

MEANING-MAKING AND THE WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE: AN EXAMINATION  
USING A CONSTRUCTIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL LENS

by

Curtis J. Pollock

B.S., Missouri State University, 1982

M.Div., Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, 1986

B.S., University of Utah, 1993

M.S.W., University of Utah, 1995

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

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University of Victoria

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**Supervisory Committee**

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**Supervisory Committee**

Dr. Nevin Harper (School of Child and Youth Care)  
**Supervisor**

Dr. Douglas Magnuson (School of Child and Youth Care)  
**Departmental Member**

Dr. Christopher Lalonde (Department of Psychology, University of Victoria)  
**Outside Member**

## Abstract

Wilderness Experience Programs (WEPs) take youth into wilderness settings in order to teach wilderness travel and leadership, expand personal capacity, and equip youth with coping skills in order to manage life's difficulties. Though considerable research has been conducted on WEPs, no one has sought to understand the student experience these programs provide through a constructive-developmental lens (Kegan, 1982, 1994). The purpose of this case study was to explore, describe, assess, and understand—using the framework of Robert Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental theory—the impact a 21-day wilderness backpacking experience had on five participating youth. The researcher believed that understanding how participants in a wilderness backpacking course make sense of their experience through the lens of their constructive-developmental perspective might help inform the theories of change that underpin WEPs, the means by which desired change is facilitated, and the reasons why some youth thrive and others struggle.

This exploratory study utilized a case study approach. The researcher embedded as a participant-observer for the duration on a 21-day backpacking course with Outward Bound Canada in the Ghost River Wilderness, Alberta, Canada. Nine youth participated in the expedition, with five male students volunteering as research participants. Pre-trip and post-trip administrations of the Subject-Object Interview and post-expedition semi-structured interviews were conducted with each research participant. Additionally, the researcher made field observations and wrote field notes. The subsequent analysis produced in-depth profiles of each research participant's experience of the course, pre and post expedition scores from the Subject-Object Interviews, and a description of how each research participant's experience might be understood through the lens of their constructive-developmental perspective. Although no

significant changes to constructive-developmental perspective were realized, implications of these analyses were discussed, conclusions were drawn, and recommendations were made.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **Background and Context**

We were just a few hours into our first day of a multi-day winter backpacking trip in Alaska's Chugach Range when I had a decision to make. Some youth were struggling to stay warm so we had taken numerous rest breaks in order to warm up cold feet. The stronger teens, led by a charismatic youth named Martin, had pulled far ahead, in spite of my instructions to keep the group together. I was about to blow my whistle signaling the "all stop" when Martin's small contingent of athletic and cocksure boys paused, huddled, then turned around and retraced their steps toward us. Upon rejoining the group, Martin apologized and admitted he and the other teens had not taken the rest of the party into account. With no prompting from me or the other adult leaders, Martin talked about the importance of sticking together as a group so that everyone might have a good experience. Martin's behavior that cold, snowy day impressed me, and I often wondered what accounted for it.

At the time I was leading that trip I was in my early 30s and serving my second appointment as a United Methodist Clergyman at a downtown parish in Anchorage, Alaska. I had no idea who Robert Kegan was and I had never heard of constructive-developmental theory. Frankly, the idea of human development was, at the time, mostly mystery to me. The ups and downs of marriage, work, family, and friendship taught me a lot about my own growth and development, my strengths, my limitations. Trips into wilderness (often alone) to climb, ski, or hike furthered my education about becoming a man, providing an often potent venue in which to raise questions about my values, my competence, and the trajectory of my living. I retreated to wilderness whenever I could, seeking the clarity of mind and spirit that seemed to come as a result of those intense trips into wild and dangerous places.

Several years later I visited Montana Academy, a therapeutic boarding school in northwestern Montana. The school had a stellar reputation and I was curious to learn what made it so, mostly because I wished, one day, to build my own wilderness experience program (WEP). In preparation for my visit, John McKinnon, a psychiatrist and one of the four founders of the school, suggested I do some reading; reading that would provide the theoretical background on what they were doing and why they were doing it. So I read, and re-read Kegan (1982, 1994) and McKinnon (2008), books that would rekindle my interest in developmental psychology and, though I didn't know it at the time, change the nature of my work.

These experiences, and others, were the genesis of three questions that have dogged me for a long time: what does it mean to grow up, why is it important, and to what degree might the wilderness experience serve as a catalyst for that growth? These questions have been the “fire in the belly” pulling me into doctoral work, refining my research interests, providing the tenacity to complete this dissertation, and setting the course for the remainder of my career.

### **Recognizing an Opportunity**

Kegan (1982, 1994) suggests that it is the lack of fit between our developmental perspective, or order of consciousness, and the challenges we face in modern life that create some of the fundamental and common problems within the human community. Kegan (1994) uses the metaphor of “school” to describe the modern world in which North American youth and adults find themselves. He extends the metaphor by discussing the “curriculum” those students, adults and youth alike, are expected to tackle, noting it is very long on challenge; so much so that around 58% of the adults enrolled in that school are not fully equipped to handle the school's curriculum (not yet at the fourth order of mind per Kegan's schema), and consequently are, to use Kegan's apt phrase, “in over their heads” (Kegan, 2003, p. 40). For the youth living in those

adult households, the numbers are even worse. What Kegan's constructive-developmental theory provides is a means for understanding and analyzing the "fit, or lack of fit, between the demands our cultural curriculum makes on our consciousness on the one hand, and our mental capacities as 'students' in this ongoing school on the other" (Kegan, 1994, p. 7). In other words, it is the compatibility between our mental complexity and the challenges we face that serves as an important touchstone for human effectiveness.

It was clear, after reading through the WEP research corpus, that no one had sought to understand the student experience (of a WEP) through a constructive-developmental lens. I saw an opportunity, using Kegan's theory (1982, 1994), to do just that. I believed that understanding how participants in a wilderness backpacking course make sense of their experience through the lens of their constructive-developmental perspective might help inform the theories of change that underpin WEPs, the means by which desired change is facilitated, and the reasons why some youth thrive and others struggle.

### **The WEP Industry: Three Areas of Interest**

#### **Theoretical Frameworks: Underpinnings of the WEP**

A small number of authors expressed concern about the lack of a theoretical foundation for WEPs in general (Winterdyk & Griffiths, 1984), and wilderness therapy programs in particular (Gass et al., 2012; Taylor, Segal, & Harper, 2010; Ungar, Dumond, & McDonald, 2005). These writers noted the lack of a theoretical framework (Gass et al., 2012) and a "fragmentation of ideas" with regards to the meaning of psychological wellness and preferred routes to healing (Taylor et al., 2010, p. 77). Ungar et al. (2005), reported the lack of a conceptual frame and a plethora of programs operating with little rationale for the choices made regarding program length and elements. Hoyer (2004) stated that "a unifying theory of

wilderness therapy will describe what is occurring, reveal our operational paradigms or practice, establish a measure of change, and define a standard of intervention” (p. 56). After reading the WEP literature and thinking about that literature over against the writings of Kegan (1982, 1994) and related authors (Kegan & Lahey, 2001, 2009; Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix, 2011), I thought these theorists could help inform and refine the theoretical frameworks currently in use by WEPs, addressing some of the concerns noted above.

### **Process Variables: The Means by which Change is Facilitated**

Many academics and practitioners admit to a limited understanding of how WEP process variables relate to outcomes (Baldwin, Persing, & Magnuson, 2004; Burg, 2001; Cason & Gillis, 1994; Harper, 2009; Harper, Gabrielsen, & Carpenter, 2018; Hill, 2007; Neill, 2003; Russell, Gillis, & Kivlighan Jr., 2017) or how the change process taking place in WEPs differs from other modes of learning and development (Russell & Phillips-Miller, 2002). Even less is known about what many consider *the* most important process of all; wilderness (Greffrath, Meyer, Strydom, & Ellis, 2011; Harper, 2007; Miles, 1987). Perhaps because attempts to understand the role wilderness plays in the change process “may not get beyond subjective interpretations due to a clear lack of observable, consistent, and measurable variables,” a theoretical understanding of wilderness as change agent remains elusive (Harper, 2007, p. 13).

Kegan (1982, 1994) suggests that the creation of an *optimal* balance of challenge and support is *the* crucial aspect in facilitating changes to mental complexity among persons, regardless of age or station in life. Framing the discussion about process variables through the lens of challenge and support, a key aspect of Kegan’s theory, might provide a helpful way of better understanding the relationship between process variables and student outcomes.

## **Outcomes: Understanding the Student Experience**

Considerable research has been done to determine the effectiveness of WEPs and outcomes have been shown to be largely positive (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Russell, 2003a; Bowen & Neill, 2013). Benefits most commonly cited in the literature include more internalized locus of control, enhanced self-concept, and improved social skills (Russell, 2003a, 2006a). When reading through the WEP research corpus I found myself feeling flummoxed by the fact that no one had attempted to understand the student experience through a developmental lens. I found one study that looked at psycho-social development as an outcome measure, (Norton, 2008) and another study interested in how outdoor education programs impact a self-authoring perspective (McGowan, 2016). McGowan (2016), incidentally, was the only author in the WEP corpus to cite Kegan's (1982, 1994) work. I was surprised by this, given the potential Kegan's theory holds for helping inform designers and practitioners of WEPs about the reasons people behave the way they do. By better understanding a student's capacity (their psychological achievements and limitations aka their constructive-developmental perspective) over against course expectations, their behavior on course might be more readily understood, planned for, and supported, creating, at least potentially, a more positive student experience and improved outcomes.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this case study was to explore, describe, assess, and understand, from a constructive-developmental perspective, the impact a 21-day wilderness backpacking experience had on five participating youth. The researcher believed that understanding how participants in a wilderness backpacking course make sense of their experience through the lens of their constructive-developmental perspective might help inform the theories of change that underpin

WEPs, the means by which desired change is facilitated, and the reasons why some youth thrive and others struggle. To shed light on these curiosities, the following research questions were addressed:

- 1) What constructive-developmental perspective does each participant bring to this wilderness backpacking experience?
- 2) How does each participant make meaning of his experience, and what experiences appear significant in this process?
- 3) How does each participant's constructive-developmental perspective appear to influence the meaning he has made of this wilderness experience?
- 4) What changes, if any, are evident in pre-trip and post-trip applications of the Subject-Object Interview (designed to determine constructive-developmental perspective) for participants completing this experience?

### **Research Approach**

With the approval of the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board (HREB), the researcher studied the experiences and perceptions of five male youth, ages 13-18 who participated in a three-week long Outward Bound Canada Rocky Mountain backpacking course. The expedition took place in the Ghost River Wilderness Area bordering Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada. This research project is a case study using qualitative research methods. The researcher embedded on the course as a participant-observer and participated for the duration of the expedition.

A variety of data-collection techniques were used including pre and post-expedition administrations of the Subject-Object Interview (SOI), a post-expedition semi-structured interview, and participant-observer field observations and field notes. Information obtained from

15 interviews and field observations and notes spanning the 21-day trip formed the basis for the analysis and overall findings of the study. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In order to establish inter-rater reliability, the Subject-Object Interviews were scored by the researcher and a co-scorer, both of whom were trained and certified as reliable in the administration and scoring of the SOI. Consequently, each research participant ended up with a pre and post-expedition SOI score. The thematic analysis was conducted utilizing all 15 interviews and field notes. The constant comparative method found in grounded theory coding (Charmaz, 2006) and thematic networks—“web-like illustrations that summarize the main themes constituting a piece of text” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 385)—provided the researcher with the tools necessary for developing in-depth profiles of each research participant.

### **Assumptions**

Based on the researcher’s background and experience as a clergyman, psychotherapist, Boy Scouts of America Explorer Post leader, and wilderness recreationist, two sets of assumptions inform this study. The first set of assumptions underpins qualitative research generally. They include:

the importance of understanding people and programs in context; a commitment to study naturally occurring phenomena without introducing external controls or manipulation; and the assumption that understanding emerges most meaningfully from an inductive analysis of open-ended, detailed, descriptive, and quotational data gathered through direct contact with the program and its participants (Patton, 1990, p. 119).

The second set of assumptions is specific to this study. They matter because they are the assumptions that have guided the design of this particular project.

1. Robust wilderness settings provide a form of support rarely experienced by modern youth, because as a holding environment (Winnicott, 1965), wilderness settings facilitate time and space for significant self-reflection and self-examination (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983).
2. Teaching young persons the skills necessary to travel safely and comfortably through wilderness can provide a significantly disequilibrating experience. Nature can, and often does, present difficult decision opportunities. Poor choices are often met by swift and, at times, severe consequences. Even when making good decisions, wilderness living and travel can be difficult.
3. Designing WEPs that are effective in facilitating changes to mental complexity requires an ingenious blend of support and challenge (Kegan, 1994). With too much support, and too little challenge, young people feel bored and disengage due to lack of interest. With too much challenge and too little support, participants feel overwhelmed and withdraw because they don't feel capable of managing the experience of disequilibrium. They disengage because the perceived likelihood of failure is unacceptably high. Using principles of constructive-developmental theory may assist in creating holding environments and course experiences that optimize opportunities for changes to mental complexity.
4. I understand a person's sense of reality to be socially constructed and that multiple potential realities exist. In light of this, a fundamental goal of this study is to draw on participant-observer observations and participant reports in order to reveal patterns in the student experience and to interpret that data in a way that builds a complex and holistic picture of learning on this course.

## **The Researcher**

My investment in this research study is personal, professional, and academic. For more than 20 years, I have considered starting a WEP that facilitates human growth and development. While there are many reasons I have delayed this project the most significant has been my lack of clarity about what it means to grow up—“what it is, how it is enabled, how it is constrained” (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 6). My introduction to Robert Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory has changed that. I now have a useful and research-based means of moving forward. What I still did not have, however, was a well-grounded understanding of how a WEP course interacts with persons at varying levels of mental complexity. This understanding eluded me because, to my knowledge, there were no studies in the WEP literature that addressed the questions posed by this study.

I have a varied educational background that includes bachelor’s degrees in psychology and communication, and master’s degrees in divinity and clinical social work. I have worked as a United Methodist Clergyman in urban and rural parishes, a mental health therapist in private practice as well as youth residential and community-based treatment settings, a clinical social worker in psychiatric hospitals, a correctional institution, and hospital emergency departments, and a clinical supervisor/therapist/administrator in a rural community mental health center and an urban youth day treatment program for severely mentally ill youth. I currently work as the clinical program manager for a residential treatment center for teenage boys with severe behavioral and psychiatric disorders. The program, located in Palmer, Alaska, USA, blends traditional residential care with wilderness therapy. Additionally, early in my career, I chartered and provided leadership to a co-ed Explorer Post (Boy Scouts of America) in Anchorage, Alaska, engaging youth in a variety of wilderness education and adventure activities that included glacier

travel and crevasse rescue, winter camping, ice and rock climbing, wilderness mountaineering, avalanche hazard evaluation and rescue, mountain backpacking, and the like. I have engaged in rock and ice climbing, wilderness mountaineering, and alpine and backcountry skiing the better part of 30 years. This affinity for wilderness recreation began in the Boy Scouts of America, where I earned my Eagle Badge.

### **Rationale and Significance**

A research study of this nature could make a significant contribution to youth development in general and to WEPs in particular, because there is no known literature within the WEP research corpus that addresses constructive-developmental perspectives and the wilderness experience.

If advances in human development, or changes to mental complexity have the far-reaching impacts that theorists such as Robert Kegan suggest, a better understanding of a person's constructive-developmental perspective, and how that perspective mediates the WEP experience could be beneficial to both program developers, practitioners, and involved youth. Findings could potentially influence how WEPs: 1) recruit, train, and support course instructors so they might more adequately manage professional demands; 2) prepare course curricula to more effectively support and challenge the variety of constructive-developmental perspectives students bring to the wilderness expedition; 3) design courses to more adequately facilitate changes to a student's constructive-developmental perspective; 4) conceptualize desired student change; 5) identify student learning goals; 6) understand resistance to desired student change and learning goals; 7) and measure outcomes.

Finally, significant changes in pre-post-expedition SOI scores could offer grounds to support a more extensive research project with participant numbers that are suited to exploring a possible causal effect.

### **Definitions of Key Terminology Used in This Study**

- 1. Wilderness Experience Programs (WEP):** Wilderness experience programs are constituted by three program types including wilderness education, wilderness adventure, and wilderness therapy (Friese, Hendee, & Kinziger, 1998). When discussing specific research studies, the term WEP will be used when the program(s) under consideration is not clearly defined or contains elements of two or more the three sub-types of WEP. When the study is explicitly related to one of the three types of WEP, the sub-term (wilderness education, wilderness adventure, or wilderness therapy) will be employed for clarity.
  - a. Wilderness Education:** These programs emphasize wilderness travel, living, and leadership development by teaching hard skills (e.g., climbing technique, selection and care of equipment, navigation, etc.) and soft skills (e.g., judgment and decision making, communication, leadership, etc.). The National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) is perhaps the best-known example of this type of WEP.
  - b. Wilderness Adventure:** These programs often teach at least some of the hard and soft skills found in the wilderness education curriculum, but they place more emphasis on the development of the person, especially to increases in “student self-awareness, self-confidence, and acceptance of others” (Outward Bound Canada, 2014, p. 10). Outward Bound (OB) exemplifies this type of WEP.

- c. Wilderness Therapy:** Wilderness therapy programs utilize licensed mental health professionals to assess, diagnose and treat those who suffer from psychiatric, substance use, or behavioral disorders (Russell, 2003a). These programs differ from ordinary behavioral or substance use treatment programs in that they take place in wilderness settings and utilize elements from wilderness education and wilderness adventure curricula.
- 2. Wilderness:** “‘Wilderness’ is from the Old English ‘wild-deor’ meaning wild animal. It is the abode of the non-domesticated and is out of the control of humans. Wilderness, then, is a place or context that is chaotic, unruly, and disordered and where people often feel out of control” (Taylor et al., 2010, p. 78).
- 3. Wilderness Experience:** “To go out to the wilderness—to leave society behind and to live for a while on what one carries in a pack, devoting one’s time to an exploration of the natural world” and one’s relationship to the natural world as well as to everything else (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983, p. 163).
- 4. Human Development:** “transformation toward more complex systems or ways of knowing,” in which the person continually differentiates himself from the world, and by so doing, relates to the world in a new way (Kegan, 2003, p. 25). This process can be referred to in many ways including developing mental complexity, increasing maturity, growing up, or advancing one’s subject-object relationships, constructive-developmental perspective, or epistemological position, etc.
- 5. Constructive-developmental theory:** A meta-psychological theory, also known as subject-object theory, devised by psychologist Robert Kegan (1982, 1994).

6. **Constructivism:** “the idea that people or systems constitute or construct reality” and that human being is the practice of making sense, is the creative, restless energy that puts the world together in a particular way (Kegan, 1994, p. 198).
7. **Developmentalism:** refers to the idea that “people or organic systems evolve through different eras of increasing complexity according to regular principles of stability and change” (Kegan, 1994, p. 199).
8. **Meaning-Making:** principles for organizing experience that “we bring to our thinking and our feelings and our relating to others and our relating to parts of ourselves” (Kegan, 1994, p. 29). It is “that most human of ‘regions’ between an event and a reaction to it—the place where the event is privately composed, made sense of, the place where it actually becomes an event for that person. It is that zone of mediation where meaning is made” (Kegan, 1982, p. 2).
9. **Subject-Object Relations:** Refers to the way a person makes sense of experience. It takes into account the person’s epistemology, or way of knowing what she knows. For example, whereas the four-year-old child *is* her perceptions, is identified with them, is embedded in them, the older child *has* her perceptions and is able to reflect upon them. For the younger child, she is subject to her perceptions. For the older child, her perceptions are object for her. A person’s subject-object relations can also be referred to as their constructive-developmental perspective, epistemology, level of mental complexity, stage of maturity, etc.
10. **Subject-Object Interview:** The Subject-Object Interview (SOI) was created by Lisa Lahey and her colleagues at the Harvard Graduate School of Education as a means of assessing a person’s “unselfconscious epistemology or principles of meaning-coherence”

(Kegan, 1994, p. 369). It is a useful tool for research and clinical work, as it provides a means by which to discern a person's current epistemology (aka constructive-developmental perspective, level of mental complexity, stage of maturity, etc.).

