sampling within the general student population. Therefore, chances of missing phenomena in the absence of a large sample can be considered much lower.

Context of Interviews

All interviews were conducted in open but semi-private settings such as, offices, coffee shops, park benches, and the like. Interviews were conducted in areas where the participant did not seem to feel that others were listening. The researcher provided participants with information about the study and received their consent to participate. The researcher promised confidentiality of the interviewees.

Data Collection Strategy

All study participants were interviewed. Numerous questions were asked in order to generate rich data. It was anticipated that some of the questions would

elicit answers that overlapped to some degree, but the intention was that repetition would serve as a strategy of corroboration of information within the data itself on each participant. Audio recording was used during the interviews and the recordings were later transcribed into text.

Interview Questions

Two research questions were presented.

Question 1. To what degree is the Adventure Trip Program [at Texas State] effective in meeting/fulfilling its stated goals, as indicated from the viewpoint of the participant?

In order to address this primary question, specific sub-questions which address adventure trip programming goals such as environmental awareness, active learning, community, teamwork and so on were developed. (These questions may be found in the appendices.)

Question 2. Are there other latent/hidden issues for which the adventure program is beneficial, but which are not manifest in its stated goals/purposes?

To address this primary question, sub-questions that explore deliberate and unplanned utilization of strategies or behaviors elaborated by existential themes will be drawn upon as tools of investigation. (Specific questions may also be found in the appendices.)

Data Analysis and Interpretation

After data transcription, a coding process was begun. The open coding process began with highlighting recurring data. Data were then organized into categories that served as thematic categories (Descombe, 2007).

During the axial coding process salient themes discovered in the open coding process were further integrated based on similarity or detection of patterns.

The final stage of coding involved integration of the higher order categories derived during axial coding into narrative form.

Strategies for Credibility and Trustworthiness

Credibility was established through two strategies. The first strategy used was member-checking. After completing data analysis and interpretation, the author went back to three of the participants and discussed findings and interpretations with them. These participants had the opportunity to affirm or correct the interpretations constructed by the researcher.

For the second strategy, the researcher used peer debriefing. Portions of the study findings were shared with two graduate students, who were then given opportunity to ask questions in order to clarify aspects of the study findings and interpretations that they did not understand.

Finally, the researcher included a reflection on himself and his role in order to make transparent the possible ways in which his own bias might have influenced interpretation of the data.

CHAPTER 3

Findings and Discussion

This chapter will present and describe the findings of the research conducted. The chapter will start with a brief description of the participants. Participants' backgrounds may be important to understand when trying to contextualize statements and interpret findings. Chapter four also includes a discussion of the themes that emerged from the data and a discussion of the data that was organized into each theme. Chapter four closes with a discussion of the research questions and how the findings apply to the initial research questions.

Participant Description

A brief description of the participants in this study is presented below. The names have been changed and any information that could directly identify each participant has been omitted.

Rosa is a 23-year-old senior who is studying Geography. She transferred to Texas State University-San Marcos after one year studying at a different university. She has been at Texas State for the last three years and will graduate in August. She participated in the summer of 2010 Kings Canyon and

Sequoia backpacking and rafting trip. The trip was 11 days long and consisted of six days of backpacking in the backcountry of Kings Canyon and Sequoia National park and ended with two days of rafting on the American River. This was her only Adventure Trip Program experience.

Eleanor is a 20-year-old junior by hours, in her second year of school, who is studying International Studies. She has attended Texas State for both years that she has been in college. She attended the New Student Wilderness Expedition (NSWE). NSWE is an orientation program for incoming freshmen and transfers. It is five days long and consists of rock climbing, camping, canoeing, kayaking, challenge course, and hiking. She has gone on several other weekend trips since NSWE, but was asked to focus on her experience on NSWE for the purposes of the interview.

Susan is a 19-year-old sophomore studying Psychology. She has attended Texas State for both of the years that she has been in college. She attended NSWE and a backpacking trip to the Grand Canyon. She has also attended several weekend trips but was asked to focus on the longer trips for the interview.

Joan is an 18-year-old freshman studying Mass Communication - Electronic Media. She will complete her first year at Texas State in May. She attended NSWE in May and has attended several weekend trips since. She was also asked to focus on NSWE when being interviewed about her experience.

Julius is a 31-year-old senior studying geography. He will graduate in May. He has attended Texas State for the last 7 years on and off. He attended the

Colorado Cross Country Skiing trip in January of 2011. He has not attended any other trips since but plans to do so before he graduates.

Martin is a 22-year-old graduate. He is still at Texas State because he is doing graduate work. During the time of his trip he was a Senior. He attended Texas State University for 4.5 years. He now holds a bachelor's degree in Biology. Martin attended the Grand Canyon trip over Spring Break of 2010.

Napoleon is a 21-year-old junior studying geography. He has attended Texas State all 3 years. Napoleon was a participant in the Kings Canyon and Sequoia Backpacking and Rafting Trip. He has participated in other weekend trips but was asked to focus on the extended trip.

Elizabeth is a 21-year-old senior studying Latin American Business. She has attended Texas State all 3.5 years that she has been in college. She participated in the Hawaii Backpacking and the Kings Canyon and Sequoia Backpacking and Rafting Trips. She has also participated in several weekend trips but was asked to focus on her extended trip experience.

Mary is a 20-year-old junior art education major. She is currently in her third year of study at Texas State. She has participated in a Grand Canyon Backpacking Trip as well as NSWE. She is currently an employee and trip leader at the Outdoor Center at Texas State University. She was asked to focus on her experience as a participant on extended trips.

Catherine is a 19-year-old sophomore nutrition major. She is currently in her second year at Texas State. She has participated in a Grand Canyon Backpacking Trip, Kings Canyon and Sequoia Backpacking and Rafting Trip, and NSWE. She is currently an employee and trip leader at the Outdoor Center at Texas State. She was asked to focus on her experience as a participant on extended trips.

Emergent Concepts

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed following the thematic structure that follows:

1. In the first stage, data was coded into items (e.g. escape, relaxation).

2. In the second stage, items were clustered into themes (e.g. escape, relaxation, etc. were clustered into *coping mechanism*). Some items did not cluster and so they were reclassified as individual themes.