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this case study was to explore, describe, assess, and understand, from a constructive-developmental perspective, the impact a 21-day wilderness backpacking experience had on five participating youth. The researcher believed that understanding how participants in a wilderness backpacking course make sense of their experience through the lens of their constructive-developmental perspective might help inform the theories of change that underpin wilderness experience programs (WEPs), the means by which desired change is facilitated, and the reasons why some youth thrive and others struggle. What follows is an introduction to the WEP industry and a discussion of WEP research related to the three areas of interest: theoretical frameworks, process variables, and outcomes. I then introduce Robert Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental theory and discuss how it might help inform these aspects of the WEP.

### **The Wilderness Experience Program Industry**

Wilderness Experience Programs (WEP) are a broad range of outdoor programs for persons of all ages that “take paying customers into wilderness or comparable lands in order to develop their human potential through personal growth, therapy, leadership and/or organizational development activities” (Friese, Hendee, & Kinziger, 1998, p. 40). Friese et al., (1998) identified in excess of 700 programs initially, and of the 484 programs that responded to their survey, 366 programs were identified as WEP. Of those, more than 200 of the organizations surveyed utilized “direct adaptations and modified adoptions of Outward Bound” using elements of the Outward Bound (OB) model, philosophy and method (Friese et al., 1998, p. 6). Slightly more than half the programs operated in areas designated as wilderness. The primary clientele served were youth, youth-at-risk, and university students. The National Outdoor Leadership

School (NOLS) and OB dominated the industry in terms of number of clients and range of programs.

WEPs are constituted by three types of programs, each with a distinctive emphasis and process. These include wilderness education (educational), wilderness adventure (personal growth/therapeutic), and wilderness therapy (therapy/healing/clinical) (Russell, 2003a). In broad terms, wilderness education programs focus on helping students develop skills in wilderness travel, living, and leadership. Wilderness adventure programs focus on helping course participants develop self-confidence, self-efficacy, and an expanded understanding of personal capacity. Wilderness therapy programs focus on helping young people build coping skills in order to effectively manage mental illness, behavioral or substance use disorders.

Approximately 43% of WEPs utilize wilderness education training (Russell, 2003a). This training emphasizes acquisition of hard skills (i.e., glacier travel, wilderness mountaineering, rock climbing, ocean kayaking, etc.) and soft skills (i.e., expedition behavior, communication, judgment and decision-making, tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, self-awareness, and vision and action) and seek to provide an education that equips the wilderness traveler with a particular set of skills. NOLS is perhaps the best-known example of this genre of wilderness experience program. The mission of NOLS is “to be the leading source and teacher of wilderness skills and leadership that serve people and the environment” (National Outdoor Leadership School, n.d.).

Wilderness adventure programs, making up about 47% of the WEPs, also teach hard and soft skills as noted above (Russell, 2003a). The emphasis, however, has a sharper focus on character development, also referred to as the development of “expanded capacity” (Outward Bound USA, 2007, p. 26). The mission of Outward Bound Canada is “to cultivate resilience,

leadership, connections and compassion through inspiring and challenging journeys of self-discovery in the natural world” (Outward Bound Canada, Our story: Mission, n.d.). OB is perhaps the best-known example of wilderness adventure. To underscore this genre of WEP, Gass, Gillis, and Russell (2012) note that “Outward Bound uses wilderness expeditions...to challenge participants to overcome their perceived limitations and develop an enhanced sense of self” (p. 1).

The third and final type of WEP is wilderness therapy and is defined by Gass et al. (2012) as the “prescriptive use of adventure experiences provided by mental health professionals, often conducted in natural settings that kinesthetically engage clients on cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels” (p. 1). Wilderness therapy trips focus on “special populations” constituted by a range of persons including those suffering from delinquency, personal tragedy, substance abuse, poverty, mental illness, developmental challenges, as well as those seeking personal growth and development (Hendee & Pitstick, 1993, p. 3) Wilderness therapy includes programs that focus on therapy, healing, and clinical intervention and are approximately 10% of the total WEP industry (Russell, 2003b). Wilderness therapy, sometimes described as adventure therapy or outdoor behavioral healthcare, is distinguished from other types of WEPs by the use of licensed mental health professionals who:

- conduct assessments
- diagnose mental illness
- specify the course of treatment via individual treatment plans
- provide individual and group psychotherapy to clients
- utilize specialized knowledge of psychological theory and practice to guide their work, and

- evaluate their efficacy over against the goals outlined in the treatment plan (Williams, 2004).

The central focus of wilderness therapy is to help struggling youth and young adults “overcome emotional, adjustment, addiction, and psychological problems” (Russell & Hendee, 2000, p. 63).

Because the research corpus often fails to distinguish between the three types of WEP, there is much overlap, hence, each sub-type will be included in this review as it pertains to the present research. In the next section, I present the research literature related to the three areas of interest: theoretical frameworks, process variables, and outcomes.

### **The WEP: Three Areas of Interest**

#### **Theoretical Frameworks: Underpinnings of the WEP**

Acknowledging the lack of a strong theoretical basis for wilderness therapy, Russell and Farnum (2004) suggest that existing models are largely “stage-based” or “sequential and discrete” and so propose a “concurrent” model of WEP (Russell & Farnum, 2004, p. 39). Sequential models fail to take into account the “dynamic and interrelated nature of therapeutic factors present throughout the process” and consequently come up short as an explanatory framework (Russell & Farnum, 2004, p. 40).

What Russell and Farnum (2004) propose is a model that “recognizes the interconnectedness of therapeutic process, acknowledging that the same therapeutic factors are present throughout the process, albeit in different intensities” (p. 41). In other words, rather than moving through a series of discrete stages, where the elements of an earlier stage are left behind as the elements of the new stage are embraced, the concurrent model recognizes the presence of

all elements along the entire trajectory of experience. What changes is the intensity of the elements and the relative weight each element exerts on the experience.

The authors identify “three factors believed to be operating within the context of wilderness experience programs in general and wilderness therapy programs in particular” (Russell & Farnum, 2004, p. 41). The three factors include wilderness, physical self and social self and together, constitute the “conceptual framework of the wilderness therapy treatment milieu” (Russell & Farnum, 2004, p. 41). “These three therapeutic factors can be viewed as interrelated and mutually influential, present throughout the experience and varying in intensity according to the temporal progression of the trip” (Russell & Farnum, 2004, p. 41). In a study conducted by Fernee, Gabrielsen, Andersen, and Mesel (2017), the authors propose that the third category of the Russell and Farnum (2004) model, the social self, be extended to include psychological and psychotherapeutic elements. This addition, the authors argue, allows the framework to include “the complete nature of the intervention” and makes the framework “applicable for use within the mental health setting” (p. 126).

In a second theoretical framework, Taniguchi, Freeman, and Richards (2005) define “meaningful learning,” the essence of the wilderness experience, as a person’s increasing awareness of their weakness, strength, and potential. The authors conducted a phenomenological study of a WEP for university students and they identified five attributes of a meaningful learning experience: (1) perceiving risk, (2) feeling awkward and inept, (3) experiencing fractional sublimation, or the shedding of one’s facade/persona, (4) reconstructing a self-image via the completion of two different processes; reflection followed by reformation, and (5) allowing for growth and acknowledging that there had been some form of meaningful change.

Taylor et al. (2010) suggest that current ideas regarding personal growth and change within WEPs generally, and wilderness therapy programs specifically, are fragmented, as evident by the numerous programmatic combinations of experiential learning, challenge, group experience, and new experiences. The authors argue that the wilderness environment is rarely included in discussions about what actually accounts for changes made during wilderness therapy interventions. The authors attempt to address this gap in the literature by recognizing “the importance of the biophysical context in which human individual and social systems are embedded” (Taylor et al., 2010, p. 78). They include—as does Russell and Farnum (2004) above--the wilderness milieu as a foundational component of wilderness therapy. Their model has five components which include:

- 1) Accumulation phase: students are on the edge of their ability to manage, so they end up in treatment.
- 2) Novel experience: students end up thrust into an unfamiliar environment.
- 3) Disequilibrium: the current self-system is overwhelmed by novelty and it enters a period of “collapse-regression.” This state of “imbalance” requires adequate support (Taylor et al., 2010, p. 81).
- 4) The between: the reorganization of the self-system is at a critical point, and the student’s reorganization is dependent on adequate measures of support and its own resilience.
- 5) New level of complexity: the self-system avoids collapse by inventing new ways of dealing with challenge, and in so doing, reconstitutes itself with a greater degree of differentiation and complexity.

Finally, early WEP theorist practitioners attempted to “identify the principles of the process conducted by...six Outward Bound schools” (Walsh & Golins, 1976, p. 10). They identified some of the key elements of the OB experience which are listed below.

A motivated, committed *student* is placed into a *unique physical environment* (as opposed to an accustomed environment) and into a *unique social environment* (which allows both individuality and group consciousness; both conflict and resolution) and is then given *problem-solving tasks and challenges* (that are organized, concrete, incremental, and manageable, which require mastery of technical skills) and that create *stress and /or anxiety* (which stimulates possibilities such as succumbing, coping, or thriving), to which the student adapts by demonstrating *mastery and /or competency* (because the student is motivated, is alert, has group and instructional support, and is presented with problems that are structured to facilitate mastery), which *expands capacity and develops character* (increased self-awareness, increased self-esteem, and increased acceptance of and service to others). (Outward Bound USA, 2007, p. 27)

### **Process Variables: The Means by which Change is Facilitated**

There appears to be considerable consensus that WEP process variables are poorly understood (Fernee et al., 2017; Gassner & Russell, 2008; Passarelli, Hall, & Anderson, 2010; Winterdyk & Griffiths, 1984; Ungar et al., 2005). Students often report positive changes following their participation in a WEP, but theorists and practitioners are hard pressed to explain why these positive changes occur, or which course experiences might account for them. What follows is a summary of what the literature says about the various components of the WEP process.

**Nature and wilderness experience.** The wilderness milieu is rarely included as a research variable in studies that attempt to explain the positive changes that occur in WEPs, and most depictions of wilderness therapy in particular “do not consider our connection with nature or the role it plays in the therapeutic process” (Greffrath et al., 2011; Harper, 2007, 2009, 2012; Norton, 2010; Taylor, Segal, & Harper, 2010, p. 81). Nonetheless, there is evidence that nature may be the primary agent of change in WEPs (Gass et al., 2012; Greenway, 1995; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983; Kellert, 1998; Talbot & Kaplan, 1986), or at the very least, an important component (Holman & McAvoy, 2005; McKenzie, 2003; Norton, 2008, 2010), may provide a measure of prevention against depression and anxiety (Williams, 2004), and likely restores directed attention and reduces stress (Kaplan, 1995).

I have identified two points of view within the literature that attempt to explain how the wilderness experience leads to the generally positive outcomes noted above. In the first, Hendee and Pitstick (1993) conducted a literature review of more than 300 studies of participants in WEPs in search of an explanation for why personal growth occurs as readily as it does in the wilderness environment. They defined personal growth as “a range of effects toward fulfillment of one’s capabilities and potential” (Hendee & Pitstick, 1993, p. 5). They identified five conditions essential for personal growth to occur within the wilderness setting and, once the five conditions were met, another four sequential and interrelated steps. The five conditions include:

- Receptive participants who are ready to grow
- Optimal measures of physical and psychological stress
- A break from one’s ordinary environment and routine
- Opportunity to become attuned to nature and oneself
- Experience of wilderness metaphors

Once the five conditions are met, personal growth unfolds in four sequential and interrelated steps. First, the wilderness traveler experiences increased personal awareness of core values, beliefs, feelings, and patterns of behavior. Second, they arrive at a “growing edge” where their core personal qualities can be evaluated and changed if desired (Hendee & Pitstick, 1993, p. 7). Third, their social awareness improves as a consequence of the very candid conversations and interactions that typify small group experiences in wilderness. Finally, the wilderness traveler experiences the primal influences of nature, which tend to humble and reshape their perspective of one’s place within the natural order.

The second theory regarding the power of wilderness to foster personal growth and restoration was put forth by Kaplan and Kaplan (1995). Attention Restoration Theory (ART) suggests that wilderness is unique in its synthesis of four qualities (being away, extent, fascination, and compatibility) and that these four interrelated aspects of the wilderness environment set the stage for mental restoration and personal growth.

*Being away* is a form of escape from things that are ordinarily present, and not always preferred. Three aspects of being away include getting away from distraction, putting aside the work one is usually involved in, or taking a break from pursuing certain goals, perhaps from mental effort of any sort. Escape or being away might involve any one of these forms or some combination of the three. Perhaps the strongest effect would be to combine all three.

*Extent* is constituted by two properties—connectedness and scope—that together create a “whole other world” (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995, p. 184). Escape to one’s closet would not create an opportunity for restoration or personal growth, but escape to a setting “where there is a promise of continuation of the world beyond what is immediately perceived” would do so. There is a depth and breadth to wilderness that meets the criterion of extent.

*Fascination* is the third element present in wilderness, and refers to stimulus that calls forth involuntary attention. Building on the work of William James (1892), the Kaplan's distinguished between directed attention—what James (1892) called voluntary attention—and involuntary attention. Directed or voluntary attention is set in motion when that which we are attending to is boring. It plays an inhibitory role, blocking out stimulus competing for our attention; stimulus that threatens our concentration and is irrelevant to the task at hand. This inhibitory mechanism is subject to fatigue, and consequently, must be restored. Involuntary attention refers to attention that requires no effort at all, so inherently interesting events tend to activate this type of attention. Fascination is an important element of wilderness because it attracts and keeps us from getting bored and it allows us to carry on without engaging directed attention, a mental process that is subject to fatigue. Wilderness is rich with fascinating stimuli that activate all the senses (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995).

*Compatibility* is the last wilderness element that helps explain the wilderness effect. In urban environments, there is a great deal of stimulation that is neither interesting nor important. In fact, there is much that simply needs to be ignored in order for us to function effectively. By contrast, the stimulus in the wilderness setting is entirely relevant; wind speed and direction, cloud formation, ambient temperature, remoteness, terrain features, etc., provide clues to our decision process. We take in the entire scene and all the information provided to us in order to make sound decisions about route, rate of travel, and campsite selection. In other words, the information provided by the wilderness environment is entirely relevant and compatible with our desire to travel safely and comfortably through that environment.

Kaplan and Kaplan (1995) argue that the combination of these four elements, readily found in nature, and most robustly presented in wilderness, set the stage for mental restoration.

They go on to identify four levels of mental restoration and suggest that penetration into each successive restorative level requires increasing amounts of time within the natural environment and increasing levels of quality of that environment. The four levels of restoration are described below, and it is the fourth level that I equate with personal growth.

At the first level is the ‘clearing the head’ function. After completing a task there are a variety of cognitive leftovers, miscellaneous bits and pieces still running around in one’s head.... The least demanding role of the restorative experience is probably that it allows these distracting fragments to run their course. A second function of a restorative experience is, not surprisingly, to permit the recovery of directed attention. As we have seen, this is a vital function because so many important cognitive functions require at least some degree of directed attention. A third function depends upon the cognitive quiet that is fostered by soft fascination. Most of us carry around a cognitive residue of the preceding days, months, and even years. There are, in other words, matters on one’s mind that often go unheard. Facing such matters is important not only because they may have functional importance but also because they too can create clutter and internal noise that will either muddle thoughts about other issues or require considerable directed attention in maintaining focus despite this potential distraction. The final level of restorativeness is the most demanding of all in terms of both the quality of the environment and the duration required. It is an aspect of the restorative experience we would never have suspected had it not emerged so clearly in our data. And, like so many other surprises we have happened upon in our research, it makes perfectly good sense in retrospect. A deeply restorative experience is likely to include reflections on one’s life, on one’s priorities and possibilities, on one’s actions and one’s goals. Here too the functional

benefits can be great. Certainly, making a major effort on behalf of a goal one actually does not care about could be a costly error. Yet, if one never checks on what one is doing, such priority distortions could all too easily occur. Perhaps the hazards of ‘the unexamined life’ are functional as well as moral. (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995, pp. 196-197)

Dobud and Harper (2018) conducted a scoping review in order to “explore whether adventure therapy (wilderness therapy), often perceived as an alternative therapy, works because of AT’s unique components or whether factors shared by all therapies were responsible” (p. 16). They determined that “the active ingredients regarded as unique to AT (wilderness therapy) made little difference in outcomes across the 13 studies” (Dobud & Harper, 2018, p. 21). Furthermore, in spite of the evidence cited above about the power of the wilderness setting, Dobud and Harper (2018) determined that “not once in this review did an intervention utilizing a wilderness environment outperform an indoor setting” (p. 21).

**Solitude and solo.** Many WEPs incorporate the solo and accompanying solitude in recognition of the potential benefits of spending time alone in a natural environment with one’s thoughts and feelings. Hammit (1982) conducted an investigation involving 109 university students, average age 22 years, and asked them to rate aspects of wilderness solitude in order of importance. Factor analysis produced four dimensions of solitude in order of importance including: 1) a *natural environment* free from human-made intrusions; 2) *cognitive freedom* to focus on what humans find inherently fascinating; 3) *intimacy* afforded by a small group of chosen friends, and; 4) *individual freedom* from the expectations and obligations of society (Hammit, 1982, pp. 487-491).

Hollenhorst, Frank, and Watson (1994) argue that the essence of solitude is the capacity to be alone and not feel lonely, to be alone and use the time alone for “self-discovery, self-

realization, meaning, wholeness, and heightened awareness of one's deepest needs, feelings and impulses" (p. 235). The solo has been described as the most important part of the wilderness experience (Daniel, 2007), and as a "crucial" component of the WEP, as it provides teens with the space and time to reflect on their problems and "break-through" their resistance to their "core issues" (Russell & Phillips-Miller, 2002, p. 427). The solo and solitude have additionally been described as important to long-term impact (Campbell, 2010; Gassner & Russell, 2008), a beneficial experience (Kalisch, Bobilya, & Daniel, 2011), important to learning (Martin & Leberman, 2005), and critical to providing time for reflection (McKenzie, 2003). Researchers have also discovered that the instructor's role during the solo experience is important (Bobilya, Kalisch, & McAvoy, 2005) and that youth are less likely to enjoy the solo than adults (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995, 2002).

Gabrielsen and Harper (2017) note the increased urbanization and technification trends of modern life, suggesting that youth, and adults as well, lead lives that are increasingly disconnected from the natural world. As people become increasingly dependent on technological gadgets (i.e., smart phones) and the internet, and as more and more people relocate from rural areas to urban ones, the exposure to noise, light, and air pollution increases dramatically, trapping many people in a "bubble of light, noise, and constant distraction" (Gabrielsen & Harper, 2017). The authors go on to say that "physical solitude is a state many seldom or never experience, as silence, solitude, and darkness are easier to come by in non-urban settings and wilderness" (Gabrielsen & Harper, 2017, p. 8).