3. In the third stage, themes were grouped into categories (e.g. coping, practical skills, etc. were grouped into the *personal* category, while themes such as friends and working with a group were grouped into the *social* category).

4. In the fourth stage, all standing categories and themes were placed in one of three higher-order conceptual categories: *practice of life constructs,*

constructs of transcendence, and existential constructs.[5]

Practice of life constructs.

Related research question: Question 1

Related ATP goals:

- To promote active learning through direct personal experience

- To help students grow in their leadership abilities and communication skills

- To encourage self-sufficiency, independence, health, and confidence

- To instill in the participants a sense of community, teamwork and sharing

Personal: Coping, practical skills, life lessons, confidence.

Trip as a coping mechanism. This theme emerged as the second most common. The following sub themes were grouped together to form the theme of trips as a coping mechanism: escape, positive memories, time and place for reflection, and relaxation.

1. Escape. This was a common topic throughout the data. Some participants spoke of how ATP gets them away from technology, stress, and even homework and allows them to simply escape for a small amount of time. When asked if other concerns or worries ever came up during an adventure trip, one participant answered, "Actually no, I think it was a very good distraction if there was

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[5] As a guide for the reader, each concept will immediately be preceded by information related to the research question which the concept addresses.

something going on like just stress from school, I think that's kind of why I went, it make me forget about… everything."

Escape from technology might be of particular interest to some researchers, given technology's dominance in the life of many of today's students. Its presentation here is less about coping, and so its role is not central. Its impact, however, can be construed indirectly as a force from which escape sometimes might be some form of relief. Before each extended trip, a pre-trip meeting is held. In this meeting information about the trips is discussed, rules are made, and the group agrees on how the trip will run. The trip leaders at the meetings always suggest that once the group begins hiking, canoeing, or participating in other outdoor activities, the students leave their cell phones, iPods and other electronics behind. Because of this discussion, the idea of leaving technology behind might be in the thoughts of the participant well before the trip. When Susan was asked what the most impactful part of the trip was for her she responded, "Probably being away from technology and the rest of the world. You have to interact with nature." Students are surrounded by technology in every part of their lives, even in the classroom they are asked to complete power points and multi media presentations. It seems that getting away from technology, and into nature, was a refreshing part of the ATP experience for some.

2. Positive memories. Some participants spoke about how when they returned from a trip they often revisited the trip through their memories. These memories invoked many emotions and feelings, but the primary one was happiness. Catherine stated that when she thought back on trip memories, "it gets me in a

really happy mood, super positive." Another participant said when she remembers the trip it makes her miss it, but it also makes her happy. She said, "Oh yeah I'll miss [nature] but also it's a good positive happy feeling." When asked if the mental image, that the participant forms during a trip, affected the participant when he or she returned to school, five of the participants mentioned, among other things that the memory made them happy or lifted sprits.

3. *Separate place and time for reflection and processing.* Trips allow time to think through issues. For many students life gets too busy to have time to sit down and think through and mentally resolve issues that arise during the college experience. Adventure trips are filled with quiet times. Often during the evenings when students are used to watching television or browsing the Internet, participants find themselves lying under the stars with time to mentally tackle issues. One participant stated that if there was a distressing problem, the opportunity to take "a hike or something" was an opportunity to resolve the problem. Another participant stated, "Ohh [being on trips] definitely helps me tackle those problems that I have, like if I am thinking about those problems while I am on the trip, it gives me a sense of warmth and lets me know that everything is going to be ok."

4. *Relaxation.* Trips help with relaxation. For some participants, ATP is a getaway, a place to have some peace, to relax and rejuvenate. When Rosa was asked why she comes out into nature she responded, "[To] get away from stuff, relax." While the activities of the ATP program are generally not very relaxing, some participants felt that the setting, nature, was relaxing. Being in nature gave them a

sense of relaxation. When Susan was asked what she sees when she looks at nature, she said, "Um just… a really relaxing setting."

The theme of coping as presented here can be looked at generally as that of confronting stress through instrumental actions and their accompanying experiences--in the way some of the concepts identified above illustrate. Some participants spoke of trips being a positive mechanism for dealing with stress. This is true during the trip itself and afterwards.

Most participants at some point during the interview referenced trips as a way to get away, to relax, or to escape stress. Just being on the trip seemed to facilitate a different state of mind. When asked if thinking of issues or stressors while on trips dampened their spirits or if it energized them to deal with the issues or stress, all students that identified as having thought of issues or stress on trips said that being on the trip energized rather than dampened their spirits. The participant mentioned above who proposed that a hike was an opportunity to resolve things had this to say: "Yeah I would say it energizes, because I don't know being stressed out about something here and there, maybe going for a hike or something and you think about it more and destress and figure out what to do."

One participant identified trips as a place to meet other students that may be encountering similar stress over similar situations. The participant stated, "[ATP] its also a great way to connect with the other students who might be going through the same stressors."

Even after the trip is over, memories might still play a role in tempering stress. Memory of a trip, noted one participant, "makes me like peaceful kind of, like when I am stressed out it makes me not stressed out." One of the most convincing pieces of data to support this idea is Elizabeth's statement about what trip imagery does for her,

> Yeah actually um after the Waipio Valley I bought a postcard and I put it on my fridge so every time I think I am stressed in school I look at that as like, even though it's a beautiful picture I just remember some of the things. It was just like raining and sometimes when things get bad, everything will go wrong, but we have just got to, you know, see the light at the end of it all. Like it was raining, we were climbing, we were about to give up at one point. So I literally have it up on my fridge just to remind me.

In Elizabeth's description above, it is shown that memories of the trip help her cope with the stresses in her life.

Trips help students deal with stress in several different ways. Some students use trips as getaways and report not even thinking of their stress when on the trips. Other students speak of how nature relaxes them and lets them know that everything will be ok. Yet other students, like Elizabeth, use the experiences they have had on the trips to help put their challenges and stresses into perspective. During a trip participants must be concerned with staying warm, staying dry, and making sure they have enough food and water. When students compare the challenges and stresses at home to stresses faced on the trip, it helps them put their

problems into perspective and it gives confidence, that, as on the trip, their challenges can be overcome.