Solitude has been described as the most difficult and most enjoyable aspects of the solo (Kalisch et al., 2011), the most important experience of a wilderness trip (Greenway, 1995), critical to the spiritual experience of wilderness (Nagle, 2005), as a factor leading to increases in

personal effectiveness (Greffath, Meyer, Strydom, & Ellis, 2011), and as conducive to feeling alive, thinking clearly, and feeling well (Hinds, 2011). Some research subjects regarded solitude as an experience to be avoided, noting the discomfort they anticipated if left alone with their thoughts and feelings. In fact, contrary to what they expected, skeptical research subjects found the experience of solitude in nature to be helpful and therapeutic (Nicholls & Gray, 2007).

**Reflection.** It may be that the most important aspect of the wilderness experience is the space it affords for self-examination, internal reflection, and contemplation. It has been noted that this facet of human information processing is the most vulnerable to fatigue and the hardest to achieve (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983). Throughout the literature, the importance of reflection is explicated or implied. Bobilya, Kalisch, and Daniel (2011) suggest that reducing distraction and increasing reflection on life is a key implication from their study, in order to help college students make a smoother transition from secondary to post-secondary education. Kaplan (2001) makes the point that restoring fatigued directed attention and achieving a state of a quiet and tranquil mind can be more readily accomplished by combining the restorative aspects of contact with nature with meditation. Reflection is understood as the most important process variable identified in the wilderness experience and important to long term impact (Gassner & Russell, 2008), an important aspect of the wilderness experience (McDonald, Wearing, & Ponting, 2009) or change process for youth participating in wilderness therapy (Norton, 2008), closely related to self-discovery (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995), and key to processing learning from the solo experience (Campbell, 2010; Kalisch et al., 2011). In short, reflection is an important part of the wilderness experience, leading to more realistic self-assessments, reflection upon one's character and future plans, clarification of what matters most,

reconsideration of one's involvements and priorities, and to deeper levels of understanding of self and the world (Takano, 2010; Talbot & Kaplan, 1986).

**Challenge.** Challenge maintains a prominent place within the WEP experience, and for good reason. It helps create a “context of hope” for depressed youth, as it provides what Erikson (1959) referred to as real accomplishment, providing discouraged youth new evidence about their ability to succeed (Norton, 2010). Increased risk-taking behavior fits well developmentally with teens because, generally, they possess tremendous strength and agility, lack significant responsibility for others, desire to demonstrate their emerging adulthood and crave new experiences (Kaplan & Kaplan, 2002). This limit-testing nurtures self-confidence and self-esteem, and increases sense of identity (Kellert, 1998). Challenge is viewed as: key to bringing about positive change (Durr, 2009; Gassner & Russell, 2008; Norton, 2008; Rossman & Ulehla, 1977), the most important aspect of NOLS and OB programming when tackled as a group (Goldenberg & Pronsolino, 2008), conducive to positive states and learning (Hinds, 2011; Martin & Leberman, 2005; McKenzie, 2003; ), important for promoting social and personal growth (Sklar et al., 2007), a chief factor in helping high-risk college students develop self-authoring ways of knowing (Pizzolato, 2003), and as a key component of the wilderness therapy change process (Russell & Phillips-Miller, 2002).

Caulkins, White, and Russell (2006) studied the effects of backpacking as a part of the therapeutic process in wilderness therapy. Eight “central impacts” were identified and “attributed to the backpacking component of the therapeutic process by the wilderness therapy participants” (Caulkins et al., 2006, p. 27). The eight impacts were finally divided into two categories “depending upon their temporality, intensity, and clarity” (Caulkins et al., 2006, p. 27). The two categories of experience included “general impacts” and “substantive impacts”. General impacts

(reflection, perceived competence, accomplishment) were often experienced early in the trip, were less intense, and were clearly and easily identified and discussed. Substantive impacts (timelessness, awareness of surroundings, self and others, self-efficacy) were identified later in the wilderness therapy experience, were more intense, and were difficult to put into words. McKenzie (2003) suggests that the lack of sufficient physical challenge can actually cause students to experience negative course outcomes. In support of this notion, Orren and Werner (2007) suggest that wilderness experiences need to be as challenging as possible, while still insuring safety, in order to bring about maximal impacts. Somevel and Lambie (2009) suggest that the intensity introduced by challenge “creates an engagement in the therapeutic process and depth of learning, above and beyond what is possible in the ‘normal’ group setting” (p. 168). Wilson and Lipsey (2000) shore up support for the role of challenge by stating: “If the salience of the challenge and psychological engagement with it are critical to the positive changes induced by these programs, more intense challenges may facilitate these responses independent of any therapeutic facilitation” (p. 11). In the hermeneutical study conducted by Patterson, Watson, Williams, and Roggenbuck (1998), challenge was the most often cited dimension of the wilderness experience. In a study of high-risk college students, Pizzolato (2003) concluded that developing self-authoring ways of knowing (Kegan’s fourth order of consciousness, Kegan, 1982, 1994) required an optimal blend of support and challenge. As long as challenges were sufficiently provocative, movement toward Kegan’s fourth order of consciousness was likely to occur. In order to qualify as “sufficiently provocative” experiences needed to significantly disrupt “the student’s equilibrium such that they felt compelled to consider and begin to construct new conceptions of self” (Pizzolato, 2003, p. 798). With too much support, and too

little challenge, students were “shut down by privilege,” remaining stuck in their earlier and less developed mindset (Pizzolato, 2003, p. 808).

Playing the other side, researchers involved with the Outdoor Challenge Program (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983) stripped away all artificially created challenges in order to better determine the role of wilderness. The impact was unchanged, suggesting that wilderness, not challenge, was to account for the profound changes experienced by expedition participants.

**Course instructor.** It’s a mixed bag when summing up the current knowledge about the role of course instructors in student outcomes. Some studies reveal that course instructors earn their keep by using their expectations of students, interpersonal skills, and personalities (McKenzie, 2003) to contribute to a range of positive student outcomes (Holman & McAvoy, 2005; Martin & Leberman, 2005). Russell and Phillips-Miller (2002) found that the relationships established with course instructors and therapists were aspects of the wilderness therapy process that were among the most helpful. Other studies make note of the fact that instructor personality and expectations can be related to negative student outcomes (McKenzie, 2003), or that course instructors simply don’t factor into the long-term impact equation (Gassner & Russell, 2008; Takano, 2010). Harper (2009) investigated the relationship of therapeutic alliance to outcomes in wilderness therapy. Therapeutic alliance is constituted by three elements: 1) the *goal* is whatever the therapist and client agree needs changing; 2) the *task* is whatever the client and therapist agree to *do* to bring about the desired change; 3) the *bond* refers to the quality of attachment between the therapist and the client. Therapeutic alliance and treatment outcome scores improved significantly, per client self-reports, but alliance scores, though significant, were not predictive of outcomes. Harper (2009) suggests that paraprofessional staff and therapists who

remain in the field (as is the case with the contained expedition) may have a better opportunity for developing strong alliances than staff that rotate in and out of the field (as is the case with the continuous flow expedition).

Helsing and Howell (2014) conducted a study of leadership performance that had nothing to do with WEPs. I include it in this review because it helps underscore the importance of constructive-developmental perspective to the function of leadership; a function inherent in each and every WEP. Using a constructive-development lens to better understand a person's capacity for leading others and the Subject-Object Interview to identify a leader's degree of mental complexity, Helsing and Howell (2014) determined that there is "value... looking at leadership performance and potential through a development lens" (p. 199). The authors go on to say that when considering "leaders' underlying capacities as what shapes their observed performance, we can forecast a great deal about how individuals are likely to experience the demands of their roles" (Helsing & Howell, 2014, p. 199). Mirkin and Middleton (2013) found, in their study of social climate and peer interaction during outdoor courses, that instructors "played a meaningful role in the social experience of participants through modeling social development goal orientation and fostering a positive social climate" (p. 238).

**Group experience.** The consensus is that the group experience plays an important role in positive outcomes in WEPs. It is viewed as: a vital component to NOLS courses even several years after course completion (Goldenberg & Soule, 2011), a key attribute in facilitating successful outcomes (Holman & McAvoy, 2005), a powerful force in promoting connection, self-definition, and psychosocial health (Norton, 2008), sense of accomplishment (Goldenberg et al., 2011) and learning (Martin & Leberman, 2005), and as an aspect of the WEP process that proved most helpful (Russell & Phillips-Miller, 2002). In their study looking at process factors

that might explain psycho-social outcomes in wilderness therapy, Russell et al., (2017) drew from a sample of 169 males, 21.5 years of age, who had completed an average of 79.6 days of a 90-day residential substance abuse treatment program. The program utilized adventure experiences as a primary treatment tool. On average, the young men involved in the program improved their psycho-social functioning. The authors discovered that the group-based adventure factor was “the only unique predictor of positive change in treatment outcome” and that none of the other four factors (nature, reflection, challenge) approached significance (Russell et al., 2017, p. 278). According to the authors, group-based adventure experiences include: bonding with peers, being supported by leaders, applying lessons to treatment goals, and having a sense of accomplishment (Russell et al., 2017, p. 278). In sum, developing common goals and working together as a group to achieve those goals can have a powerful impact on psycho-social functioning.

**Course length.** How long is long enough? What constitutes the optimal time afield? Is there a point at which positive outcomes plateau, and if so, at what point does that flattening of effect occur? These questions are important, given the high cost of WEPs, yet no one seems to know the answer, except to say, in the most general terms, that longer is better (Cason & Gillis, 1994; Hattie et al., 1997; McGowan, 2016; Neill, 2003; Orren & Werner, 2007). The wilderness therapy industry average for client days afield is 50 (Harper, 2007). For effecting lasting change, the industry average hardly seems long enough. John McKinnon has suggested that change of a substantive nature (think developmental change) takes months, even years (J. A. McKinnon, personal communication, November, 2009), which is the primary reason he and his colleagues at Montana Academy, a therapeutic boarding school set in the hills of northwestern Montana, refuse to admit youngsters for fewer than 14 months. Additionally, Robert Kegan, the

psychologist whose constructive-developmental theory figures prominently in the final sections of this paper, has unequivocally stated: “Without exception, if a person’s order of consciousness changes from one year to the next it changes only very gradually (never more than two discriminations, that is ‘fifths’ of the way from one order of consciousness to another)” (Kegan, 1994, p. 188). Of course, as with so much in the WEP literature, the evidence on course length is not unequivocal. Consider this report from Wilson and Lipsey (2000), who conducted a meta-analysis of WEPs and found, surprisingly, that longer trips were correlated with dramatic *decreases* in positive outcomes. Wilson and Lipsey (2000) write:

Perhaps the most troubling area of uncertainty in this body of evaluation research has to do with the counterintuitive dose-response relationship that appears for program duration. One would expect that more exposure to and involvement in wilderness challenge programs, at least up to some reasonable level, would produce greater effects on delinquency. After that, the effect might plateau, but it does not seem plausible that it would dramatically decrease. Our analysis showed that program length was not related to the magnitude of the effect on delinquency among the short- and medium-term (less than 6 weeks) programs. It seems most likely that, above that point, the duration variable acted as a proxy for some other characteristics of extended programs that account for their diminished effectiveness. The information reported in the available studies, unfortunately, is not sufficient to identify any such characteristics and this topic clearly warrants further investigation. (p. 10)

Though Wilson and Lipsey (2000) found evidence of a “counterintuitive dose-response relationship” in regards to program duration (p. 10), I suspect that longer really is better, for reasons that McKinnon (personal communication, November, 2009) and Kegan (1994) imply

(i.e., that substantive change, changes to a person's order of consciousness, takes time, a long time). So why is it that WT clients do not stay longer afield than the WT industry average of 50 days? Yet another issue warranting further study.

For outcome measures that are not explicitly related to increases in mental complexity, (e.g., cognitive autonomy or self-efficacy), WEP interventions of a very short duration (a four day backpacking trip) can be effective, leaving the question of how long is long enough as confusing as ever (Margalit & Ben-Ari, 2014).

In a study of 220 youth and young adult offenders randomly assigned to an eight to 10-day or 17-20-day wilderness therapy expedition, Paquette and Vitaro (2014) discovered that length of expedition made no significant difference in reductions to antisociality, but the longer expeditions did lead to significantly better improvements to interpersonal skills and accomplishment motivation.

**Final expedition.** The autonomous student expedition (ASE) is a final component of many NOLS and OB courses and provides opportunities for students to spend three to five days travelling as a small group unaccompanied by their instructors. Sibthorp, Paisley, Gookin, and Furman (2008) studied the value of the ASE by examining data collected from 1,229 youth participants on 130 wilderness education courses run by NOLS. This study confirmed the benefits of the ASE, suggesting that the risk of injury is no higher during the ASE portion of courses than on the instructor accompanied portions. Additionally, this study, and others that have preceded it, suggests that the benefits of ASE are significant, that ASE plays a “critical pedagogical role” in WEP, that ASE may be “entirely appropriate” for certain types of outdoor programs, that ASE can be among the “most meaningful” components of WEP courses, and is likely among the “most important ways in which they (students) learn on course” (Sibthorp et al.,

2008, p. 144). Additionally, “the majority of research on ASE suggests that they promote learning, personal growth, and group development,” and that ASE affords students opportunities to engage deeply by providing a measure of control and choice that are not often experienced in their daily lives. The idea that autonomy leads to empowerment, which then results in personal growth, is relatively consistent in the literature (Daniel, Bobilya, Kalisch, & McAvoy, 2014).

In a case study investigation of NOLS, Paisley, Furman, Sibthorp, and Gookin (2008) determined that “student-led, autonomous behavior is a fundamental part of the learning in outdoor education programs” (p. 219). McKenzie (2003), in a study of OB Western Canada, linked positive course outcomes with the final expedition, and in a study by Gassner and Russell (2008) the ASE was deemed an “important” contribution to long term impact. On July 23, 2011, a group of seven NOLS students travelling without instructors was attacked by a bear in Alaska’s Talkeetna Mountains. Four of the seven students were injured, even though the student group was employing accepted bear safety practices. In spite of the dangers made evident by this unfortunate and exceedingly rare incident, the handful of studies consulted encourages the practice of the ASE for appropriate groups (Bobilya et al., 2011). Daniel et al. (2014) do acknowledge that

Today, some outdoor adventure education programs are minimizing, modifying, or eliminating ASE primarily due to concerns over risk and liability. This trend is often driven by fear of litigation rather than what the ASE research reveals about the educational value and ways to minimize the actual risk involved. (p. 13)

Whether or not the ASE is appropriate for all WEPs is another matter, as teens participating in wilderness therapy, for example, may generally be less fit psychologically and physically, and

often less mature than their age-mates participating in a wilderness education or wilderness adventure course.

**Process variables summary.** The processes that appear to set WEPs apart from other modes of personal development for youth include: (a) immersion in a beautiful, remote, and unfamiliar environment and complete “unplugging” from their former life; (b) consequences are levied as much by the natural environment as by adult authority figures; (c) the adult-teen relationship is radically restructured because the adult is experiencing the same travel and living conditions as the youth; (d) the challenges of outdoor group living and intensive interpersonal relations promote social cohesion and social development; (e) self-efficacy is promoted through task accomplishment (backpacking, cooking meals, erecting shelter, safely traversing an avalanche prone slope, rituals, solo, accountability letters to parents, etc.); (f) program phases provide structure and include cleansing, responsibility, and transition, and; (g) the instructor team works together to build rapport and support and challenge the student (Russell, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2006a; Russell & Phillips-Miller, 2002).

### **Outcomes: The Student Experience**

In this section, I discuss the student experience by covering a variety of topics including: personal growth and development, personality, mood and behavior, the wilderness nature effect, and interpersonal relationships.

**Personal growth and development.** WEPs consistently show positive outcomes related to factors consistent with personal growth (Daniel, 2007; Goldenberg, McAvoy, & Klenosky, 2005; Hendee & Pitstick, 1993; Kellert, 1998; Maher, 2005). Noted changes are multifarious including improvements to one’s sense of well-being (Greenway, 1995; Hinds, 2011; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995; Mutz & Muller, 2016) and sense of accomplishment (Bell, 2006; Goldenberg,

Russell, & Soule, 2011; Norton, 2008; Russell, 2001; Whittington, 2006). Positive changes to self-concept, defined as a person's "mental model of his or her abilities and attributes" (Gerrig & Zimbardo, 2002), have been noted in numerous studies (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995; Kellert, 1998; McKenzie, 2003; Russell, 2004). Changes to self-concept include increased self-esteem (Grocott & Hunter, 2009; Kellert, 1998, 2002; Norton, 2008; Romi & Kohan, 2004), self-confidence (Duerden, Taniguchi, & Widmer, 2011; Goldenberg et al., 2005; Holman & McAvoy, 2005; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983; Kellert, 1998, 2002; Martin & Leberman, 2005; Norton, 2010; Somervel & Lambie, 2009), self-efficacy (Jones & Hinton, 2007; Margalit & Ben-Ari, 2014; Mutz & Muller, 2016; Norton, 2010; Russell & Walsh, 2011; Somervel & Lambie, 2009), self-awareness and understanding (Goldenberg, Hill, & Freidt, 2008; Holman & McAvoy, 2005; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983; Martin & Leberman, 2005; McKenzie, 2003), mindfulness (Mutz & Muller, 2016), sense of empowerment (Shellman & Ewert, 2010), personal effectiveness (Greffath, Meyer, Strydom, & Ellis, 2011), sense of identity (Cook, 2008; Kellert, 2002), cognitive autonomy (Margalit & Ben-Ari, 2014), and independence (Goldenberg et al., 2008; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995; Kellert, 1998; McKenzie, 2003; Talbot & Kaplan, 1986).

Only one study was identified that addressed constructive-developmental perspective directly. McGowan (2016) looked at the impact a "one-semester outdoor education program" (WEP) had on the development of self-authorship. McGowan (2016) defined self-authorship as the "ability to form our identity independently from the expectations of external individuals and the capacity to invent our beliefs, identity, and relationships" (p. 386). Using the Self-Authorship Questionnaire (SAQ), the author found that 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students showed gains in three of four SAQ categories (situational coping, interpersonal leadership, and self-efficacy) as well as in overall SAQ scores. Program experiences that seemed to make the most difference in the

development of a self-authoring mindset included winter camping, canoeing, the solo, and the influential role played by the outdoor educator.

**Personality.** Personality, defined as “the unique psychological qualities of an individual that influence a variety of characteristic behavior patterns...across different situations and over time” (Gerrig & Zimbardo, 2002), has been improved as a result of WEP (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983), as have some of the constituting elements of personality including locus of control (Romi & Kohan, 2004), coping (Kellert, 1998), adaptation (Kellert, 1998), resilience (Ewert & Yoshino, 2011; Whittington, 2006), hope (Russell & Walsh, 2011), and physical, expressive, and moral courage (Whittington & Mack, 2010). Among youthful offenders, resilience scores did not improve, suggesting mixed outcomes for this particular aspect of personality, at least for this sub-group of the youth population (Russell & Walsh, 2011).

Clark, Marmol, Cooley, and Gathercoal, (2004) found statistically significant improvement to dysfunctional personality patterns following a 21-day wilderness therapy program for participating youth. “The most striking finding of this study is that wilderness therapy appears to facilitate positive characterological change in youth with clinically elevated MACI (Millon Adolescent Clinical Inventory) Personality Patterns scores. Short-term interventions leading to characterological change are virtually unheard of in the personality literature” (Clark et al., 2004, p. 213).

**Mood and behavior.** In a study by Mossman and Goldthorpe (2004), teens who demonstrated the most significant improvements to mood and behavior following a nine-day wilderness therapy expedition were those who reported the most severe problems pre-intervention, had parents involved in post-program assessment and had been involved with the fewest number of agencies prior to the wilderness therapy intervention. Norton (2008, 2010)

reported that wilderness therapy was effective at decreasing the rate and prevalence of youth depression. Russell (2001, 2003) noted that Y-OQ (Youth-Outcome Questionnaire) scores, completed by the teens and their parents upon completion of a wilderness therapy program, dropped significantly from onset of treatment to completion of treatment. The lower Y-OQ scores suggest that wilderness therapy is effective in bringing about a measurable improvement in symptoms of emotional and behavior problems. Even non-clinical interventions, such as recreating in nature, appear effective in protecting against depression and anxiety. Williams (2004) presented the results of an unusual study in which 2433 infants, aged four to eight months, were followed to age 15. Analysis of 12 waves of data collection revealed that teens who participated in WEPs often or very often experienced lower levels of depression and anxiety than those who did not participate frequently in WEP activities. Of course, no causal link was established, so caution must be employed when interpreting these results. The study does suggest, however, that those who participate in WEPs may be gaining something psychologically meaningful from doing so.

Contrary to the positive outcomes noted above, the two-day (and one night) WEP intervention studied by Orren and Werner (2007) did not show significant improvements to internalizing and externalizing behaviors. The authors explain the poor results by speculating the program was too short and the interventions not challenging enough.

Bowen, Neill, and Crisp (2016) studied outcomes of a 10-week manualized wilderness therapy program consisting of 36 youth outpatients with a mix of mental health problems. They found moderate, statistically significant improvements in social self-esteem and psychological resilience and noted that those changes were retained at the three-month follow-up point. Exceptions to this were suicidality (significant improvement) and family functioning (significant

reduction). Additionally, for participants who initially scored within the clinical range on symptomology, a statistically significant, large improvement to depressed mood was noted. A statistically significant, large to very large improvement was determined for behavioral and emotional functioning. At the three-month follow up, these changes were retained, suggesting that wilderness therapy “is as effective as traditional psychotherapy techniques for clinically symptomatic people” (Bowen et al., 2016, p. 49). Worth noting, this statement seems to contradict Bowen’s earlier statement that wilderness therapy outcomes still trail in effectiveness (“for the most part”) to traditional one-on-one therapy (Bowen & Neill, 2013, p. 40).

**The wilderness nature effect.** Classic and contemporary literatures have long suggested that nature has a “profound and healing affect (*sic*) on humans” (Harper, 2009, p. 55). A handful of researchers over the past few decades have slowly built an evidence base in support of this idea. In the preceding section on process variables, I discussed *why* things happen to us as they do when exposed to wilderness environs; in this section I will limit my discussion to *what* happens when humans leave the built environment and enter the natural domain.

Interested in the psychological effects of the wilderness experience, two researchers, Kaplan and Talbot (1983), embarked on what is likely the most extensive study of the wilderness experience yet conducted; the Outdoor Challenge Research Program. Over the course of a decade, they ran 25 wilderness backpacking trips, two weeks in length, in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. Groups ranged in size from three to 12 participants with two adult guides, and were constituted by men and women, ages 15-48 years. Data were collected from personal journals and questionnaires. In the early years, trips were fashioned after OB, with an emphasis on physical and psychological hardship. As the research program matured, the researchers eliminated activities that artificially induced hardship. This allowed the wilderness environment

itself and only those tasks necessary for survival to become the primary focus of attention. The two-week trip was comprised of seven days of group hiking, a two-night solo, and a five-day hike without direct supervision of the guides. The authors placed their results into three groupings.

In the first grouping, the authors related how the wilderness experience unfolded over time. By *day three*, the unfamiliar environment felt “strangely comfortable...and surprisingly familiar” (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983, p. 177). By *day four* hikers expressed a mix of physical hardship and joy.

By *day five*, they noted increased self-confidence, peacefulness, and tranquility. There was a notable absence of external distraction and internal noise. “Participants give the impression of having discovered something of great importance that they hope will have a place in whatever they do after their trip is completed” (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983, p. 193). By *day seven*, participants displayed an enhanced sense of awe, wonder, and spiritual awakening. The concern for priorities had deepened and there was a profound sense of “harmony among one’s perceptions plans, and what was necessary for one to do” (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983, p. 193).

In the second grouping, psychological effects clustered around four categories. *Situational stress* was common among participants, as most began the trip with high levels of anxiety, fear, and discomfort. *Enjoyment* came next. Soon after the trip started participants related their enjoyment of and happiness with the situation, and expressed confidence in their ability to manage in the wilderness environment. The third category centered on *fascination*. Hikers found the wilderness environment stimulating and highly enjoyable, with the many sensory inputs bringing deep and abiding satisfaction. *Perceptual changes* made up the final category of psychological effects. Persons in the wilderness setting developed an enhanced

awareness of their feelings, their future, and their place and role in the world, and developed a keener sense of who they are and what they want to do in life (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995).

In the third grouping, the hikers reflected on their return to civilization. They noted their *wilderness perspective*; one that left them feeling disappointed in the built environment to which they returned, describing it as “flat, ugly, and boring by comparison” (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983, p. 182). *Nature tranquility* constituted the second category; hikers remembered the wilderness environment as peaceful, relaxing, awesome, and immensely satisfying. The *new activities* enjoyed during the trek, as well as the enjoyment of nature and the fitness achieved, were considered aspects of their experience participants hoped to continue once the trip was over. The two remaining categories included concern over the potential *loss of impacts*, and the sense that their *perspective* had irrevocably and fundamentally been altered; matters that had seemed urgent prior to the trip were less important after the trip, and changes to their long-term view of and their relationship to the world had been significant (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983, p. 186; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995). In summing up the results of their research, Kaplan and Talbot (1983) write:

We had not expected the wilderness experience to be quite so powerful or pervasive in its impact. And we were impressed by the durability of that residue in the human makeup that still resonates so strongly to these remote, uncivilized places. (p. 201)

The results noted above are echoed throughout the handful of other studies conducted to better understand the wilderness experience. Berger and McLeod (2006) noted that nature elicits strong emotions and sensations in people, and often leads to increased awareness of self and other, and sets the stage for meaningful change. Hinds (2011) conducted an ethnographic study of five women, ages 17-25, who participated in a ten-day WEP in the Scottish wilderness. The

psychological rewards of this experience included an increased appreciation for solitude and simplicity, challenge and accomplishment, and changing perspectives and priorities. The first master theme of solitude and simplicity was grounded in the experience of feeling alive, thinking more clearly, feeling well and authentic. The second master theme, challenge and accomplishment was represented by the subordinate themes of the importance of social support, acceptance of life challenges, and rewards related to living simply. Finally, the third master theme, changing perspectives and priorities, was comprised of three subordinate themes including values (the material is not as important as once thought), environmental connection (having a better sense of one's place in the larger context of life) and contemplation (the ability to think deeply about one's life).

In a survey of 94 university students, Rossman and Ulehla (1977) discovered that the anticipated values associated with forays into wilderness included challenge and adventure, emotional or spiritual experience, esthetic enjoyment of natural settings, and escape from urban stresses. All the anticipated rewards rated as at least fairly important were also highly expected only in the natural environment. In a study by McDonald, Wearing, and Ponting (2009), peak experiences were triggered primarily by the esthetic qualities of the wilderness setting and the freedom from the distractions, pressures, people, and concerns of the built environment. Koole and Van den Berg (2005) concluded, in their study of 361 young adults that "modern individuals have ...come to feel deeply ambivalent toward wilderness, finding it both beautiful and terrifying, both awesome and awful" (p. 1014). The authors suggest that wild nature and the "untamed forces" within are "intrinsically connected with uncontrollability and death" and at the same time embody the vital forces of life, offering freedom from cultural constraint (Koole & Van den Berg, 2005, p. 1014).

White and Hendee (2000) conducted a qualitative inquiry into the human benefits of the wilderness experience using post-experience interviews and focus group data collected from 44 young adult participants in three WEPs. The authors tested “the primal hypothesis” which asserts a positive relationship between the naturalness and solitude of wilderness with three broad constructs of human experience: development of self, development of community, and spiritual development. Their analysis showed that all three constructs held up well and “captured and discriminated between all the self-reported benefits generated by participants’ responses to the open-ended question, ‘In your own words, what were the most important benefits you gained from this experience?’” (White & Hendee, 2000, p. 225). Furthermore, participants affirmed the importance of solitude and naturalness as key aspects of the wilderness experience.

Additional outcomes related to the wilderness/nature effect have to do with restoring mental, psychological, and physical functioning. Directed attention, which is the sort of attention required to focus on tasks that lack inherent fascination, is subject to fatigue and, consequently, in need of restoration. While sleep provides the primary form of rest for this essential resource, immersion in nature, even for short periods of time, has been demonstrated to effectively help restore depleted directed attention (Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995). Similarly, recovery from stress was found to be “faster and more complete when subjects were exposed to natural rather than urban environments” (Ulrich, et al., 1991, p. 201). Other researchers confirmed that exposure to natural settings were more restorative than built environments to youth and the elderly (Berto, 2007), and in instances of physical and psychological fatigue (Hartig, Evans, Jamner, Davis, & Garling, 2003; McKenzie, 2003).

While research studies indicate that natural environments are restorative, Harper et al. (2018) suggest that “the question of why wilderness has gone mostly unanswered” for therapeutic use in WEPs (p. 3). Harper et al. (2018) go on to say:

In the collective opinions of the authors, WT (wilderness therapy) has operated for decades now mostly on simple heuristics that wild places provide time away, offer a venue to advance or intensify therapy and healing processes and are inherently therapeutic. While generally accepted in practice, and commonly described in literature as an element of WT, the role and impact of the ‘wild’ remains significantly unexplained, specifically across cultures. What we do know is that living and travelling in wild environments provides us with clear and unambiguous feedback (Reser & Scherl, 1988). Beyond this simple reality, there is much yet to learn to advance WT theory, training and practice. (p. 12)

**Interpersonal relationships.** The impact of WEPs on interpersonal relationships is mixed. Many studies note significant improvements to human relationships generally (Bobilya, Akey, & Mitchell, 2011); Goldenberg et al., 2005; Somervell & Lambie, 2009), increases in empathy and concern for others (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995; McKenzie, 2003; Norton, 2010; Talbot & Kaplan, 1986), improved interpersonal skills (Russell, 2001) and social self-efficacy (Chapman, Deane, Harre, Courtney, & Moore, 2017), improved relations and connection with peers on the expedition (Whittington, 2006), and better family relationships (Norton, 2008). The sense of community among participants also appears to increase over the course of a WEP (Breunig et al., 2008; Chapman, Deane, Harre, Courtney, & Moore, 2017; Goldenberg et al., 2005) as does perceived levels of trust, social support, and friendship (Sklar, Anderson, & Autry, 2007). These gains seem positively related to the measure of energy spent surviving in

wilderness (Breunig et al., 2008), and the degree of teamwork and cooperation employed among expedition members (Goldenberg et al., 2005).

Mirkin and Middleton (2013) employed two studies with youth to explore how the social climate relates to peer interactions on a WEP. They used achievement goal theory to help frame their understanding of the types of peer interactions expected during WEPs. Achievement goal theory posits that people will either seek to *demonstrate* social competence or will attempt to *develop* social competence. There are two types of social demonstration, including approach and avoid. Youth engaged in the social demonstration-approach form of peer interaction seek to gain status or demonstrate social competence. Youth engaged in the social demonstration-avoid form of peer interaction are trying to avoid looking incompetent. “Demonstration orientations are considered maladaptive because the outcomes associated with them have negative impacts on individuals in a variety of settings” (Mirkin & Middleton, 2013, p. 233). Youth engaged in social demonstration approaches to peer interactions tend to undermine positive relations with others, self-acceptance, personal growth, and autonomy and exhibit increased feelings of loneliness (Mirkin & Middleton, 2013). By contrast, social development forms of peer interaction are adaptive because the underlying goal in this approach is to develop social competence with peers. In this approach, the student is focused on learning new ideas, improving the self, deepening relationships with others, increasing social skills, and generally, shoring up interpersonal and social skills (Mirkin & Middleton, 2013). In classroom studies, social development forms of peer interaction have been shown to promote self-acceptance, social adjustment, social self-efficacy and personal growth. In their first of two studies, Mirkin and Middleton (2013) discovered that movement away from social demonstration types of interaction toward social development types of peer interactions were facilitated by being outdoors

generally, having tasks that required teamwork to complete, having most of the waking hours structured rather than free, and instructors who were supportive and effective at social engineering. In the second study, the authors concluded that the strongest predictors of change from social demonstration to social development form of peer interaction were twofold: 1) the perception among youth participants of group cohesion, and 2) a clear task orientation.

Negative results, however, were noted by Kellert (1998), in his study of three major WEPs (OB, NOLS, and the Student Conservation Association). Kellert (1998) states: A discouraging result was only negligible impacts immediately following program participation in concern for others' feelings, as well as acceptance of other racial and ethnic groups.... Moreover, very substantial declines occurred six months later in perceived program effects on these variables, and these reported levels were well below those indicated prior to program participation (Mirkin & Middleton, 2013, p. 47).

In another study of an eight-day canoe experience led by therapists and volunteers, youth reported developing "deep and meaningful" relationships with staff, while parents of the participating clients reported feeling "disconnected" and "out of the loop" (Sklar et al., 2007, p. 234). Upon completion of the trip, youth participants had "little to say" about their experience, further exacerbating parent's lack of connection to the WEP process. Communication between clients and staff in the field and parents who remain at home constitutes a major challenge for administrators running WEPs, especially when the parents are investing large sums of money for a clinical intervention as part of a wilderness therapy program.

Additionally, Kaplan and Talbot (1983), in their review of the research conducted by psychologists studying the wilderness experience, note the presence of "only two consistent

findings,” one of which is that the social benefits of the wilderness experience are of little consequence (p. 166).

In the next two sections of this chapter, I discuss the work of Robert Kegan, a psychologist who has devised a theory of human development called constructive-developmental theory. I then introduce a measurement tool created by Lisa Lahey and associates (Lahey et al., 2011) called the Subject-Object Interview (SOI). The SOI was created to, among other things, determine a person’s constructive-developmental perspective.

### **The Work of Robert Kegan**

#### **Constructive-developmental theory**

As a clinical social worker, I routinely ask my clients questions about their experience. In nearly the same breath, I also ask about the sense they make of those experiences. I do this because I know, and have known for a long time, that the way they construct meaning, or the way they know what they know (their epistemology) has a lot to do with their current pain and dysfunction. What I did not realize, until recently, was just how fundamental that meaning-making process really is.

Robert Kegan is a psychologist who devised a meta-psychological theory called constructive-developmental theory, also known as subject-object theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994). His meta-theory is a progression from two earlier traditions; existential (existential phenomenology) and dynamic (neo-psychoanalytic ego and neo-psychoanalytic object-relations) personality psychologies (Kegan, 1982) and is grounded in the work of one of the “fathers” of constructive-developmental theory, Jean Piaget (Kegan, 2003, p. 22).

Constructivism is “the idea that people or systems *constitute* or *construct* reality,” and that human *being* is the practice of making sense, is the creative, restless energy that puts the

world together in a particular way (Kegan, 1994, p. 198). Constructivism refers to our “capacity to select, regulate, act upon, and make decisions about raw data” (Kegan, 1994, p. 205) and it refers to:

That most human of ‘regions’ between an event and a reaction to it—the place where the event is privately composed, made sense of, the place where it actually becomes an event for that person. It is that zone of mediation where meaning is made. (Kegan, 1982, p. 2)

A developmentalist sees human *being* as a process of differentiating and reintegrating, organizing and reorganizing, (Kegan, 1982). It refers to the idea that “people or organic systems evolve through different eras of increasing complexity according to regular principles of stability and change” (Kegan, 1994, p. 199). Developmentalism posits that organisms evolve through processes of forming and transforming, and it “directs us to the origins and processes by which the form came to be and by which it will pass into a new form” (Kegan, 1982, p. 13).

Developmentalism contributes “toward an understanding of psychological phenomena oriented toward origin, development, and process” (Kegan, 1982, p. 14). Kegan views the human activity of meaning-making as the “irreducible “and “fundamental motion in personality” involving physical activity (perceiving), social activity (relating to other), and survival activity (we survive because we mean) (Kegan, 1982, p. 15).

Subject-object theory is concerned with the way a person makes sense of experience. It takes into account the person’s epistemology, or way of knowing what she knows. An example of a subject-object relationship is demonstrated in a famous experiment by Jean Piaget, the Swiss psychologist known for his work on child development. Piaget (1954) gathered young children around a table and showed them a container filled with water. He then poured the water into another container of exactly the same shape and size and asked the children if the amount of

water in the second container was the same as in the first container. They all agreed that it was. But when he poured the water into a container that was taller and slimmer, and asked the question again, they tended to answer that it was more. As if to bring them to their senses, Piaget poured the water back into the original container, thinking they would recognize their error. Instead, they stated it was now the same amount of water that they started with in the first place. In this simple experiment, Piaget brilliantly demonstrated the power of a four-year-old child's epistemology. If you ask a seven or eight-year-old the same question, they will wonder how you could be foolish enough to ask such a stupid question. What has changed between the ages of four and eight is that the child's epistemology, the way by which she makes meaning, and her relationship to her perceptions is now different; qualitatively different. What once was subject is now object. Whereas the four year old *is* her perceptions, is identified with them, is embedded in them, the older child *has* her perceptions and is able to reflect upon them. Kegan notes that Piaget's discoveries underscore two important points: "first, that each of his stages is plausibly the consequence of a given subject-object balance, or evolutionary truce; and second, that the process of movement is plausibly the evolutionary motion of differentiation (or emergence from embeddedness) and reintegration (relation to, rather than embeddedness in, the world)" (Kegan, 1982, p. 39).

Kegan suggests that the "evolutionary motion" referred to above, in which the person continually differentiates himself from the world, and by so doing, relates to the world in a new way, is a "radical consideration," because it is the "grounding phenomenon of personality" (Kegan, 1982, p. 43). In my introduction to this section I commented that I did not realize the fundamental importance and far-reaching implications of the meaning-making process. It was this "radical consideration" I had in mind when making that observation. If Kegan is right that

meaning-making is, in fact, the “grounding phenomenon” of personality, it follows that (material in brackets added for clarity by author of this dissertation):

This process or activity, this adaptive conversation [concerning the extent to which the organism differentiates itself from—and so relates itself to—the world], is the very source of, and the unifying context for, thought and feeling; that this motion [of differentiating and reintegrating, assimilating and accommodating] is observable, researchable, intersubjectively ascertainable; that its understanding is crucial to our being of help to people in pain; and that unlike other candidates for a grounding phenomenon, this one cannot be considered arbitrary or bound over to the partialities of sex, class, culture, or historical period. It is an activity we have always shared and always will share. Seen ‘psychologically’ this process is about the development of ‘knowing’ [each developmental truce, striking a subject-object balance, becomes a way of knowing the world]; but at the same time, we *experience* this activity. The experience [of that tension between self-preservation and self-transformation], as we will see, may well be the source of our emotions themselves. Loss and recovery, separation and attachment, anxiety and play, depression and transformation, disintegration and coherence—all may owe their origins to the felt experience of this activity, this motion to which the word ‘emotion’ refers. I use the word ‘meaning’ to refer to this simultaneously epistemological and ontological activity; it is about knowing *and* being, about theory-making *and* investments and commitments of the self. (Kegan, 1982, pp. 44-45)

Kegan begins by recounting a story from his early days as a middle-school teacher. He was teaching literature to a group of seventh-grade boys and engaged them in a discussion about a story they had read the week before. In the story, a kid named Marty shows up at the neighborhood baseball field, and waits while sides are chosen. As always, he is picked last and exiled to left field. Praying fervently that no ball will come his way, his hopes are dashed as a

line drive sails toward him. His failure is spectacular and his team loses the game. As he retreats to the infield, his teammates pepper him with abuse, reinforcing his position at the bottom of the roster. Then one day, a new kid shows up. He is short, skinny, and meticulously dressed, all indications of a difficult future. For the first time in his baseball career, Marty is not the last to be picked, and the new kid is sent straight to left field. Near the end of the game, the opposing team at bat, and Marty's team in the lead by only one point, the bat cracks and sends the ball soaring to, where else but left field. What follows is familiar, a spectacular failure. And as the new boy returns from the outfield, filled with embarrassment and shame, who should lead the bully chorus but Marty himself!