Confidence through facing challenge. This is an important theme throughout the data. The data indicates that one of the most impactful benefits of the ATP program is its ability to build confidence through overcoming challenge. On most trips the challenge is physical in nature. Many trips require participants to carry heavy loads over steep mountain passes, or paddle boats loaded down with equipment for miles. Many of the activities done on the ATP trips are new and challenging, for instance, rock climbing, whitewater kayaking or rafting, and backpacking, are new experiences to most people who participate in the ATP program. Facing these new challenges can be a difficult task, but success can build a great deal of confidence. Napoleon, when asked how ATP had affected his time at Texas State, stated, "Just do it you know, like on sawtooth [a mountain pass] I was like, 'oh god,' you know and... I just kept on pushing myself and I did it. That was one of the hardest things I have done. If I could do that, I feel like I could do a lot of things." For Rosa, it was very challenging. She said, "It's [the California backpacking trip] definitely the most challenging thing that I have done, which is why I think I liked it so much." For these two participants, the challenges they faced on the trips were some of the hardest they have faced in their lives.

It appears as if facing a very difficult challenge and succeeding places some challenges faced back at school in perspective. Mary had this to say:

I think, particularly of the Grand Canyon, hiking out, it was so hard but I think you look towards the end, like you know you are going to get there, and I think it's that way in life, like graduation, it's in the future and you know you will get there at some point and it will be rewarding.

For some challenge was a significant component of the experience. Some participants enjoyed the rewarding feeling of having conquered a great challenge. It seems that the degree of challenge correlated to the degree of satisfaction after the challenge was complete. Elizabeth said,

I feel like sometimes I look at it as a challenge because I feel like there are some times when I am just like really tired. I am in a forest but all I can see is the hill ahead… but then once you get to the top you look back at what you have done. I think it's kind of euphoric when you get to the end of the views that you are pretty much working your ass off to get to, sometimes it's a challenge, but you overcome it and it pays off.

Furthermore, for Elizabeth the challenge of ATP seemed to define the experience. Going to the same places without the challenge would not be the same. She stated,

I mean its really cool to think about, I mean I cant believe I did that, I can do a hike you know through the Sierra Nevadas and in a valley in Hawaii. Not many people can say they have done that. Some people go to Hawaii and they spend the entire time in spas and we did [it] the rustic way and I think that is so awesome. So that's what I look back on and I think how lucky I am.

This participant defines the experiences through the lens of challenge, a challenge that she chose. She could have done it the way other people do it but she chose the "rustic" way.

Life lessons. Some participants indicated that the things they learned paralleled or illustrated lessons about life in general. Some participants encountered metaphors that they believed translated well into their everyday lives. Catherine said:

> When we were in Sequoia and there were… all of these trees that were burnt from the inside out and you could just see it but they were still standing. I think about that all of the time, these trees, they are dead, that's what they are but they are still going through it, they are still standing, so many obstacles in life but they are still standing.

Several participants said that the challenges they faced translated in to great life lessons for them. When asked if experiences that a person has on a trip are similar to other experiences in life, Catherine responded:

> Um definitely challenges, of challenging my body, of seeing what it can do and at the same time of challenging my mind during school, challenging my heart with friendships. So I feel like challenge is a big thing, especially for my life because I like to challenge myself and so being in Sequoia and freaking Black Rock Pass is like hard but it was cool when you finish and it's just like that with anything, it's going to be hard but once you finish it is the best.

Practical skills. Some of the participants spoke of the practical skills they had learned on trips. Some of the skills that were mentioned were camping skills, how to pack, how to dress for certain types of weather and survival skills. One participant said,

> I think I like being challenged… you know you do what you have to do to kind of like survive, you know you are out there for six days you know you cant really forget to pack… a meal its like you have to figure out what the basics you need to live pretty much it makes you become a little more down to earth.

Other skills mentioned as benefits included such things as backpacking, canoeing, and skiing. Julius said, "Oh it [ATP] gives me an education, teaches me new skills and techniques that I didn't have before." Julius also said that he felt that the skills he learned would help him in his job in the future.

Like Julius, Elizabeth stated that she felt that the ATP experience was something that taught her things that will apply in the work life, that will help her get a job. Elizabeth said,

> I interviewed with a company and they were like "So are you active in school?" and I was like, I actually go on a lot of outdoor trips with the recreation center, and I think that that is something they think is kind of cool. Like ok you are being involved. It's just… voluntary, just the fact that you put yourself out there and go on trips. I think it [trips] definitely gives me good experience that I can apply to my work life.

It is worth mentioning that some of the activities that are done on ATP trips are risky without proper instruction. Such activities require supervision and instruction at first. Since many students do not have the resources to pay to go on trips through organizations that provide service for profit, the opportunity to come on trips and learn hard skills through ATP is an important service that helps college students develop outdoor skills in a safe environment.

Self-sufficiency, independence, health, and confidence. Participants said that the trips helped them grow, and also helped them find out things about themselves that that they did not know, or that they had forgotten. In one student's case, it reminded her of the need to be self-sufficient, " I mean I have always known its important just to be yourself and go forward boldly but uh at that point in my life I had kind of forgotten a little and that [ATP] kind of brought me out of my shell again." Many examples have been given of how challenges lead to confidence. Some of the best examples are ones where students transfer their accomplishments in the outdoors to confidence in other areas of life. The idea of challenge and self-confidence seem to be very impactful parts of the ATP experience for most participants.

Trips also encourage health. According to several participants, trips promote healthy lifestyles in several ways. The trips themselves are extremely physically challenging and can be a great way to spend some time increasing a person's fitness level. Participants reported being challenged by the trips in a way that made them want to be more fit. Some felt that the trips encouraged them to pursue a healthy

lifestyle. Other participants felt like the trips complemented their already active lifestyles. One participant stated, "I love being active and running and swimming and I feel like Hawaii [the ATP trip] had a lot of that."

Active learning through direct personal experience. Some students spoke of learning as one of the benefits of ATP, most spoke of learning in the sense that they were learning about themselves. One participant said, "I just think it's a self development experience, just learning what you really do need to get... by and enjoy... life." Several of the students spoke of the fact that ATP taught them things about camping and outdoors that they would have not learned otherwise. When asked what benefits ATP had given participants, one participant answered, "well the whole like interacting with people and learning things, because you know when I graduate I would love to go camping on my own but I wouldn't know the first thing to do if I didn't go on these trips."

Opportunity to have fun. Several participants used fun when describing their experience of ATP. Most of the participants stated that they had fun at some point during the trip. When asked to describe her experience of ATP, Mary said, "Um definitely challenge[ing] and fun too." When asked what the most impactful part of the trip was, Elizabeth responded, "Um see I love like the whole having fun, we goofed off on the beach." Fun was an important part of the trip for several of the participants.

Social: Friendship, ability to work in groups.

Friendship/camaraderie. This theme was by far the most common theme throughout the data. Most trip participants saw this as the major goal for participating in the ATP program. This theme also emerged as the most commonly spoken of advantage to the program. In fact, the goal of making friends seems to be generally significant. Susan, for instance, stated that her primary goals for college were "to meet new people and get a good education." Even when asked about their general experience of being a student at Texas State University, several participants framed their answer in terms of success in establishing friendships. Elizabeth said:

> Like the first two years it was kind of hard to make friends. It's actually kind
> of the reason I signed up for the trip, just to kind of meet some more people,
> but I came [to school] with my two best friends so we went in there not really
> meeting that many people. Ideally in the beginning it [the Texas State
> experience] wasn't really that great but I really am enjoying it a lot now,

It is not surprising then that friendship emerged as a key theme of participation in ATP, with either participants entering into the program with an expectation of making new friends or participation leading to formation of new friendships. Also, certain aspects of ATP itself seemed to facilitate friendship formation.

Participants were asked about their goals in ATP participation. Joan responded, "Mainly [to] try something new and meet new people." On the other hand, when inquiry was made about benefits of participation, enjoyment of nature was mentioned and, also, several participants responded with answers about

meeting new people or friends. Susan added that "[ATP] offers new challenges and the ability to… push yourself and to meet other people that like to be outdoors and do the same kinds of thing you do."

When asked if the participant made new friends on the ATP trip every participant surveyed answered that she or he had made new friends. When comparison about friendship making was made between participation in ATP and other activities, Catherine said, "I have made lots of friends through ATP, but I feel like that if I had done a sorority or any other student organization I would be forced to make friends with other people, but I feel like with ATP I am not paying to be friends with other people." For some participants, ATP facilitated more friendships than other activities and for some it did not. All respondents, however, agreed that ATP facilitated new friendships.

Participants were asked if they could identify any aspect of ATP that facilitated friendship formation. One common aspect was the long van ride that most trips require. Some trips require as many as four days of driving. This time allowed participants to share conversations and build friendships. Some participants referred to this time as being "forced" to be together and being compelled to share things that people usually do not share. According to one participant, "I was just thinking about this the other day….I think…you get to know each other where you kind of talk about the weird…things but its ok."

Another aspect that seemed to facilitate friendships is the idea of a common goal or challenge. Julius stated, "Well it's been my experience in the past that when

people experience something together, they form a stronger bond, and when they experience something together they can always relate to each other and trust each other a little more." According to Julius, because the group goes through a common challenge they form a quick bond and are quick to trust each other. Spending a week or more going through significant life challenges is a big factor in creating this type of bond. These types of relationships are some of the most impactful parts of adventure programming.

While not all friendships made on trips continued upon return (speculatively as a result of divergent schedules or interests), some participants indicated that they have maintained some of these relationships. ATP is a great place to launch friendships for people with a common interest. It also serves as a great way to make new acquaintances. Some participants cited having more acquaintances around campus as a benefit of the trip.

Sense of community, ability to work in a group (teamwork) and sharing. This ability was identified as a major benefit of ATP. Two participants indicated that they have not had many opportunities in their classes to work with groups. It is essential on a trip to work well in a group as many daily tasks are done as groups. One participant said, "like the whole team work thing because… if I didn't do the outdoor trips, not many of my classes do… teamwork stuff so I just feel like I am a little more prepared when you are with a group of people and you have to… reach a common goal."

Many students said that the trips helped them understand that communicating and sacrificing for others was an important part of working with a group. One participant stated, "I guess just communication you know when [a trip participant] was like, 'I don't want to do this,' and then we all like as a group consensually agreed that, you know, I mean just concern for other people it was really good."

One participant indicated that the ATP experience helped his understanding of diversity, "Um I think maybe on people, not certain people but kinds of people, you know you have like the really strong people and the people that complain or whatnot so not negatively but it just helps me understand different types of people in that challenging situation."

Participants often spoke of the bond created on trips, they spoke of shared goals, common interest, and even group encouragement of those who were facing struggle. Several participants spoke of being "forced" to be together, they spoke of how being placed in a group with members you did not pick, taught them how to deal with different types of people. Participants found that on a trip of this nature, you need to work together to get things done. At the pre trip meeting each participant states their goals for the trip, then as a group participants and facilitators attempt to help each other achieve those goals. This instilled sense of teamwork seems to have been noticed by the participants. One participant said, "the challenge I guess was working with a big group and trying to have everyone get what they want out of it, that was the challenge." Others felt that the challenge itself

was what helped the group bond. Several participants noted that common challenge builds friendships. One participant said ATP was best described by, "challenges, new challenges definitely, a time not only to test yourself but to meet new people which is great and form strong relationships because they are challenging themselves too."

Leadership abilities and communication skills. Participants never used the word leadership to describe things that they learned on the trips; however, they did state that they learned many of the skills that strong leaders possess. Some students mentioned that they learned hard skills, practical skills that will make them competent leaders. Some of the skills mentioned were, survival skills, camping skills, and how to act and dress in a wilderness environment. These skill sets will help them lead others into the outdoors. One participant said, "I come to the outdoor center to do trips. I want to interact with people. I want to learn more things, and hopefully when I feel confident enough to do those things, I can teach somebody else and give them that experience." The ATP program builds outdoor leaders. Two of the participants in the study are trip leaders that started out as trip participants. ATP trips also build confidence through challenge. Respondents pointed out that succeeding at challenges on the trip gave them confidence. Participants said that they felt that the challenges they overcame on the trip would give them confidence not just in areas of outdoors, but in many areas of life including, applying for jobs/school, taking on new tasks, and attempting things that they previously thought were too difficult. One participant said, " Um definitely having confidence in myself, rock climbing really helped that one and really self

confidence can be important for doing anything especially trying a new job out or

even having the 'umpf' to apply to some position that I might not think I can get or a

grad school." Participants often spoke of how they learned to communicate with the

group. Some spoke of how they learned how people react in tough situations, they

learned what to do and what not to do in certain social situations, and they learned

how to communicate with a variety of personalities. When asked what benefits ATP

allowed its participants one student said, "Um you know building friends, and

communicating with everyone."