Kegan asked this group of 12-year-olds what they made of the story. Nearly all of them agreed that being mean to others is just how things are, and if you've been getting it when you are little, you'll have your chance to be on top once you're bigger and stronger.

It seems clear that what we are looking at here is not so much what kids know but how they know. It began to occur to me that if how they were making sense of this story was so different from how I was making sense of it, perhaps we were not all living in exactly the same classroom. (Kegan, 1982, pp. 47-48)

There was one boy in his classroom, however, who did see things differently. After listening to his classmates applaud the central character of the story for getting his chance to "be on top," Richie offered a dissenting view that went something like this: "You would think that Marty, of all the kids on that field, would have remembered what it was like to be made fun of, and that he would have been the *last* one to give that poor kid a bad time." Kegan began to see that what matters most isn't so much *what* kids know as *how* they know, and that growing up is more closely related to the process of *transforming* one's mind than *informing* it. It was in his

study of both Piaget's and Kohlberg's stages of development that Kegan (1982) was able to discern the common origin of the stages they discovered, a common origin made up by the "underlying motion of evolution" that sets "terms on what the organism constitutes as self and other," that gives "rise to the stage-like regularities in the domains they" explored and that describes "the process of movement from one stage to the next" (p. 74).

If human development is, as Kegan suggests, the "transformation toward more complex systems or ways of knowing" (Kegan, 2003, p. 25), then it is important to be clear what form it is you are attempting to transform. In Kegan's theory, the epistemological root is the subject-object relationship. Object is any phenomena that can be looked at, considered, manipulated, or pushed against. Subject is that phenomenon that we are blind to because we are fused with it, embedded within it, and controlled by it (Berger, 2010). "We *have* that which is object, we *are* that which is subject. In other words, any meaning-making system is essentially a kind of equilibrium that maintains a certain balance between what is subject and what is object" (Kegan, 2003, p. 25). Growing up, also known as "developmental transformation," always involves this movement from what was once subject to what is now object. When the ten year old begins to show interest in thinking abstractly *about* the facts he is learning, rather than in simply acquiring more information, we can then rest assured his subject-object balance is in a process of transformation and change, and that his developmental activity, understood as the "fundamental ground of personality" is being worked out through yet another episode of "defense, surrender, and reconstruction of a center" (Kegan, 1982, p. 82).

Kegan points out that when he first started as a psychologist, the notion of adult development wasn't in the lexicon. The prevailing idea noted the conclusion of physical and mental development with the transition from adolescence to adulthood. As the twenty-year-old

reached his full height and his physical development began to slow, he also approached the zenith of his mental development and personality formation. Adults, it was believed, might continue learning ever increasing bodies of information and accruing ever widening levels of experience, but substantive mental development was over. What research is now showing is that “there are qualitatively more complex mental systems beyond adolescence that are just as discontinuously different than are the better understood transformations from early to later childhood and later childhood to adolescence” (Kegan, 2003, p. 35). With this discovery of the continued development of consciousness, one that stretches into adulthood and perhaps beyond, came the opportunity for exploring the evolving complexity of meaning-making in adults, the developmental activity that is central to the construction of personality. This is where Kegan’s work gains traction, as he explicates “orders of mind,” described as “the qualitatively different ways of constructing reality” throughout the lifespan (Berger, 2010, p. 3).

Kegan has identified six orders of mind, beginning at birth with a sort of zero order for infants and culminating with a largely theoretical fifth stage that unfolds, if it unfolds at all, never before mid-life, and often only in advanced age (Kegan, 2003). Kegan suggests, “the evolution of human consciousness requires long preparation” (Kegan, 1994, p. 352), and is “extraordinarily gradual” (Kegan, 1994, p. 188). One hundred years ago, the average American lived to their middle 40s, what today we refer to as mid-life. Today, Americans live, on average, at least three decades longer to an average age of 78.5 years while their Canadian neighbors live an average of nearly 83 years (World Health Organization, 2016).

We may gradually become ever more ready to engage the curriculum of the fifth order because we have found ways to increase the number of years we live. And why are we

increasing the number of years we live? Are we living longer as a species precisely so that we might evolve to the fifth order? Who knows? (Kegan, 1994, p. 352)

Kegan goes on to say:

With very few exceptions, if a person's order of consciousness changes from one year to the next, it changes in the direction of greater complexity. Without exception, if a person's order of consciousness changes from one year to the next it changes only very gradually (never more than two discriminations, that is 'fifths' of the way from one order of consciousness to another). (Kegan, 1994, p. 188)

The evidence for the claim made above ("never more than two discriminations") comes from a longitudinal study by Kegan and colleagues (Kegan, 1994, pp. 187-190) and, when reported, was preliminary, because the data used to make the claim was based on four years of data of a nine-year longitudinal study of 22 adults. I asked Annie Howell, a former doctoral student of Robert Kegan, to comment on his assertion regarding the gradual nature of developmental change. Howell writes:

I think it is highly possible that someone can be involved in an intense curriculum over a short period of time (less than a year) that challenges their meaning-making and that provides a foundation for transformational change. That foundation could be a new understanding of adult development theory, of a leadership/management style, of the way that they may be holding themselves back from other, more complex ways of making meaning, etc. By providing these other frameworks, the person can begin to hold onto alternative ways of engaging in their meaning-making. This may, however, be noticeable more in what they say and do on a nascent level, than to see significant Subject-Object Interview changes in a more holistic way.... In my thesis, I called that a 'developmental

handhold' rather than a marked developmental shift. The important thing is the kind of holding environment the person has after the curriculum to continue to practice...this kind of change. There is clearly a need for more studies...to refute Bob's claim, to build on it, etc. (A. Howell, personal communication, November 9, 2012)

There are 21 equilibrative structures "that set terms with what is self and what is other, what is subject and what is object" (Kegan, Noam, & Rogers, 1982). While there are periods of relative stasis, what Kegan refers to as the "evolutionary truce," when a balance is struck between what is object and what is subject, the "motion" of development is, at least potentially, continuous and ongoing. What follows is a brief description of each stage or order of mind, and an overview of the transition between stages, without the lengthy discussion that would be required to discriminate among the 21 equilibria or discriminations.

**Stage 0: The Incorporative Balance.** All developmental theories consider the infant as completely undifferentiated; all subject, no object, all self, no other (Kegan et al., 1982). As far as we know, the infant experiences everything around him as an extension of the self, as an organism entirely embedded within its holding environment.

***Transition from 0 to 1.*** According to Kegan et al. (1982), there are two phenomena in infancy that appear universal; object permanence and separation anxiety. Beginning somewhere between six and nine months, the infant begins to recognize that objects that disappear don't cease to exist. They are, for the first time, able to remember that an object, no longer visible, is still "there." The infant also, for the first time, begins to protest separation from her primary caretaker. Somewhere between twenty-one to twenty-four months, these processes come to their conclusion; the toddler is able remember an object even when that object is no longer in view, and the protests waged when the primary caregiver leaves have all but stopped.

**Stage 1: The Impulsive Balance.** The transition from stage 0 to stage 1 is completed sometime between ages two to five years (Kegan et al., 1982). At this stage, the child is embedded in her impulses and perceptions. The child has little control over bodily movements, so that when the impulse fires to go in one direction, they are off and running until such time as an impulse fires with a contrary signal. Consequently, children at this stage need constant supervision and containment. Additionally, the stage one child will talk with loose associations, with no sense of the rules of speech, and with no sense that her amused parent cannot read her mind and entirely comprehend her unintelligible speech. Finally, she is embedded in her perceptions, such that when her perception of a thing has changed, as far as she is concerned the thing itself has changed, in similar fashion to what Piaget demonstrated with the beakers of water experiment (Kegan et al., 1982; Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix, 2011).

**Transition from 1 to 2.** This next shift happens predictably between the ages of five and seven (Kegan et al., 1982). Whereas the younger child has great difficulty sitting still, appears to be in a perpetual state of motion with no sense of direction, and has limited attention for matters requiring accommodation of others, the older child appears patient, physically organized, and able to persevere (Kegan et al., 1982). The younger child uses language as a sort of add-on to other forms of self-expression, but the older child uses language as the central form of presenting self to the world (Lahey et al., 2011). The younger child is fascinated by “fantasy about the fantastic,” while the older child is interested in things as they really are (Kegan et al., 1982). As the child grows up, she begins to “have” her impulses and perceptions rather than be “had” by them. She moves out of what she once was fused with toward a new relationship marked by the ability to “look at,” what before, she was unable to “see.”

**Stage 2: The Imperial Balance or Instrumental Mind.** During this stage, roughly beginning around seven years of age, and continuing into the early teen years, the older child begins to construct an identity or self-image, the way “I tend to be” (Kegan et al., 1982). For the first time he is aware of durable categories, those things about him, or others, or the world around him that persist over time. He is considerably more self-contained than he was before, with a measure of independence and autonomy that is both intrapsychic and interpersonal (Kegan et al., 1982). He is finally able to coordinate perceptions, so that he now realizes the changing appearance of things (cars getting smaller as they drive further into the distance) does not mean they are, in fact, changing substantively. While “every new balance is a triumph over the constraints of the past evolutionary truce,” it is also “a limit with respect to the truce which might follow” (Kegan, 1982, p. 90). Though he is able to recognize that others have a point of view that differs from his own (durable categories), he is unable to coordinate the other’s point of view with his own (cross-categorical thinking). He is given to dualistic thinking such as right and wrong, and either/or distinctions, and is incapable of abstract thinking. He concerns himself with concrete consequences (“What will happen to me if I get caught?”) and not with injury to the relationship. Others are seen as pathways or obstacles to meeting his needs, and are treated and manipulated accordingly. He demonstrates a strong reliance on rules for guidance about what to do and how to do it, and views morality as tit-for tat (Lahey et al., 2011). Finally, he is able to understand and acknowledge another’s point of view, and even adopt it as his own, as long as it doesn’t cost him something. In other words, he is able to accommodate only those who think and behave just like he does.

**Transition from 2 to 3.** From a Piagetian perspective, the crucial facilitator of development is social experience, especially opportunities to experience the inherent

contradictions or limits of one's underlying psychologic. Such opportunity is understood to involve both a situation of conflict and the psychosocial supports to deal with its implications (Kegan et al., 1982).

The transition between the second and third stages usually unfolds during the teen years. The young person begins to take as object, her needs, desires, and wishes, and demonstrates a budding capacity to consider the needs of another while at the same time attending to her own. Though this transition opens up mutuality in relations with others, it can leave the teen feeling torn between feeling empathy for the desires of the other and wanting to preserve her sense of autonomy and independence (Kegan et al., 1982).

**Stage 3: The Interpersonal Balance or Socializing Mind.** Once the young person arrives fully at stage three, an achievement attained at some point from mid-adolescence on, he notices that he no longer is subject to his needs. Rather than being run by them, he now takes control and manages them in a way that makes it possible, for the first time, to talk about feelings now as feelings rather than as social negotiations. In the context of interpersonal relations, he is now able to consider the needs of another, and sublimate his own needs in order to preserve or enhance his relationships or place within the larger community; a capacity he lacked in the earlier Imperial Balance (Berger, 2010). The self is now defined by an abstract sense of identity and his sense of self is constituted by the opinions and expectations of others (Lahey et al., 2011). Though he is capable of empathy, he tends to blame others for his own feelings and feel responsible for the feelings of others. He has difficulty tolerating ambiguity and requires a clear sense of what others want from him. He relies on external authority for his standards and beliefs and experiences criticism as destructive to the self. His morality is grounded in the expectation that he will do for others what he hopes and expects others to do for him (Kegan, 1982, 1994).

*Transition from 3 to 4.* This transition is not seen until late adolescence or adulthood, and is marked by a “form of psychological independence or internal authority typically referred to as autonomy or identity formation” (Kegan et al., 1982). The tension during this transitional phase is constituted by her desire, on the one hand, to formulate her identity in light of the expectations of others, and by her emerging wish, on the other hand, to define her identity quite apart from what others think is best.

**Stage 4: The Institutional Balance or Self-Authoring Mind.** On the heels of a shift from “I am my relationships,” or embeddedness within the interpersonal, to “I have my relationships,” whereby the interpersonal is now related to as object, comes the capacity for authoring one’s own identity. “This authority, sense of self, self-dependence, or self-ownership is the hallmark of a new psychologic” (Kegan et al., 1982). Once firmly planted in this evolutionary truce, the stage four person is able to differentiate between what is self and what is other, and no longer holds others responsible for her feelings. She is the architect of her own inner life, and as such, bears responsibility for the emotions that architecture generates. She is tolerant of ambiguity, and is able to hold internal debates about disparate points of view. She evaluates her own work and sets the standards by which she is judged. Personal integrity is more important than meeting the expectations of others. She is open to criticism, recognizing that the points of view of others can enrich her own. Differences in others are understood as the way things are and embraced as opportunities for growth. Her moral code recognizes the vast variety of standards and values, and enables her to show respect for differing points of view.

*Transition from 4 to 5.* Kegan, after looking into the developmental balance of several hundred people in a collection of studies, has determined that 58% of the adults interviewed, including professional and highly educated persons, are not constructing the world as complexly

as the fourth stage, or the Institutional Balance (Kegan, 2003, p. 40). It nearly goes without saying that the fifth order of consciousness, or Interindividual Balance, is mostly theoretical. In the research referred to above, the column relegated to the fifth order was filled with zeros all the way across most of the studies, yet there were “many people” who were identified as in transition between the fourth and the fifth orders of consciousness (Kegan, 2003, p. 42). Nonetheless, Kegan does not believe that the fourth stage or Institutional Balance is the climax to human development. The post-modern world demands a level of complexity that simply outstrips the capacity of the Institutional Balance; consequently, Kegan believes there are those who are accepting the challenge of this “honors curriculum” and developing to levels of mental complexity that exceed the fourth order (Kegan, 2003, p. 41). But as he bluntly states: “The move to stage 5 shakes the foundations of the self as a psychological institution...and can be felt as a kind of troubling remoteness or isolation, interpersonally and internally” (Kegan et al., 1982).

**Stage 5: The Interindividual Balance or Self-Transforming Mind.** The psychologic that emerges in stage 5 is characterized by a radical reorientation to one’s own institution. Whereas, in the fourth order, the person’s institution, ideology, or belief system was subject, in the fifth order it is now object. Consequently, one no longer *is* one’s career, one *has* a career. Additionally, the self is no longer subject to cultural or societal norms, but is now able to reflect and act upon them, since the self is no longer invested in any one system or ideology. It follows that the person at the fifth order of consciousness is now able to look beyond her own and others’ systems of belief in order to identify patterns and similarities. Other aspects of the fifth order mind include: a) her orientation to the tension between poles rather than to one pole or the other; b) her sense that her internal conflict is not only to be tolerated, but to be welcomed and

embraced, as it has lessons about her own functioning; c) her belief that she is incomplete, partial, in process, never finished, and as such is always open to the ideas of others; d) she focuses now on her own growth and development rather than on the pursuit of her own ambitions and achievements, and finally; e) she claims citizenship in the broad community of persons, understanding her own clan as just a smaller part of a much larger whole.

### **The Work of Lisa Lahey and Associates: The Subject-Object Interview**

The Subject-Object Interview was created by Lisa Lahey and her colleagues at the Harvard Graduate School of Education as a means of assessing a person's "unselfconscious epistemology or principles of meaning-coherence" (Kegan, 1994, p. 369). The Subject-Object Interview was designed primarily to force the constructive-developmental theorist to continue to clarify what it is she is studying, determine the extent to which the theory makes sense, and to monitor how closely the theory comes to explaining what actually unfolds within persons and between persons and "other" (Lahey et al., 2011). It was, in short, developed as a way of keeping the theorist honest, by helping her remain mindful of her own theoretical assumptions and inferences. Nonetheless, it became a useful tool for research and clinical work, as it provides a means by which to discern a person's current epistemology, providing significant insight into the way in which they put their world together.

The interview takes about one hour and 15 minutes to complete and is fashioned in the style of the Piagetian semi-clinical interview, during which the interviewer asks the interviewee questions to determine how the interviewee makes sense of his experience (Kegan, 1994). The interviewer asks the interviewee to take five or ten minutes to write out some thoughts related to ten different prompts that include the following subjects: 1) angry, 2) anxious, nervous, 3) success, 4) strong stand, conviction, 5) sad, 6) torn, 7) moved, touched, 8) lost something, 9)

change, and, 10) important to me. The interviewer then asks the interviewee to pick a card and elaborate on the theme selected. The interviewer guides the questioning in order to elicit subject-object material, or responses that will illuminate the interviewees underlying meaning-making capacity or epistemology. To reiterate, the fundamental question being asked during the Subject-Object Interview is this: “From where in the evolution of subject-object relations does the person seem to be constructing his or her reality? Which subject-object balance is the person primarily operating out of?” (Lahey et al., 2011, p. 7). Subject-object balances have nothing to do with “themes, motives, issues of preference” (Lahey et al., 2011, p. 8). Rather, the subject-object relationships are “principles of organization” (Lahey et al., 2011, p. 8). The interviewer can be confident he is in “subject” territory when the person being interviewed is unable to take a wider perspective on the issue at hand, in spite of opportunities provided by the interviewer to do so. The interviewer is in object territory when the interviewee is able to look at, reflect on, and take responsibility for the material being discussed. Once the subject-object territory has been identified, the interviewer then starts testing hypotheses by asking questions to confirm and rule out various equilibria. With 21 different equilibria that include six discreet stages, there is, potentially, a lot of ground to cover in a relatively short period of time.

Interviews are transcribed, and the sections which contain structural or subject-object material are identified and subjected to interpretation and analysis. An interview may have anywhere from eight to 15 units of analysis and each is scored independently (Kegan, 1994). The final score is arrived at through a uniform process of evaluating the evidence from the unit analyses.