Constructs of transcendence: Worth, care, spirituality.

Related research question: Question 1

Related ATP goal:

▪ To promote environmental awareness and outdoor ethics

Spirituality. Spirituality is a theme that arose for some participants. Several

of the participants seemed to see the ATP experience as a spiritual one. The

spiritual aspect seemed to be most common when participants were asked about

their understanding of nature. Mary was asked what she saw when looking at

nature and responded by saying, "just beauty I think, just natural god's beauty that

he created." While Mary's identification of her experience might be interpreted as

revealing a theistic component, others identified their encounter with nature in

other ways. Eleanor's response, for instance, seemed to convey a more naturalistic

form of spirituality. When asked about her experience of nature, she responded, "I

feel like when I am climbing or something I am really one with the earth and that is really cool for me, its almost kind of a spiritual experience." For some the idea of being in contact with nature seemed to arouse spirituality.

Although, when surveyed, trip participants made reference to learning principles of Leave No Trace (LNT) as practical lessons, perhaps the direct knowledge gained through LNT is not the only contribution that the program makes to the participant. When it was suggested that the valley known as Hetch Hetchy in California be dammed to store water for San Francisco, John Muir suggested that people did not know of the valley's beauty. Muir famously said, "It appears, therefore, that Hetch Hetchy Valley, far from being a plain, common, rock-bound meadow, as many who have not seen it seem to suppose, is a grand landscape garden, one of Nature's rarest and most precious mountain temples" (Muir, 1912, p. 255). Muir suggests that conservation is dependent on people seeing and being involved with nature. The data indicates that participants are connecting with nature during their ATP experiences. One participant said,

> I always look forward to sleeping at night, it's just so quiet you know. You hear the wind at night and it's just so quiet and you're just in your sleeping bag and you are like I am just in the middle of the woods and I don't know it's my favorite part, and the stars.

It may be the case that such a transcendent personal connection with nature is one of the program's contributions to person-nature interaction.

Environmental awareness and ethics. Environmental ethics are emphasized in the ATP program primarily through the teaching of "Leave no Trace"(LNT) ethics. Each trip goes through a brief overview of the LNT principles. Some participants learned about LNT on the trip for the first time. When asked whose responsibility care of nature is, all of the participants said that they thought it was "our" responsibility. One participant said, "Its our responsibility, you know, you make it the way you want it to be. Just respect it because you want to enjoy it, you know, you go out there to enjoy the pristineness of it and um that's how I like it to be, that's why I am getting outside of the city."

Some participants spoke about how because they grew up in a city, it was their first time to camp or to be in nature for an extended amount of time. When surveyed, most of the respondents stated that ATP positively influenced them in their understanding of environmental ethics.

As hinted above connection with nature at a visceral level might have its impact on human-nature interaction. In the same light, basic interaction that is not mediated by such things as coded principles, technology and so on might be valuable for environmental ethics. An ethic of appreciation of nature in a basic way is reminiscent of *friluftsliv*, the Scandinavian philosophy of "open air life" (discussed in chapter 1). *Friluftsliv* is a tradition of going outside and interacting with nature in an elemental way (Faarlund, Dahle, & Jensen, 2007, p. 393). As mentioned above following Muir's observation, a transcendent apprehension of nature just as it is might be a facilitator, an evocative dimension of experience that might instigate

action. Perhaps it is the case that the spiritual nature of some of these experiences impact participants enough to motivate them to put forth extra effort to protect the nature that they connected with.

Participants were asked if they thought that a sense of responsibility for the environment would transfer to a sense of responsibility in other areas of life. Most participants answered that they thought that the two were related and that it would be likely for a person to develop a sense of responsibility in other areas of life. Julius responded to the question this way: "Yes because if you teach them that we need to take care of nature and respect it, then hopefully they will learn that they need to respect everyone else."

Existential constructs: Self-definition, freedom, authenticity.

Related research question: Question 2

Self-definition: A perpetual project of self-discovery. This theme was a particularly common theme among participants that were freshman[6] at the time of their ATP experience; however, in several instances self-discovery was a theme for non-freshman participants as well. Respondents who participated in the New Student Wilderness Expedition commonly saw this as one of the benefits of the ATP program. These participants saw the ATP experience as a chance to begin the transition from high school to college.

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[6] It should be noted that Eleanor, Susan, Joan, Mary, and Catherine were all freshman when they initially participated in ATP. Many of them also participated in trips after their freshman year.

Trips help students discover, rediscover and define who they are. Self-definition is an integral part of existence and is something that, for some, is facilitated during trips. Elizabeth stated, "Well I think from what I have said yeah it's [ATP] taught me a lot and… [it's] another thing that is helping me find who I am because I am just finding out more and more who I am." For some, the ATP experience helped them discover new hobbies, connect with nature, or find a previously unknown love for the outdoors. For others the trips helped them discover who they are and what things they want to define them. Catherine said,

> I was outside one night and I was staring off into nothing and I realized that I
> need to make some changes, and it definitely helped me kind of put things
> into perspective, and helped me realize that I am from this place [the city]
> but it does not have to define who I am and nothing has to define me but me.
> And I saw that there.

There were several stories of self-discovery and revelation that had taken place on an ATP trip. While the younger participants seemed to be more impacted by self-discovery on trips, a majority of the participants indicated that they had learned something about themselves on their trip(s).

Jean Paul Sartre said, "man...encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards" (Sartre, 1966, p. 290). In college a person begins to exist outside one-time identifying groups such as family and begins to formulate a new identity. For some students, ATP is a chance to take what Sartre sees as the second step, ATP allows the college student to "encounter himself." As participants

are challenged, in some cases more than they have ever been challenged before, it is

the case for some that through those challenges they are able to see a picture of

themselves that they have not seen before. For participants like Rosa who said, "It's

[the California backpacking trip] definitely the most challenging thing that I have

done, which is why I think I liked it so much," overcoming challenges that are more

difficult than ever before is a defining experience. Napoleon said, "That was one of

the hardest things I have done. If I could do that I feel like I could do a lot of things."

Napoleon seems to be discovering himself, and "surging up in the world" by

realizing what he is capable of. According to Sartre the last step is defining one's

self. One participant indicated that she felt that she had begun this process as well.

Elizabeth said, "Well I think from what I have said yeah it's [ATP] taught me a lot

and… [it's] another thing that is helping me find who I am because I am just finding

out more and more who I am."   The ATP experience is a medium for students to

progress along the existential path of self-definition.

    Extending oneself. Several participants indicated that trips helped them

encounter adventure. Adventure is another example of Sartre's idea of

encountering one's self. When trying new things, students begin to understand

themselves better. One student said that he felt that ATP gave him the needed push

to experience some adventure, "You know it pushes me to get out there and try new

things because sometimes people are afraid to try new things and we don't want to,

we will make excuses, and this kind of just helped me get out there." Some

participants indicated that ATP, "Opened a door to more new things." Some

participants spoke of trying new activities for the first time, or hiking in places they

had not hiked before. Participants suggested that ATP encourages students to choose adventurous opportunities.

Freedom as emancipation. Students come to college partly with the intent of finding their own way, becoming more self-reliant, and discovering who they are apart from their family lives or other systems of their childhood. Borchert (2006, p. 502) wrote, "if any single thesis could be said to constitute the doctrine of existentialism, it would be that the possibility of choice is the central fact of human nature" . Students begin to realize for the first time that they do not have to enjoy the same hobbies, or dress the same way, or even look at religion the same way as their parents. For some, college is a time of awareness of liberation from past systems. When asked about her college experience Elizabeth said, "Um I think just learning how to live on my own, becoming more independent."

For some students getting out into nature on ATP trips allows them to realize that they do not have to be defined by any particular system. Catherine said,

> Oh yeah, I would say grand canyon was a really big deal for me, I don't want
> to blame where I come from, but I came from a city and everything was just
> kind of on a schedule or timeline and there is no moving around it and once
> things got out of whack for I would just get upset and frustrated…. I was
> outside one night and I was staring off into nothing and I realized that I need
> to make some changes and it definitely helped me kind of put things into
> perspective.

Thus ATP aids students in realizing their freedom from past constraints and structures and in some cases helps them to find out the things that they as a free individual prefer or enjoy.

ATP has elements in it that, like the rest of the college experience, allow participants to reorder their worlds. When asked to describe her experience of ATP, one thing Elizabeth added was, "I just think...just learning what you really do need to get on by and enjoy like life and stuff." Another participant said,

> I think, it's just so weird to see what the world is without all of this technology and conveniences. This [ATP] is what the world was before any of this, its like, I think that's why I like it because you are just getting away from like everything. Like the Hawaii for instance, like the first night we were in a hostel and I was like oh I have never been in a hostel and it's alright. Then we moved on to tents, and then it was raining and we were just happy to have a roof over our heads. Then when we went back to the hostel. We were like this is the best place in the entire world. So it really makes you appreciate like you know everything we have created in this world are just like conveniences and we don't need to have a roof on our head. Somebody just wanted to put one in case it rains and it [ATP] just makes you realize that.

Reordering one's world through understanding of what is critical and what is not or what is important and what is not is a way of being freed from past expectations about what one must have or do.

It could be argued that current involvement in an adventure trip program constitutes replacement of a past system. For instance , when a person frees himself from a system to which he was bound, such as one created under the watchful eye of a parent, it could be said that by participating in the adventure trip he is simply stepping into a new system. Moving from one system to another, however, might serve as a basis of revelation that one negotiates between systems as part of one's existence.   That awareness itself becomes the beginning of one's emancipation.

Authenticity. The college experience has a great impact on the way a person sees the world. For many people, college is a time when ideas are deconstructed, and new ideas are adopted. Karl Jaspers said, humans are "distinguished by the fact that they have authentic attributes of existence and transcendence" (Jaspers, 2006, para. 23). This means that humans have the ability to question their own situation. Humans can question their standing, their freedoms, and even their existence. As humans we are able to look critically at our lives, and particularly at our identities. Heidegger argued that loss of self-identity might instigate a person to face up to existence and make effort to restore authenticity of self. Some participants spoke of the time on trips allowing them to refocus, thus making advances in regaining authenticity of life. Eleanor, for instance, felt that ATP created an opportunity for her to recollect herself. She said, "I have always known it's important just to be yourself and go forward boldly but, uh, at that point in my life I had kind of forgotten a little and that [ATP] kind of brought me out of my shell again." Eleanor was able to take the needed time and space to confront false identities and reconsider a more authentic view of her life. ATP helped her refocus on her true self. Susan, discussing how a trip

provides opportunity for her to resolve issues, said, "things that I thought were such a big deal weren't such a big deal once you get out in the program [ATP]." For Susan, ATP fostered seeing a more stabilized self by illuminating her misconceptions about the magnitude of some of her problems. Trips gave her the opportunity to refocus and assert more control over her situation.

Conclusion

The results of the study give good insight into the motivations, goals, and experiences that result from the Adventure Trip Program at Texas Sate University. The data has indicated some of the benefits of ATP illuminated by student participants. The data brought out themes that acted as important indicators to the research questions. The study indicates that all goals of ATP are being met and that there are additional benefits outside of those in the stated goals such as self-definition, extending one's self, freedom as emancipation, and authenticity. Participants felt that trips helped them, as Elizabeth said, "find who I am."

CHAPTER 4

Conclusions

The aims of this study are two. First, it was designed to gain insight into the practice of adventure programming, using the Adventure Trip Program at Texas State University as a case for examination. Second, it was designed to probe the interaction of a student's college experience and adventure programming. To accomplish these aims, two questions were formulated to illuminate the character and practice of adventure programming and uncover encounters between participants and participation in adventure trip programs. The two questions are as follows (1): To what degree is the Adventure Trip Program [at Texas State University] effective in meeting/fulfilling its articulated goals, as indicated from the viewpoint of the participant? (2): Are there other latent or hidden means through which the adventure program is beneficial for participants, but which are not manifest in its articulated goals or purposes?