Each interview is scored by two raters in order to determine interrater reliability. One of the raters should have been certified as reliable. Across studies, the interrater reliability has

ranged from .75 to .90, with one study reporting a test-retest reliability of .83 (Kegan, 1994). Several report expectedly high correlations with like measures, and high degrees of consistency among alternate forms of the measure, different domains of experiencing, and different “test items.” In addition to the six levels,

The subject-object interview is able to make six reliable distinctions between any two orders of consciousness. Between the third and fourth orders, for example, it distinguishes between a) a system in which only the third order is in evidence [designated ‘3’]; b) a system in which the person has begun to separate from the third order [‘3(4)’]; c) a system in which both the third and fourth orders are in evidence and either the third predominates [‘3/4’]; or d) the fourth predominates [‘4/3’]; e) a system in which the fourth order is now the governing structure but it must work at not letting the third order intrude [‘4(3)’]; and finally, f) a system in which the fourth order is securely established [‘4’]. (Kegan, 1994, pp. 370-371)

### **Interpreting the WEP Using Constructive-Developmental Theory**

There are five principles that help summarize the theoretical underpinnings of Kegan’s (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental theory, Kegan and Lahey’s (2009) immunity to change technology, and the SOI (Lahey et al., 2011). In what follows, I suggest how these principles may help inform the three areas of interest (theoretical frameworks, process variables, and outcomes) in WEPs discussed above.

1. **Principle One:** Changes to *how* we know what we know (our meaning-making system or constructive-developmental perspective), rather than to simply *what* we know (our fund of knowledge) are among the most helpful and powerful changes people can make in the effort to improve human performance (Kegan, 1982, 1994).

2. **Principle Two:** Desired changes to our meaning-making system are often foiled by a psychological mechanism protecting us from *anticipated* harm that is *unlikely* to occur. This “immunity to change” requires reflective action, over time, to overcome (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).
3. **Principle Three:** Substantive change, of the kind Kegan (1982, 1994) and Kegan and Lahey (2009) advocate, occurs most readily within holding environments constituted by ingenious blends of challenge and support and, so far as we know, takes a long time to unfold.
4. **Principle Four:** Understanding how a person makes sense of their experience (their constructive-developmental perspective) can give us insight into their capacity; what they are able to do and what they are unable to do. The SOI is an instrument designed to identify a person’s meaning-making system, or constructive-developmental perspective (Lahey et al., 2011).
5. **Principle Five:** As we move through each developmental stage, changes to our constructive-developmental perspective or meaning-making system, always move in the direction of greater complexity. Once we have reached a new level of mental complexity, there is no going back. People advance through stages at differing rates and advancement to any particular stage is not a surety.

The architects and practitioners of WEPs of all three types (wilderness education, wilderness adventure, and wilderness therapy) work hard at creating holding environments that foster change. Each program type is known for offering courses that challenge students, intentionally subjecting them to stressful experiences intended to help them grow. Students, while experiencing difficult circumstances or activities, are often supported in their WEPs

through teaching, coaching, or counseling. These supports play a crucial role in helping students learn from the challenges they face.

One can imagine WEP staff attempting to understand under-performing students with models of change that make it difficult to resist blaming and alienating struggling students who may be written off as defiant, incompetent, or emotionally ill. It is far easier to malign someone whom you believe to be acting in a willfully defiant manner, as opposed to someone who is having a hard time while doing the best they can. Kegan's theory of human development (1982, 1994) as well as the immunity to change technology (Kegan & Lahey, 2009) could be instrumental in helping staff better understand why people behave the way they do. With the additional information provided by a student's constructive-developmental perspective, gleaned from an administration of the Subject-Object Interview (Lahey et al., 2011), the strengths and limitations students bring with them—that are likely to surface during the course—could be more adequately understood. With a more sophisticated understanding of meaning-making and its role in the ways students think and behave, as well as the resistance to change Kegan and Lahey (2009) refer to as our immunity to change, WEP staff might have more patience with and improved insight into students having a hard time afield. This increased sophistication among staff might allow them to create and sustain better holding environments in which to challenge and support young charges, leading, potentially at least, to improved student experiences and better overall outcomes. While I believe this is the most important and viable contribution Kegan's theory is likely to make in improving WEPs and enriching the student experience, there are other ways that Kegan's work (1982, 1994) and that of the related authors (Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Lahey et al., 2011) may inform WEPs.

Kegan argues that changes to constructive-developmental perspective can have big impacts on human performance. Changes to mental complexity occur, primarily, at the epistemological level (the *way* we know what we know or the way we make sense of experience). And though changes to our constructive-developmental perspective also occur at the information level (*what* we know or our fund of knowledge), these changes are of relatively minor importance when compared to changes at the epistemological level.

Acquiring knowledge at the informational level is important. It is what helps the NOLS student navigate to safety through avalanche terrain. It is the knowledge required to help an OB course work together as a team to safely cross a glacier. It is the skill that can help a panic stricken teenager on a wilderness therapy expedition calm down. But this sort of learning, important as it is, has limitations. The NOLS student leading a group through avalanche terrain may have the technical skills to do so, but may lack the mental complexity required to make decisions that are in the group's best interest. If that NOLS student leader is making meaning at Kegan's third order of mind, he may be unduly influenced by his desire to "get along" and in so doing, be persuaded by those with less experience to make a costly error. In other words, though WEP students are likely to acquire new skills and a wider array of responses to complex problems, they may not necessarily develop at the epistemological level, leaving them essentially the same person they were before the course. It is possible they have "learned but they have not... developed" (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 12). When students change *how* they know what they know, they "undergo qualitative advances in their mental complexity akin to earlier, well-documented quantum leaps from early childhood to later childhood and from later childhood to adolescence" (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, pp. 12-13). As mentioned above, Kegan refers to *how* we know what we know as our constructive-developmental perspective, or level of mental

complexity. And as Kegan argues, it is a person's level of mental complexity that has the *most* bearing on how effectively they manage the complex world in which they live. Consider Kegan's comments about leadership development.

The field of 'leadership development' has overattended to leadership and underattended to development. An endless stream of books tries to identify the most important elements of leadership and help leaders to acquire these abilities. Meanwhile, we ignore the most powerful source of ability: our capacity (and the capacity of those who work for us) to overcome, at *any* age, the limitations and blind spots of current ways of making meaning. Without a better understanding of human development—what it is, how it is enabled, how it is constrained—what passes for 'leadership development' will more likely amount to 'leadership learning' or 'leadership training.' The knowledge and skills gained will be like new files and programs brought to the existing operating system. They may have a certain value—new files and programs do give you greater range and versatility—but your ability to use them will still be limited by your current operating system. True development is about transforming the operating system itself, not just increasing your fund of knowledge or your behavioral repertoire. (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, pp. 5-6)

Understanding the difference between epistemological change and informational change seems important for a number of reasons. First, it may help course designers and practitioners decide if changes at the epistemological level are desirable enough to adjust the way they construct and execute WEP experiences. The WEP research literature suggest that demonstrated outcomes include improvements to fund of knowledge (information level change) and, at the very least, nudges toward mental complexity, or toward making sense of the world in a qualitatively different way (epistemological change). If curricula were designed specifically to bring about

changes to a student's constructive-developmental perspective (a change at the epistemological level) then staff training and preparation, course content, course duration, and the balance of challenge and support, might look different from courses designed, primarily, to impart information or teach skills.

Additionally, a more sophisticated understanding of differences between changes at the informational versus epistemological levels might help course architects and practitioners develop more realistic expectations for student outcomes, helping them avoid mistaken claims of student transformation. Discerning transformational change of the kind Kegan writes about requires an assessment tool like the SOI and, to my knowledge, this research represents the first attempt to utilize the SOI on a WEP.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

“The function of research is not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it” (Stake, 1995, p. 43)

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the research methodology of this case study and includes discussions concerning the following areas: (a) overview of the research study, (b) data collection strategies, (c) procedure, and, (d) data analysis and synthesis.

### **Overview of the Research Study**

The researcher embedded on a 21-day backpacking course with nine teenage males and females, five of whom agreed to participate in the study. The course, led by three Outward Bound Canada (OB) instructors during the summer of 2015, was a regular course offering through OB and took place in the Ghost River Wilderness Area near Banff National Park, Canmore, AB, Canada. Data collected included pre and post-expedition administrations of the Subject-Object Interview (SOI), participant-observer observations and field notes, and a post-expedition semi-structured interview. Data were analyzed using grounded theory coding (Charmaz, 2006), and thematic networks (Attride-Sterling, 2001). The SOIs were scored according to the principles laid out in Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix, 2011. The researcher and his SOI co-scorer were previously certified as reliable in administering, analyzing, and scoring the SOI by Dr. Deborah Helsing and Dr. Annie Howell.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this case study was to explore, describe, assess, and understand, from a constructive-developmental perspective, the impact a 21-day wilderness backpacking experience had on five participating youth. The researcher believed that a better understanding of how

participants in a wilderness backpacking course make sense of their experience through the lens of their constructive-developmental perspective, might help inform the theories of change that underpin wilderness experience programs (WEPs), the means by which desired change is facilitated, and the reasons why some youth thrive and others struggle. To shed light on these areas of interest, the following research questions were addressed:

- 1) What constructive-developmental perspective does each participant bring to this wilderness backpacking experience?
- 2) How does each participant make meaning of his experience, and what experiences appear significant in this process?
- 3) How does each participant's constructive-developmental perspective appear to influence the meaning he has made of this wilderness experience?
- 4) What changes, if any, are evident in pre-trip and post-trip applications of the Subject-Object Interview (designed to determine constructive-developmental perspective) for participants completing this experience?

### **The Case**

Nine youth attended the OB backpacking course that served as the context for this project and all were invited to participate in the research study. Five youth volunteered and received permission from parents to serve as research participants. The five youth who made up the case were recruited from two OB wilderness backpacking courses; courses that were eventually blended into one course due to low enrollment on one course and over-subscription on the other. Research participants were all male, ranged in age from 13 to 17, and were from three provinces across Canada including Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. A case of five participants offered a manageable number of youth to observe on an expedition of this type, and provided

enough variety to allow for “reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study” (Patton, 1990, p. 186).

Table 1

*Demographics of Research Participants*

Pseudonym	Age at start of course	Gender	Province
Brant	13	Male	Alberta
Derek	17	Male	British Columbia
Kevin	14	Male	Ontario
Cooper	16	Male	Alberta
Alec	15	Male	Ontario

**Rationale for Using Case Study Approach**

Kegan views the human activity of meaning-making as the “irreducible” and “fundamental motion in personality” and as the central, organizing function of being human (Kegan, 1982, p. 15). In keeping with Kegan’s understanding of meaning-making, I proposed to better understand how students construct, and thus experience, an OB 21-day wilderness backpacking expedition as a reflection of their internal meaning-making process. After considering a number of research approaches including grounded theory, narrative inquiry, phenomenology, and ethnography, (Creswell, 2013), I settled on case study.

Case study “is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. xi), and developing a thorough understanding of the case is the goal (Stake, 1995, p. 9). Stake (1995) goes on to say:

The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself. (Stake, 1995, p. 8)

The case study design was chosen for the following reasons.

First, the five research participants (the case) on this 21-day wilderness backpacking course were naturally bounded by time and space (Creswell, 2013, Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2011), and constituted the principal unit of analysis. It was the way participants made meaning of the expedition that was of chief interest to me.

Second, case study is particularly effective at gaining a picture of a phenomenon in its completeness by looking at it from many points of view (Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2014). It is also useful at “getting a rich picture and gaining analytical insights from it” (Thomas, 2011, p. 23).

Third, I selected a case study because the focus of the study was on a *particular* group of youth participating in a WEP (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995) and was a case that was of “special interest” (Stake, 1995, p. xi). That is, it was a wilderness backpacking course that was constituted by a unique wilderness setting (Ghost River Wilderness Area, Alberta, Canada), a small number of youth research participants (n=5), duration of 21 days, and a comprehensive outdoor education curriculum (soft and hard skills).

## **Difficulties Encountered Obtaining a Willing WEP**

One of the surprises encountered during the dissertation proposal process was the considerable difficulty finding a WEP that would cooperate. I wrote and defended four distinct dissertation proposals before finally securing a workable study. I discovered that the organizations I approached were reluctant to allow this researcher to embed on an expedition because of anticipated negative impacts to the student experience or unfavorable judgments about the program. My experience may help explain the dearth of research studies like this one, and may signal an ongoing challenge for researchers interested, as I am, in better understanding the human experience of the WEP.

## **Data Collection Strategies**

In order to understand the impact the wilderness backpacking course had on each research participant, the meaning participants made of the expedition, and the way their constructive-developmental perspectives mediated their experience of the expedition, it was necessary to collect four types of information. That information included contextual, demographic, perceptual, and theoretical data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

1. *Contextual Information:* This study occurred during a 21-day Outward Bound Canada wilderness backpacking course with nine youth attending, five of whom agreed to participate in the study.
2. *Demographic Information:* These data included age, gender, and province.
3. *Perceptual Information:* Perceptual data were the most critical because these data provided me with descriptions of research participant experience of the subject of inquiry. There were two types of perceptual data collected for this study.

- a. *Meaning-making of the wilderness backpacking course:* I needed each research participant to describe, in considerable detail, the meaning he had made of the wilderness expedition. This step was necessary in order to have the basis for analyzing each research participant's experience through their constructive-developmental lens.
  - b. *Constructive-developmental perspective:* I needed each research participant to describe how they know what they know so I could determine each participant's constructive-developmental perspective. This information was required in order to determine if there had been any changes to the subject-object balance among research participants over the course of the expedition and in order to better understand how their experiences were mediated by their constructive-developmental perspective.
4. *Theoretical Information:* A comprehensive review of the WEP and constructive-developmental corpus of research was required in order to provide the theoretical underpinning for this study. Specifically, this information provided support and evidence for the: (1) methodological approach, (2) conceptual framework, (3) interpretation, analysis, and synthesis, and, (4) conclusions and recommendations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

### **Subject-Object Interview**

I decided on a pre and post-expedition administration of the SOI in order to determine the constructive-developmental perspective of each of the five research participants and in order to see if changes to constructive-developmental perspective occurred over the duration of the expedition. Determining the constructive-developmental perspective of each research participant

was a necessary step in order to answer three of the four research questions posed by this study (research questions one, three and four).

I conducted two SOIs with each of the five research participants following the interview protocol outlined at the end of the last chapter. The first SOI was administered face-to-face during the first three days of the backpacking portion of the course. I set up a tarp for protection from rain and sun within eyesight of camp but far enough away to ensure privacy and I digitally recorded each interview using a hand-held recording device. The ten prompts offered to begin the first SOI were open to any context or timeframe; the interviewee was invited to think of cues from any facet of their life experience. Within seven days following the conclusion of the course, the second or post-expedition SOI was conducted by telephone once the research participants had returned home. The ten prompts required to begin the second interview were context and time specific; the interviewee was invited to think of cues arising from their experience of the OB course they had just completed. The second SOI, consequently, served two purposes: to clarify participant's post-course constructive-developmental perspective and to provide another data set that could be used to better understand the meaning made by participants of this OB wilderness backpacking course. Time spent administering each SOI varied between 45 and 90 minutes.

### **Participant-Observer Observations and Field notes**

SOI and semi-structured in-depth interviews contain each research participant's recollected verbal account of the OB wilderness backpacking experience. The in-situ observations I made as a participant-observer constituted another important source of data and rendered a different sort of account of what took place on the expedition (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990). With my knowledge of Kegan's constructive-developmental theory, I was able to view

research participant behavior through Kegan's constructive-developmental lens. This allowed me to formulate hypotheses about why certain aspects of the course were challenging to some, but not to others.

My participant-observer observations were useful for other reasons. First, field observations provided me the opportunity to see for myself how research participants behaved on the course. This was helpful because their self-reported behavior (on the SOI and Semi-Structured In-Depth Interview) did not always match the impressions I formulated during field observations. This provided a check and balance to the research participant's self-report and made for a more interesting and accurate description and analysis of the case. Second, as a participant-observer I was able to see things that may have escaped the awareness of others on the course, or that simply did not come to mind for research participants during the interview process (Patton, 1990; Asfeldt & Beames, 2017).

My approach to participant-observer observation was to participate alongside research participants and pay attention to the course setting, the human and social environment, planned and unplanned course activities, formal and informal interactions, nonverbal communication, things that did not happen that might have been expected to occur (Patton, 1990, pp. 219-235), as well as my own behaviors, thoughts, feelings and reflections (Merriam, 2009).

Initially, I planned to type field notes on an electronic notebook, save notes to a jump drive, and use a solar powered charger to keep the notebook operating. By day five, I decided the electronic notebook system was cumbersome, slow, and inconvenient. I wanted the flexibility to record notes throughout the day, while impressions were top of mind, but the hassle associated with digging the electronic notebook out of the pack, powering it up, attaching the jump drive, and typing on a small keyboard proved more than I could bear. So I put my back up system into

play instead, recording notes using pen and paper. I found it much more effective to retrieve my pen and paper notebook out of my backpack and utilize the numerous, and often short rest-stops to jot down notes. At resupply, mid-way through the course, I happily shed the four plus kilograms of electronic equipment, sending all of it out with OB in-town staff with instructions to secure it under lock and key at the OB Rocky Mountain Program office in Canmore, AB.

When writing field notes I adhered to a few guidelines in order to make my field observations maximally useful. First, I recorded full field notes as soon after observation as possible in order to preserve details of what was observed (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990). This meant I wrote notes at least once daily, usually at night following dinner and course related meetings. Because my pen and paper were stashed in the “brain” of my backpack, it was easy to access and allowed for frequent recording, even during short breaks. I ended up recording thoughts, feelings, and impressions several times each day, resulting in a thick description of events in real time. I attempted to make my field notes “highly descriptive” so that readers felt as if they were there, seeing what I was seeing. I also attempted to be highly “reflective,” capturing my own “feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretations, speculations, and working hypotheses” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 130-131; Patton, 1990). Finally, I tried to behave in a way that put students, research participants, and course instructors at ease, as I did not wish for any of these persons to feel self-conscious or uncomfortable when around me. I kept my field notebook with me at all times so as to protect the sensitive information contained therein. At the beginning of the course I clarified with research participants, course instructors, and the other students that they were not allowed to access or read the raw data kept in my field notebook, given the sensitive nature of the content.

One of the significant learning experiences for me as a novice researcher was the clarification of my role on the course. Several days into the expedition one of the instructors approached me with a concern about my level of involvement in teaching and reprimanding the students. She asked if I had considered how my behavior might compromise my data collection. It hadn't occurred to me that I might be sabotaging my neutrality and ability to observe what was taking place on the course. We talked at length about roles and decided I would stop instructing, reprimanding, and involving myself with chores and leadership responsibilities. In order to maintain some contribution to the group we decided I would focus on the daily task of hauling water to camp. I was taken off the chore rotation (cooking, cleanup, bear fence) and stopped rotating through the leadership positions of navigator, sweep, and leader of the day. This change helped me focus on the task at hand—observing research participant behavior in order to understand their experience as deeply as possible—and provided an important learning experience about how to conduct research in the field.

### **Semi-Structured In-Depth Interview**

The final form of data collection was the semi-structured in-depth interview. It was administered once research participants had returned home. The last semi-structured interview was administered on August 13, 2015, a little more than two weeks after the course ended. In-depth interviewing was considered a critical, even essential aspect of this qualitative research study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Yin, 2014).

The in-depth semi-structured interview seemed an indispensable tool in light of the fact I wished to understand: (1) how each research participant *made sense* of the course, (2) how each young person put the events of the 21-day course into *perspective*, i.e., *their perspective*, (3) how

each young person *felt and thought* about the course, and (4) how each research participant *intended* to behave as a consequence of this particular OB course (Patton, 1990).