Summary of Findings

The data from the interviews provided a means for addressing the research questions. In terms of the first research question, participant responses provided support for the conclusion that the goals set out by the adventure trip program at Texas State University were being met. For instance, one of the goals was, "To

encourage self-sufficiency, independence, health, and confidence." Some students

spoke of deriving these benefits on trips. Another goal stated, "To promote

environmental awareness and outdoor ethics." Although outdoor ethics was often

seen through the lens of "Leave No Trace" principles, responses showed that

participants embraced a view of responsibility about the environment. Based on the

goals of the ATP program as stated on the program's web site, data were found that

supported the program's success at each of the goals. The research does not suggest

that all the goals were fulfilled with each participant, only that there was evidence of

each goal being met in the experience of some of the participants. Each goal had data

supporting that at least one of the participants felt that the goal was achieved. In

short, each goal was met for at least one student in the study, according to the

perspective of the participant.

In exploring the second research question, several themes describing

outcomes of participant interaction with the adventure trip program emerged

during data analysis. Emergent themes included self-discovery, extension of self,

freedom to pursue one's a self-determined way of life.

Relationship to Past Studies

Past Research. Several previous studies found have elements that are

similar to elements of this study.

Bahaeloo-Horeh and Assari (2008), studied college students and found that

confidence was gained from mountaineering. Their finding complements one of the

findings in this study concerning ATP challenges increasing the confidence of the

participants in the Texas State University program.

Glass and Jackson (2008) conducted a study on adventure-based counseling

(ABC). In their study they examinied different ABC techniques through an

existential framework. Their study loosely complements some of this study's

interpretation of adventure programming illuminating the existential nature of the

college experience. Glass and Jackson said that while typically ABC programs help

participants take responsibility for their actions, increase self-awareness, and

connect with others, they are not commonly linked to any established counseling

theory. Glass and Jackson chose to use existentialism as a framework for

interpreting the phenomena taking place in their programs. Their study stated, "An

adventure based counseling low-element challenge course program grounded in the

tenets of Existentialism should focus on the attainment of a higher self-awareness

and authenticity" (Glass and Jackson, p.4). Glass and Jackson state that adventure

based programming has been labeled as experience rich and theory poor. They

draw many parallels between existential theory and ABC programming throughout

their study. Their study spoke of authenticity, freedom and responsibility as key

existential applications for adventure based programming. During their case study,

they had a student who refused to participate in one of the elements. The

counselors stopped the activity and began to process with the group. Through the

processing they found out that the student was not participating because he was not

sure he could succeed at the challenge and did not want to look foolish. The student

was experiencing some anxiety of life and because he has the freedom to choose, he

can be held responsible for success or failure based on his choice. The student in the end chose to face the challenge. Glass and Jackson's study is similar to this study in that both programs allow participants to face challenges, overcome anxiety of life, and be held responsible for success or failure. Both studies have chosen the existential framework to describe the phenomena taking place in programming. The studies have also noticed common emergent tenants of existentialism such as freedom, authenticity, and responsibility. The conclusion of both studies is that the programs being examined help participants work through the existential problems of life.

Downs' (2003) study assessed the value of recreational sports on college campuses. The study interviewed over 2,600 students from 16 universities across the nation. The study examined the students' opinion on the importance of recreational sports on campus. The study examined 21 factors of the college experience and asked where students thought recreational sports would rank amongst these 21 factors. Recreational sports ranked 11 out of 21. Students ranked recreational sports above such things as clubs, fraternities, sororities, study abroad opportunities, and cultural opportunities. Downs highlighted many of the reported benefits of recreational sports on college campuses. Some of these benefits included reducing stress, improving self-confidence, teaching team building, and improved leadership abilities.

Researcher's Critique of the Study

One limitation of this study was the size of the sample. Due to time and resource constraints the sample size was kept small and localized. A larger, more diverse sample would likely enhance the information collected. The length of the interviews also limited the study. Longer more in depth interviews would have yielded richer data.

Another limitation may be described as the researcher's complacency regarding one-word responses to some questions. On occasion, participants were allowed to simply answer *yes* or *no* on some questions and were not asked follow up questions. The data for some participants were diminished because of this element.

Researcher's role. Potential biases might be embedded in this study as an outcome of the researcher's role. Some of these are candidly presented here. It is possible that the researcher's interpretation of the data might have been influenced by his role as an employee of Texas State University, and a person who is heavily involved in planning, leading, and participating in trips through ATP. For instance, because the researcher was on each of the trips, when a story was told the interpretation of the story might have been biased by the researcher's own memories of the story.

Second, because outdoor recreation is the researcher's chosen field, it might be noted that, though all attempts were made to remove a desire to see a positive outcome for the study, there is a possibility that the desire to see ATP as an impactful program influenced the study.

It should be noted that the researcher had relationships with all participants prior to the interviews. Respondents may have felt pressured to answer questions in a helpful way. Respondents may have also felt uncomfortable sharing certain information with the researcher. Attempts were made to eliminate such researcher-induced bias by stating at the beginning of each interview that honest answers would serve the research best.

Strategies for Credibility and Trustworthiness

The study employed two strategies for credibility. The first strategy was member checking. Three participants were asked to review the findings and interpretations of the study. The participants were given the opportunity to give feedback, ask questions and make recommendations or changes if they felt that the data was misrepresented or misinterpreted. The second method of validation was peer debriefing. Portions of the findings were shared with two graduate students who were familiar with ATP. They were given the opportunity to ask questions, raise concerns, and suggest clarifications.

Although peer debriefing and member-checking were used as strategies for facilitating credibility, other systems could also be employed. One would be use of an external auditor. Another could be use of methodological triangulation. The latter strategy might involve, for instance, participant observation, which might help limit the social pressure the participants might feel when answering the researcher's questions.

Results of member check. Three participants were asked to review the study. The participants were specifically asked if they felt that the study findings were true to their experience of the program. One participant said, "The study was very true to my experience in ATP. I was able to escape from the craziness of life and get into nature. ATP is a place to make new connections with people and the environment, and that is shown in this study." Another participant said, "It [the study] definitely represented aspects of the experience I felt." One participant reacted to reading the accounts from other participants in the study by saying, "On the ATP trips that I attended I was able to find myself, that is the main thing I grasped from my experiences. I now see by reading the study that I am not the only one who had life changing results from my trips. These aspects are definitely reflected in the paper." None of the members had criticisms or reported feeling misrepresented.