There are three types of open-ended interviews commonly used in qualitative research and they include the informal/unstructured interview, the semi-structured interview, and the highly structured/standardized interview (Merriam, 2009, p. 89). I selected the semi-structured interview in order to combine the structure of the SOI with the more open-ended discussion of the participant's experience made possible by the semi-structured interview (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2014). The semi-structured interview I used employed an interview schedule/protocol (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) or guide (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 1990; Rossman & Rallis, 2012) that listed questions I intended to cover over the course of the conversation. I did not intend to follow the questions sequentially, thinking I would follow leads as they were provided me by the interviewee. As it turned out, my questioning followed the interview schedule closely, with deviations occurring most often with the more articulate interviewees. I tried to make the interview conversational in style, but had difficulty doing so with the less verbal research participants. The interview schedule helped ensure I covered the same, salient issues and topics with each interviewee, even if the order of topics covered varied from one interviewee to the next. The chief advantage of this type of interview was the delimiting function of deciding ahead of time what issues warranted attention (Patton, 1990). This made more efficient use of the limited time available to understand each research participant's perspective (Patton, 1990). The semi-structured interview schedule is included as Appendix G.

## **Procedure**

### **Human Research and Ethics Board Approval of Protocol**

The protection of research participants is a vital concern to any research study, and the ethical considerations that help ensure those protections must be carefully and thoughtfully addressed (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990). In order to think through the myriad of ethical issues inherent in this study and secure the required endorsement from the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board (HREB), I successfully submitted an Application for Research Ethics Approval for Human Participant Research. I was awarded a Certificate of Approval on June 9, 2015. On June 10, 2015 I received a call from Lenka Stafl, Rocky Mountain Program Director, Outward Bound (OB) Canada, informing me the course I was scheduled to embed on (composed of youth ages 16-18) might be cancelled due to low enrollment. In order to salvage the course and this research study, she stated she was taking younger youth (ages 13-15) from another wilderness backpacking course that was oversubscribed and funneling them into the under-subscribed course for the older students. On June 15, 2015, due to these changes in the composition of participants of the OB course I was scheduled to embed on as well as the tightening recruitment timeline resulting from these changes, I submitted a Request for Modification of an Approved Protocol. That request was approved on June 24, 2015.

### **Recruitment of Research Participants**

Approximately three months before the research study was scheduled to begin, I travelled to Canmore, AB, Canada to meet with Lenka Stafl, the Rocky Mountain Program Director, OB. During our meetings I clarified the recruitment process and requirements and discussed pertinent issues related to the study including: context and background of the study, voluntary nature of

the study, purpose statement, research questions, research design overview, research interest and expertise, rationale and significance of the study, overview of theoretical underpinnings and the work of Robert Kegan, and an overview of the methodology and research approach which included data required, data collection methods, and data analysis and synthesis. Upon conclusion of these meetings, we discussed and agreed on the content for the researcher invitation to participate and the OB invitation to participate. Each invitation to participate would include: the purpose and importance of the research study, the role of OB, participant selection, expectations of research participants, the voluntary nature of participation, the researcher's relationship with participants, anonymity, confidentiality, and contacts for additional information.

Once Ms. Stafl received a registration packet and payment from a youth participant, she mailed a course information packet that included the OB invitation to participate in the research study. Ms. Stafl then followed up with a phone call to the youth and his or her parents and reviewed the information that had been included in the course information packet including the invitation to participate in the research study. Ms. Stafl then asked if they had questions about the course or research study. After answering their questions, she asked if they were interested in "opting in" to the research study or in talking to the researcher to gather more information before deciding. If they answered affirmatively to either question she then asked if it would be permissible for the researcher to contact them in order to answer further questions and/or secure their consent to participate. If they agreed, Ms. Stafl communicated this information to the researcher who then embarked on the next step, consent.

## **Consent**

After thoroughly introducing the research study and answering questions over the phone, each course registrant was invited to “opt in” to the research study by signing a written consent form (Thomas, 2011, p. 70). I made it clear to each research participant and their guardian that they may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason and there would be no penalty to them for doing so, except for the loss of the 50-dollar VISA card promised for completion of all phases of the research study.

## **Confidentiality**

Protecting each research participant’s privacy meant safeguarding their anonymity to the extent that was possible, and protecting access, control, and security of their data and personal information throughout all phases of the study and beyond. I assigned pseudonyms to each research participant and kept all data in a secure location.

Because I was embedded on a wilderness backpacking expedition, weight was a significant consideration, as I carried all personal equipment and food in my backpack. In order to help ensure the security of data I was collecting in the field (i.e., field notes, SOI # 1), I kept my digital recording device, password protected electronic notebook, jump drive, and paper notebook in my pack at all times, except when writing field notes. After each digitally recorded interview in the field (SOI # 1) I downloaded the recording onto my jump drive and electronic notebook and then erased the interview from the recording device. I kept my pack with me at all times in order to prevent snooping by others on the course.

Once out of the field, I kept all paper and electronically filed field notes, interview transcriptions, and working copies of my data analyses locked in a file cabinet in my home office. As soon as each interview was completed (SOI # 2, Semi-structured in-depth interview)

using the digital recorder, I downloaded the recording to my jump drive and external hard drive, erased the digital recording from the recording device, and stored the external hard drive and jump drive in my locking file cabinet.

### **Protecting the Outward Bound Experience**

When searching for a research site and organization—as mentioned above—I became acutely aware of the concern summed up by Daniel et al., (2014): “Many OAE (outdoor adventure education) programs are hesitant to allow research to take place on program participants for fear that it could intrude on their experience” (p. 12). The numerous rejections I received when proposing to embed on an expedition as participant-observer sensitized me to the fact that WEP organizations hold significant concerns about researchers compromising the student experience. In light of this, I remained sensitive to ways I might disrupt the experience for research participants and other course students. As noted earlier in this thesis, remaining open to feedback from others, especially course instructors, helped me sort through the sometimes complex roles I found myself in throughout the study.

### **Establishing Trustworthiness**

In quantitative research, the criteria for evaluating the quality of a study include reliability and validity. In a reliable study, two researchers exploring the same phenomenon will come up with similar findings and in a valid study the findings will accurately reflect the phenomenon being described (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Qualitative research is not amenable to the measure of reliability because “human behavior is never static” (Merriam, 2009, p. 220). Instead, qualitative researchers attempt to ensure the quality of their research studies by focusing on issues of credibility, dependability, and transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

**Credibility.** A high level of *credibility* refers to a strong match between my portrayal of the participant's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and the participant's perceptions of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). I used several means to develop adequate credibility including: disclosing researcher biases, spending time afield with research participants, collecting multiple sources of data, triangulating data, and engaging peer oversight through my doctoral committee.

**Disclosing researcher biases.** Every researcher approaches his or her study with preconceptions, interpretations, and biases, making it difficult to remain neutral and impartial (Patton, 1990). The important thing for me was to become and remain aware of my preconceptions, interpretations, and biases throughout the research process, and make note of them in my memo-writing. Reflecting on what I was thinking and why, and noting the impact my thoughts had on the research process, helped to ensure my thinking didn't unduly influence what I saw in the field, what I reported from the field, and how I interpreted the data I finally collected.

**Spending time afield.** "Adequate engagement with data collection... makes sense when you are trying to get as close as possible to participants' understanding of a phenomenon" (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). I spent 21 days (24 hours per day, seven days per week) in the field with research participants, providing a significant level of exposure to the phenomenon of interest. The understanding that came as a result of this immersive experience was far and away the most helpful aspect of my data collection strategy, and opened up a measure of understanding I could never have experienced through pre and post-expedition interviews alone.

***Collecting multiple sources of data.*** I diversified the data set by collecting three types of data including: pre and post expedition Subject-Object Interviews, post expedition semi-structured in-depth interviews, and participant-observer observations and field notes.

***Triangulating data.*** Triangulating, or procedures related to “a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 107) is a “principal strategy” for helping ensure validity and reliability in qualitative research and it was employed in this study in a variety of ways (Merriam, 2009, p. 216). First, I utilized multiple data collection methods including interviews (pre-post SOIs, post-expedition semi-structured interviews), observation (participant-observer observation), and documents (field notes). Second, I collected and analyzed data from five research participants in order to obtain a variety of perspectives related to the expedition experience. Third, I collected data over the entire duration of the 21-day research study. Finally, I utilized an independent co-scorer of the SOIs. By way of example, my field observations sometimes contradicted the self-report of research participants, allowing me to challenge the research participant’s understanding of their experience. This would likely have proved impossible to do had I not engaged triangulation of data as a strategy.

***Engaging peer oversight.*** As a doctoral candidate, an element of peer review was built into the research process. Reviewers at various stages of the research design included the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board (HREB), OB Research Advisory Committee, and my PhD committee. Additionally, my PhD committee, initially led by Dr. James Anglin, and later led by Dr. Nevin Harper, has provided oversight through every step in this process, including final review of this dissertation. These multiple review layers have helped to ensure that my research design, methods, and data analysis/conclusions were reasonable and justified.

**Dependability.** *Dependability* refers to the degree to which another researcher can track the decision-making process by consulting the original researcher's "audit trail" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 113). Dependability can be enhanced by clarifying how analytical decisions were made, by making raw data available for review, and by asking colleagues to code selected interviews in order to establish inter-rater reliability. I scored each of the ten SOIs independently but also employed an SOI co-scorer, Dr. Jennifer Jones. This strategy produced two scores for each SOI, helping establish inter-rater reliability.

**Transferability.** *Transferability* refers to "how well the study has made it possible for readers to decide whether similar processes will be at work in their own settings and communities by understanding in depth how they occur at the research site" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 113). Transferability can be facilitated by providing rich, thick description of the phenomenon under investigation, and by providing sufficient detail of the context and process to allow the reader to experience the phenomenon of interest vicariously (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Perhaps a strength of this dissertation is the "rich, thick description" found in my findings chapters. I have sought an accurate understanding of the meaning made by each research participant of this wilderness backpacking expedition and, additionally, I have attempted to communicate this understanding in a way that helps the reader have a real sense of the experience.

**Delimitations.** *Delimitations* clarified the boundaries of the study and explicated what I chose to exclude (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In this study, delimitations included the following. First, the duration of the research study was 21 days. Second, the case was constituted by five male youth, ages 13-18. Third, data collection included pre and post-expedition SOIs, post expedition semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant-observer observations, and field notes. Finally,

research questions included changes to research participant constructive-developmental perspective, meaning made of the expedition, and meaning made of the expedition as mediated by each research participant's constructive-developmental perspective.

**Limitations.** *Limitations* included “conditions that may weaken the study” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 114). In this study, possible limitations were at least twofold and included the composition of the case and researcher bias and inexperience.

The case was characterized by non-probability purposive sampling, single gender, narrow age range, limited geographical area, and small n. My primary concern with the small n (n=5) had to do with possible attrition. Another concern about the small sample size had to do with the restricted ability to generalize from this study to other populations and programs. Generalizing the results of this study to other populations or programs was not a goal of this study. However, by providing rich, thick description of the phenomenon of interest, I remain hopeful that it will be possible for the knowledge demonstrated in this study to be evaluated for its applicability to other contexts.

Researcher bias and inexperience also played a potentially limiting role in this study. My own affinity for wilderness travel, enthusiasm for Kegan's constructive-developmental theory, and desire to develop an applied constructive-developmental program utilizing wilderness mountaineering and skiing as a crucible for growth, constituted potential biases that may have affected my ability to design and execute a meaningful study. Additionally, I began as a novice at collecting and analyzing data, so my competence to do the work had not yet been established. Since I was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in this study, the issues of bias and inexperience were important to address. I do not believe these limitations adversely affected

this study to any significant degree because I identified a number of steps in the design of the study to protect its integrity.

## **Data Analysis and Synthesis**

### **Data Transcription, Organization, and Storage**

Before analytic work could begin, the considerable volume of data had to be organized and secured. All digital audio recordings (SOIs and post-expedition semi-structured in-depth interviews) were transcribed verbatim and handwritten field notes were typed. Hard copies were locked in a secure file cabinet and electronic files were saved to primary and secondary electronic storage devices. Additionally, hard copies of field notes were locked away in a secure file cabinet and electronic copies were saved to a primary and secondary electronic storage device. Electronic files were saved as raw data. Once analysis began, working copies of the raw data were saved as working data files, thus preserving the integrity of the raw data, until such time as it is no longer needed for the study.

### **Subject-Object Interview Scoring**

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the sections which contained structural or subject-object material were identified and subjected to interpretation and analysis. Each interview had anywhere from eight to fifteen units of analysis and each was scored independently (Kegan, 1994). The final score was arrived at through a uniform process of evaluating the evidence from the unit analyses.

I attended SOI training in Cambridge, Massachusetts in March 2012. By December 2012, I had successfully scored a series of test interviews to reach certification as a reliable scorer, equipping me to independently administer, analyze, and score the SOI (see Appendix A). The training was conducted by Dr. Deborah Helsing and Dr. Annie Howell, both former doctoral

students of Robert Kegan at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard University. In 2015, my co-scorer, Dr. Jennifer A. Jones, attended SOI training taught, once again, by Drs. Helsing and Howell. Dr. Jones received certification as a reliable scorer in January, 2016 (see Appendix B).

Each interview was scored by the researcher and Dr. Jones and our inter-rater reliability was 100%, with nine of ten interviews rendering the exact same score, and one interview varying by just one epistemological distinction, which is within the reliability threshold of the instrument. A third certified SOI scorer was not required given the lack of substantive differences in scores. A description of the developmental positions in Kegan's constructive-developmental schema is below.

A given subject-object balance in complete equilibrium is designated with the single number that names it (1, 2, 3, 4, 5). Disequilibrium developmental positions evincing two-subject-object structures in relation to each other—the older structure being transformed and newer structure just emerging—are designated X/Y or Y/X, depending upon which structure seems to be ruling (3/2 means 3 is ruling). On either side of these disequilibrium positions we are able to discern positions in which only one structure is organizing experience but either signs of the new structure's emergence are present [X(Y)], or vestiges of the old structure remain [Y(X)]. Taken in sequence, then, the six qualitative transformations from one subject-object balance to another are designated thus: X, X(Y), X/Y, Y/X, Y(X), Y. Therefore, there are exactly twenty-one possible distinctions in the ongoing evolution of subject-object relations which we are able to make in the interview material. (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix, 2011, pp. 26-27)

Table 2

*Twenty-One Possible Epistemological Distinctions when Scoring the Subject-Object Interview*

Orders of consciousness	Complete Equilibrium X then Y	Transitional X(Y)	Transitional X/Y	Transitional Y/X	Transitional Y(X)
Impulsive Balance	1	1(2)	1/2	2/1	2(1)
Imperial Balance or Instrumental Mind	2	2(3)	2/3	3/2	3(2)
Interpersonal Balance or Socializing Mind	3	3(4)	3/4	4/3	4(3)
Institutional Balance or Self-Authoring Mind	4	4(5)	4/5	5/4	5(4)
Interindividual Balance or Self-Transforming Mind	5				

We analyzed and scored each of the Subject-Object Interviews in accordance with the procedures laid out in Lahey et al., (2011). Statistical analysis of the SOI scores was unnecessary because SOI scores were presented in numerical form and the number of research participants in this study was not sufficient for further analysis. A mock-up example of the SOI scoring schema is provided below in Table 3. It explicates the second through the fourth orders of mind, with scores moving along a continuum from less mentally complex to more mentally complex: **2**, 2(3) 2/3, 3/2, 3(2), **3**, 3(4), 3/4, 4/3, 4(3), **4**. Each step along the continuum is called a

“discrimination” of change, or change equal to “‘one-fifth of the way,’ so to speak, in the journey from one order of consciousness to another” (Kegan, 1994, p. 371).

The mock-up table below provides an example of how the SOI scores were presented in the findings chapter of this dissertation.

Table 3

*Mock-up Overview of Subject-Object Interview Scores across Administrations*

Research Participant Using Pseudonym	Pre-Expedition SOI Score	Post-Expedition SOI Score	Discriminations of Change in Orders of Mind:	Non-significant Trends Toward Greater Mental Complexity	Significant Trends Toward Greater Mental Complexity
Judith	2	2(3)	1	X	
Melanie	3	3/4	2		X
Jessica	4(3)	4(3)	0		
Jane	3/2	3/2	0		
Sarah	2	2(3)	1	X	
Angelica	2(3)	3/2	2		X

The reliability range for the SOI is 1/5<sup>th</sup> of a level or one discrimination of change (Kegan, 1994; Lahey et al., 2011; Lindsley, 2011). Only scores that are 2/5<sup>th</sup> or two discriminations higher between the pre-expedition SOI and the post-expedition SOI can be considered indicative of development or greater mental complexity (Kegan, 1994; Lahey et al., 2011; Lindsley, 2011).

Since none of the research participants in this study demonstrated significant changes to their constructive-developmental perspective, it was not necessary to analyze the significance of the findings from this study (changes to mental complexity as measured by the pre-post SOI) by comparing to findings reported in the constructive-developmental literature (Lindsley, 2011, p. 118); literature constituted by the six studies that utilized a pre-post design and a reliable and valid developmental metric.

### **Construction of the Five Research Participant Profiles via a Thematic Analysis of Participant-Observer Observations, Field notes, Subject-Object Interviews and, Semi-Structured Interviews**

The work completed during this stage of the analysis provided answers to research question # 2: “How does each participant make meaning of his experience, and what experiences appear significant in this process?” This process resulted in the five stand-alone profiles created for each research participant. This step was necessary in order to provide a foundation for the work that would be required to answer research question # 3: “How does each participant’s constructive-developmental perspective appear to influence the meaning he has made of this wilderness experience?”

The goal of the thematic analysis was to “make sense” out of data by “consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 175-176). It was to “make meaning” by “moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 176).

Because this study was underpinned by the idea that knowledge is constructed, not fixed, and in keeping with the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm that informs it, the constructivist

grounded theory of Kathy Charmaz (2006) and the development of thematic networks as described by Jennifer Attride-Stirling (2001) were selected as the data analysis methods for this study. Below is a brief summary of the way I used the constant comparative method of Kathy Charmaz (2006) and thematic networks as outlined by Jennifer Attride-Stirling (2001).

**The constant comparative method of Charmaz (2006).**

*Coding.* The first step I took in making sense out of the hundreds of pages of interviews and field notes was to code. “Coding means categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data. Your codes show how you select, separate, and sort data to begin an analytic accounting of them” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). I used initial and focused coding as a way of identifying units of meaning as expressed by each research participant.

In the first step, *initial coding*, I stuck close to the data, searching for actions (gerunds) rather than topics, and using the following guidelines: “Remain open, stay close to the data, keep your codes simple and precise, construct short codes, preserve actions, compare data with data, move quickly through the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 49). Initial coding began with line-by-line coding requiring that every line of every document be coded for meaning, a process that exemplified the immense measure of work required in qualitative analysis. While coding I continually asked questions about the meaning of the data, questions that focused on process, allowing insights to emerge from the texts. My first round of coding produced hundreds of codes for each interview manuscript and for field notes.

Once the initial coding was complete, the process of comparing codes began. Each coded text was reviewed in such a way that codes within the text were compared intra-textually and inter-textually, in order to identify “recurring regularities in the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 177).

Comparing initial line-by-line codes allowed me to see “important ideas or subjects that are recurring” (Thomas, 2011, p. 172).

The next step was *focused coding*, and constituted the second major phase in coding (Charmaz, 2006). “Focused coding means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data. Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). This step was, once again, an iterative one. I reviewed each text with itself and with all others texts, with the goal of identifying recurring themes, categories, or patterns. It was the process of “consolidating, reducing, and interpreting” what research participants had said and done so that their “meanings or understandings or insights” could be discovered and constructed from within the data (Merriam, 2009, p. 176).