Results of peer debriefing. Both graduate students who reviewed the study had been on ATP trips before, one as a leader and one as participant. The students offered several critiques of the study. Both students offered critiques on the complexity of the layering of the data. One of the students said, "As far as the findings in chapter three, I had to keep going back and forth to figure out what category and construct you were discussing. Due to the overall length of each section it is possible to lose track." The students also said that some of the quotes were hard to read, and could be edited more to provide more clarity. Most of the quotes were left in raw form to provide as much context as possible. One student

said, "I believe that all the conclusions drawn in Chapter 4 are accurate and correct. Being both a participant [and a leader] on both a long and shorter ATP trip at Texas State, I can relate to not only the responses that the participants gave, but also the conclusions." The other student said, "The findings presented in chapter three are fantastic. Your questions and you as a researcher were able to bring out very meaningful and personal feelings and stories from the study participants." One of the reviewers is in the field of outdoor recreation. He had this to say about the study's contribution to the field, "This study would be of great use to outdoor professionals. The wealth of different experiences and depth of some set a high standard on what participants should be getting out of our trips. We should make greater efforts as a profession to assist participants in making these conclusions."

Recommendations for Adventure Programming.

This study has yielded some instruction that might be useful for professionals who work in college outdoor recreation programming.

The study has suggested that students enter into adventure trip programming with the goal of finding friends. It benefits student participants for trip leaders to keep friendship formation in mind when designing programming. Trip leaders should arrange programming to allow for the maximum amount of interaction between participants. Program managers should create an environment that is welcoming, friendly, and breaks down relational barriers as quickly as possible. Getting trip participants to talk, touch, and tell stories is a great way to break down those personal barriers and facilitate friend making. Program

managers should set a group tone, helping participants understand that trips are not accomplished individually but by the group. A group philosophy is a great way to facilitate friend making. When training staff, program managers should teach trip staff the value in facilitating friend making on trips.

The study indicated that connecting with nature was an important part of the trip program for some students. Trip leaders should schedule relaxation time into the trip schedule to better facilitate this connection with nature. Participants spoke of laying in the tent looking at the stars, or being awe struck by the beauty of the Grand Canyon as important parts of the experience of trips. These benefits will be more easily realized if students have time to think and connect with nature on trips.

Students also spoke of the importance of the challenge that trips offered them. For instance, a participant observed about an event that it was one of the hardest things he had done. Trip planners should attempt to know their groups well and plan challenges that will push their participants to go beyond what they think they are capable of doing. Trip leaders should attempt to enrich the experience by encouraging the participant to accept the challenge and use their success in other parts of life.

It should be noted that one of the challenges faced by public and private programs and services generally is the issue of financial solvency. Sometimes, the matter is exacerbated when there is a small number of participants--as it happens with some adventure trip programs. Fortunately, the program at Texas State University has been successful in being fully self supporting. For adventure trip

programs across campuses to increase their chance of being retained and serving

students, more studies like this one which examine manifest and latent possibilities

that can become bases for generating successful programs should be commissioned

or proposed and their findings should be used appropriately.

There has been a great deal of contributions that this project has made to this

researcher as a professional in outdoor recreation programming. Because the study

dissects trips that I was on, and some that I was leading, it has allowed me to better

process elements of the trip that will help me better facilitate participants reaching

their personal goals. Data collected in the interview helped me to realize what many

students hold as important factors when participating in ATP.

Recommendations for Future Studies

The study was a preliminary exploration of benefits gained through

adventure programming. Future studies should include a larger sample size, and

should include students who participate in similar activities drawn from different

programs across multiple universities.

One particular area that the study could be expanded is its focus on the

formation of friendships. Future studies could examine the nature and longevity of

friendships formed on trips. Another area that could be looked into with greater

depth is the ability of trips to produce confidence in participants. A future study

could be designed to look more directly at the relationship between adventure trip

programs and confidence building. Lastly, for some participants the element of

spirituality seemed to be present. A study designed to take a more in depth look at the relationship between trips and spirituality would be of interest.

It might be helpful for future studies to divide participants into two groups: new participants and veterans. Such categorization might reveal differences (or similarities) in perceptions, attitudes, desire for participation, and so on.

Longitudinal studies might also be useful. For example, potential for enduring effects of friendships made on ATP trips could be examined. Another example might be a study of how effects of skills, perspectives, forms of confidence and other things that might have been acquired during a trip might play a role in a person's life over the period of several years.

Conclusion

The last night of our trip to the Grand Canyon in 2010, Andrew Lyburn, a coworker said something that I have adapted and used as a challenge to trip participants, the challenge is as follows:

When you go home tonight, likely the first thing you will do is get into the shower. As you begin to wash yourself, and because you have not showered in a week, you see the dirt pour off your body, darken the white bathtub floor, and swirl around the drain, think of all of the experiences you have had on this trip. Do not let those experiences wash down the drain in that shower. Take them, and lock them away somewhere tight. Bring them out from time to time and use them. Use the challenges that you have faced on

the trip to overcome other challenges. Use the joys you have had on the trip

to lift your spirits when you are low. And connect to the images of beauty

that your heart remembers from this great canyon.

At the end of each trip the challenge is issued. As outdoor educators we can only

hope that perhaps on some occasion this challenge is met by a participant, and the

experiences that we work so hard to create are fully taken advantage of. It is our

duty as outdoor educators to continue to challenge ourselves in the same way that

we issue challenges to others. This study has been that challenge for me, and in the

same way that the Grand Canyon can offer great lessons, hours of studying the

details of participants' experiences can teach different, but equally impactful

lessons.

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Vita

Stephen Anthony Deringer was born in Houston, Texas, on February 1st, 1984, the son of Julie and Glenn Deringer. He was married May 1st, 2010 to his wife Lindsey Deringer. After completing his work at Deer Park High School, Deer Park, Texas, in 2002, he entered the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree. He worked as the Assistant Director of a youth camp for three years, from 2006-2009. In August 2009, he began work on his Master of Science in Recreation and Leisure Services at Texas State University-San Marcos. Anthony graduated in May of 2011 with his MSRLS.

Permanent Address: anthonyderinger@gmail.com

This thesis was typed by Stephen A. Deringer.