***Memo-writing.*** Memo writing was a means of stepping back and taking stock in order to see the bigger picture. If coding was the more or less micro-analytic process, memo-writing was the more or less macro-analytic process; one that afforded me time, space, and sufficient distance to reflect on how the coding (initial and focused) related to the larger issue of making sense of the data and answering the research questions. Memo-writing was a way to generate “new ideas and insights” through the act of writing, and it helped me “capture comparisons and connections...and crystallize questions and directions...to pursue” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 73).

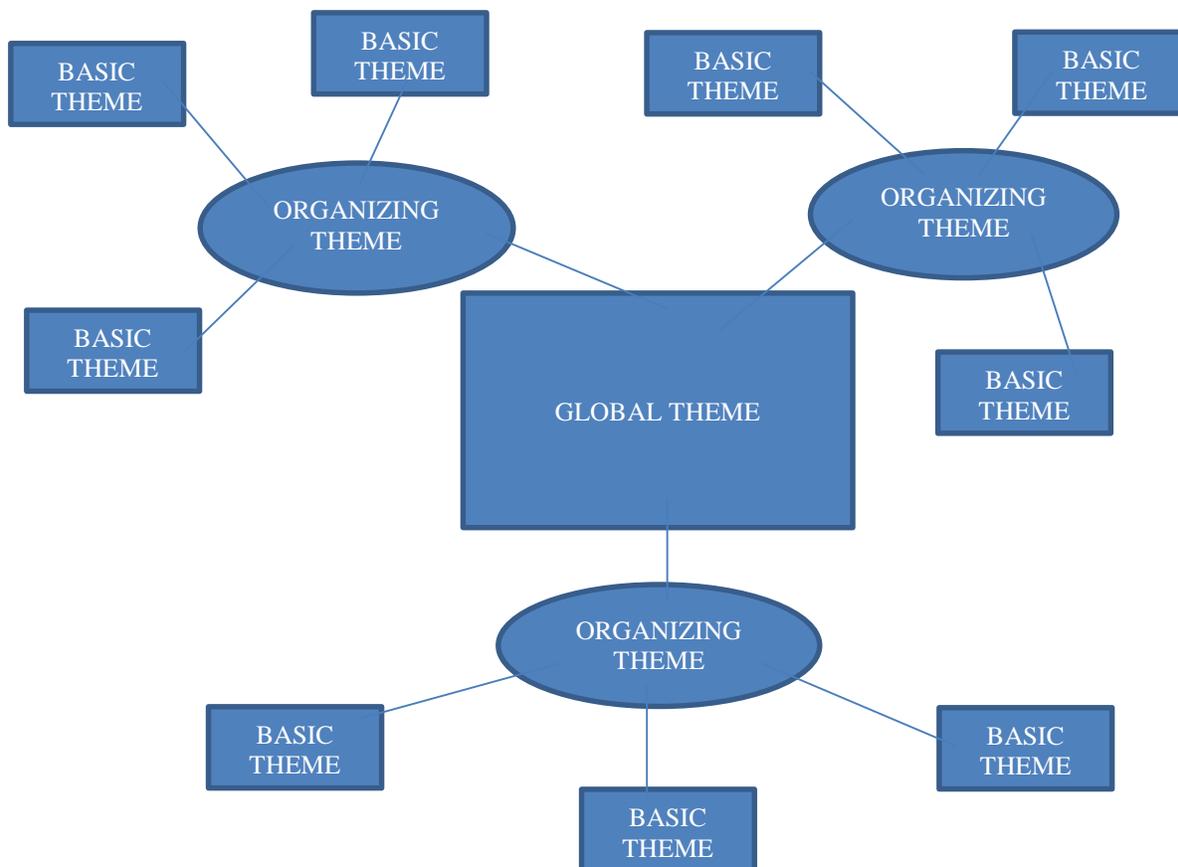
My only regret is that I didn’t use memo-writing more than I did. When I did employ the technique, it was extremely useful, as it sharpened my thinking and helped me sift through the “noise” contained within the considerable volume of data I was struggling to make sense of.

**Thematic networks of Attride-Stirling (2001).** Thematic networks, which are “web-like illustrations that summarize the main themes constituting a piece of text” (Attride-Stirling, 2001,

p. 385) were helpful in structuring and depicting the themes that emerged from my textual analyses. Thematic networks are constituted by three levels of themes: 1) the *Basic Theme* is the lowest-order theme that is derived from the textual data; 2) *Organizing Themes* are middle-order themes that organize the Basic Themes into clusters of similar action, and; 3) *Global Themes* are “super-ordinate themes that encompass the principal metaphors in the data as a whole” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). A depiction of a thematic network is noted in Figure 1.

Once I had coded the data, identified the themes, and constructed the networks, I then turned my attention to describing and exploring the thematic networks created for each research participant.

In this step the researcher returns to the original text, but rather than reading it in a linear manner, the text is now read through the Global Themes, Organizing Themes, and Basic Themes. As such, the thematic network now becomes not only a tool for the researcher, but also for the reader, who is able to anchor the researcher’s interpretation on the summary provided by the network. (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 393)



*Figure 1.* Depiction of a thematic network.

While reviewing data, with an eye to the network created for each research participant, I described the content or themes of each network, using text to support my description. At one and the same time I also explored the networks, noting the appearance of underlying patterns.

### **Analysis of the Five Research Participant Profiles Through a Constructive-Developmental Lens**

At this stage of the analysis, I turned my attention to research question # 3: “How does each participant’s constructive-developmental perspective appear to influence the meaning he has made of this wilderness experience?” I looked at each research participant’s profile and thematic network through the lens of Robert Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994). I compared the expectations I held for each research participant, in light of their

constructive-developmental perspective (as determined by scoring their two SOIs) over against their actual performance on the course, and attempted to articulate how each research participant's constructive-developmental perspective appeared to influence or mediate the meaning they made of the wilderness backpacking experience.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The final step in my analysis was to answer the “so what” question that constitutes my discussion chapter (chapter 11). I did this by looking across all of the analytic work completed including the thematic networks, profiles for each research participant, common themes and patterns tying each of the five profiles together, my understanding of how the constructive-developmental perspective of each research participant mediated their experience, knowledge of the research literature, as well as my own experiences working with people and venturing into wilderness environments for work and pleasure. With all of this in mind I attempted to make sense of what I had learned by “returning to the original research questions and the theoretical interests underpinning them, and addressing these with arguments grounded on the patterns that emerged in the exploration of the texts” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 394).

By the end of the analytic process, I concluded that the constructive-developmental literature was helpful in understanding the experiences of each of the five research participants. In order to demonstrate this, I elected to look at the explanatory power of Kegan's constructive-developmental theory, Kegan and Lahey's (2009) immunity to change, and Lahey et al., (2011) SOI, in the context of the expedition's failure to elicit or provoke significant changes to research participant's constructive-developmental perspective. I saw this as a way to better understand how the expedition fell short (in bringing about changes to mental complexity), and how it, at the very same time, succeeded in producing changes of another kind (e.g., increases in self-

confidence and resiliency). I then looked across all of the five research participant profiles and selected Black Rock Mountain as the top contender for most significant course experience. I concluded with recommendations that may enhance the design and implementation of WEPs and directions for future research.

### **Introduction to Findings**

Findings will be divided into seven chapters as described in Table 4.

Table 4

#### *Organization of the Findings Chapters*

Findings Chapter	Pertinent Research Question
4-8	Research Question 2: How does each participant make meaning of his experience, and what experiences appear significant in this process?
9	Research Question 1: What constructive-developmental perspective does each participant bring to this wilderness backpacking experience?  Research Question 4: What changes, if any, are evident in pre-trip and post-trip applications of the Subject-Object Interview (designed to determine constructive-developmental perspective) for participants completing this experience?
10	Research Question 3: How does each participant's constructive-developmental perspective appear to influence the meaning he has made of this wilderness experience?

Participant profiles in chapters four through eight are introduced using a thematic network that is visually depicted by diagrams. The thematic network is organized by three levels of abstraction including basic themes, organizing themes, and a global theme. Themes were derived using grounded theory coding (Charmaz, 2006) and thematic networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001) including data from each research participant's first and second Subject Object Interview (SOI), semi-structured interview, and field observations/notes. Each of the five profiles is

intended to stand alone as a description of the research participant's wilderness experience, but each profile is also the necessary basis for the analysis that comes later: an examination of each research participant's experience through the lens of their constructive-developmental perspective.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a description of this study's research methodology. A case study method was used to help illustrate the way five teenage males, participating in a 21-day OB WEP, made sense of their experience. Using a type of purposeful sampling called convenience sampling, a research sample (the case) of five male youth, ages 13-18, was secured from course registrants from provinces across Canada. Three data collection methods were utilized including SOI, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and participant-observer observations and field notes. All data were reviewed against emergent themes and the literature. Issues of trustworthiness were addressed through various means including extensive time spent in the field by embedding in the expedition, use of multiple sources of data, triangulation of data, use of two scorers certified as reliable for scoring all SOIs, and rich, thick description of the case.

In order to construct a meaningful design and analytic strategy for the study, a literature review was conducted, resulting in a conceptual framework that guided all aspects of the research project. Utilizing grounded theory coding (Charmaz, 2006) and thematic networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001), key themes and experiences were identified. Using the SOI (Lahey et al., 2011), each research participant's constructive-developmental perspective was identified and explored in light of the meaning each made of their OB experience. A comparison of the research literature with key themes from the findings, allowed for interpretations and conclusions to be drawn. Recommendations for WEP and further research were offered. I concluded the

chapter with an introduction to the findings chapters that follow. The intent of this study was to improve our understanding of how young people make sense of a wilderness experience through the lens of their constructive-developmental perspective. It is my hope that this research will be of value to wilderness educators, coaches, and therapists as they seek to improve outcomes and deepen understanding of how wilderness experiences interact with one's constructive-developmental perspective.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS: BRANT'S PROFILE

In this chapter I describe how Brant made sense of this wilderness backpacking experience and the experiences that appeared significant.

For Brant, three organizing themes were identified including making and keeping friends, building self-confidence, and struggling with rejection. These three organizing themes and their variations (basic themes) as well as the global theme (longing for and seeking approval from others and from self) are explored below and illustrated in Figure 2.

### **Global Theme: Longing for and Seeking Approval from Others and from Self**

Brant began the Outward Bound (OB) course with a significant measure of doubt about his maturity, his capacity for managing physical and mental difficulty, and his social attractiveness and competence. His decision to participate in this OB course, something he seemed keen to do, appeared to be an attempt to gain approval from self and others by becoming more socially competent and interesting, and by developing the self-confidence that comes from doing something difficult. Those two pursuits are explored below as well as the rejection he experienced along the way.

### **Organizing Theme #1: Making and Keeping Friends**

Brant, who was the youngest of the five research participants, and was among the youngest participants on the course, brought with him the tacit expectation that he make, and keep, some close friends on the course. Throughout his interviews, the desire for friendship figured prominently.

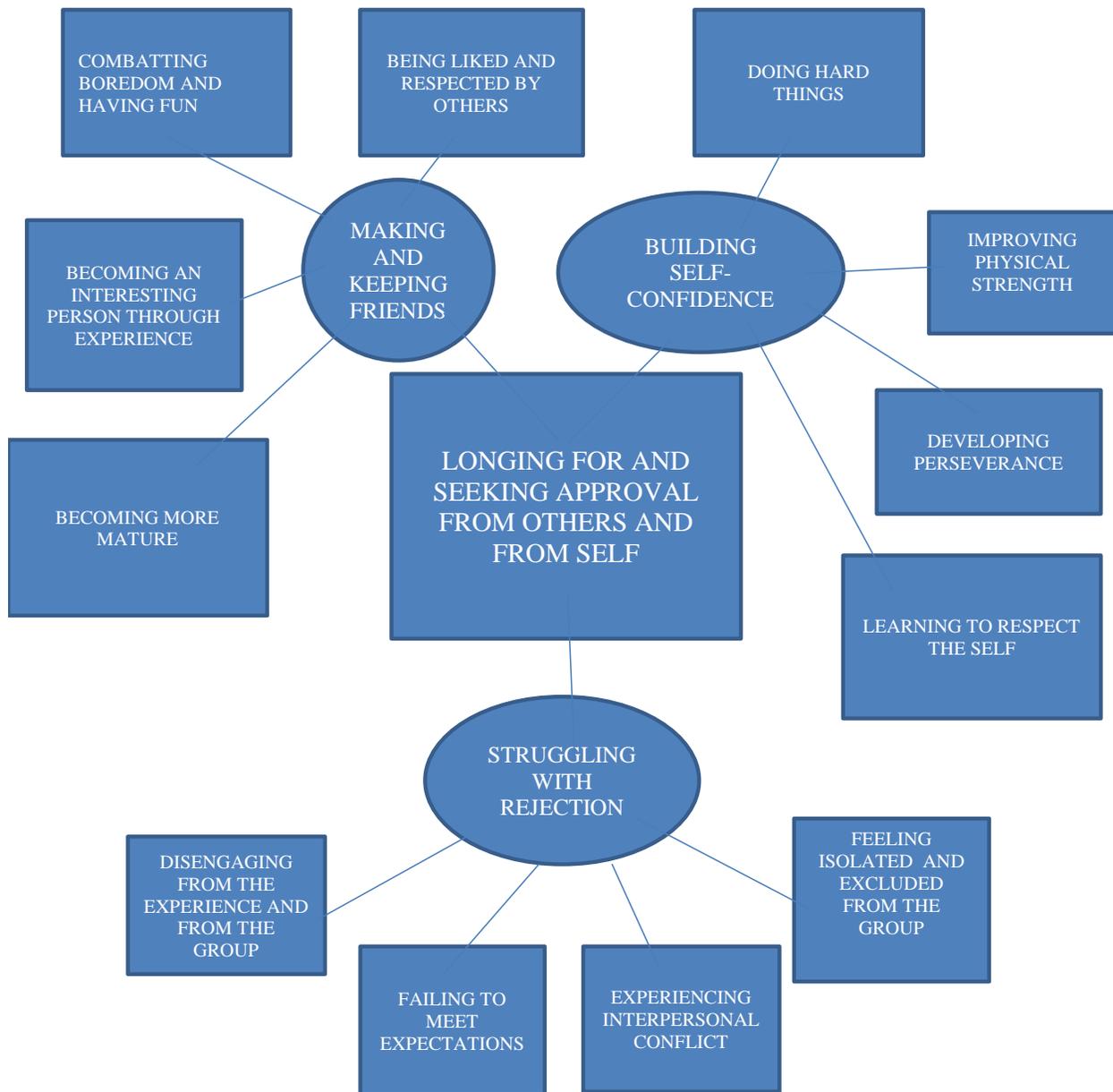


Figure 2. Brant's thematic network.

CURT: “Why would it be important for you to make sure your friends aren’t living on the street...?”

BRANT: Because they’re important to me. They’re one of the assets of my life. You need friends, family, food water, shelter...” (SOI # 1, p. 8).

BRANT: “Having friends is important to me” (SOI # 2, p. 20).

BRANT: “All I want is to be in school with no teasing, but with friends. I don’t want to be the most popular kid. Even not being noticed would be fine, as long as I have a few friends” (SOI # 1, p. 19).

CURT: “And, again, going back to the friends, friends are important to you because?”

BRANT: They’re a central part of my life. I hate being lonely” (SOI # 1, p. 21).

CURT: Ok, torn. What experience do you want to share?

BRANT: I was actually pretty torn at the end of the trip when I had to say good-bye to all the people that I had met on my trip. That sucked because I got pretty close to someone and to say good-bye sucked because I don’t have any personal info, and I can’t contact them.

CURT: Can you help me understand why that’s been hard for you not to be able to touch base with the people you met on the trip?

BRANT: I don’t know. I feel a need when I meet someone to stay in touch with them, see how they’re doing. If they live close to me we could probably meet up. In a week I’m heading to Ottawa, which is where most of them live, but it sucks because I can’t contact them because I didn’t have any personal information. (SOI # 2, p. 1)

As Brant navigated the OB course with an eye to making and keeping friends, four distinct types of experience emerged from the data that captured his understanding of what was required of him to succeed and what he might enjoy as a result of that success: (1) becoming more mature, (2) becoming an interesting person through experience, (3) combatting boredom and having fun, and (4) being liked and respected by others.

**Basic theme # 1: Becoming more mature.** For Brant, immaturity was his nemesis. It was that nagging residual of childhood that made it hard for him to make and keep friends, hard for him to be taken seriously by others (and by himself) and hard for him to avoid bullying which he had suffered for much of his school career. He viewed the OB course as a way to accelerate his development and, as a consequence, improve his social standing among others. He seemed to recognize that his own immaturity had been, and to some degree, remained, a painful limitation to his social success and he appeared, at least at first, determined to find his way out of it.

BRANT: Let's go with #9: Change. I think in the last few months I'm becoming a bit more mature. Six months ago I don't think I would have been ready to take on the course. I don't think I would've been able to haul a backpack for three weeks in the Rockies, but now I think I've been hiking a bit more, and have a bit more maturity. I'm more ready for it. And, in general, I think I'm becoming a bit more mature. A lot of people, like my friends and my family, are saying—even my teachers—on the last day you matured a lot since the beginning of the year.

CURT: Is that important to you?

BRANT: Yeah. I can't stand being called immature. It's one of my biggest pet peeves.

CURT: And it's one of your biggest pet peeves because...

BRANT: I just hate it. (SOI #1, pp. 18-19)

Brant viewed immaturity as the blaring noise and flashing light that signaled he was different from others, difference that often served as a magnet for bullying. His desire to grow up was motivated, at least in part, by his wish to diminish the measure of bullying to which he was subject; a reality he had been struggling with for years.

BRANT: When I was being called 'immature,' it seems like everybody around me was all mature, and I hate being different from everybody else. I like fitting in. I don't like being that one kid who is the outcast.

CURT: And it's important for you to fit in and not be different because...

BRANT: Because a lot of the different kids at my school get teased, and I get teased a lot at school, and bullied and stuff.

CURT: So, it sounds like, because your experience at school of being singled out, and people giving you a bad time, you'd like to be the guy who blends in so you don't call attention to yourself.

BRANT: Yeah, I don't want to be the most popular kid in the school. I'm not a big attention whore, but I don't want to be teased. All I want is to be in school with no teasing, but with friends. I don't want to be the most popular kid. Even not being noticed would be fine, as long as I have a few friends.

CURT: It would be ok for you to not be noticed as long as you have friends, because...

BRANT: Because if I'm not noticed, nobody will tease me. (SOI # 1, p. 19)

When pressed further about why maturity was so important to him, Brant brought it back to the organizing theme of making and keeping friends. He clarified, yet again, that growing up would help him become more socially attractive, resulting in a more stable and satisfying social network of friends.

CURT: You said that being perceived as mature is really important to you. Can you help me better understand that? Can you tell me a little more about your...

BRANT: Because nobody wants to be friends with the immature guy who's always making stupid faces and stupid noises, and is the big old loudmouth in the class, being all smart-ass and yelling out random stupid things, still making poop and pee-pee jokes. Nobody wants to be friends with that guy, and, coming back to what's important to me, my friends, I just kind of like to be perceived as mature instead of immature.

CURT: So that you can have friends.

BRANT: Yeah.

CURT: And, again, going back to the friends. Friends are important to you because.

BRANT: They're a central part of my life. (SOI #1, pp. 20-21)

Brant's quest for maturity emerged as one of the reasons he decided to attend the OB course in the first place, and he acknowledged that a certain measure of maturity was required of

him to complete the course successfully. At the end of the trip, the instructors conducted a closing circle that involved each course participant receiving feedback from peers and staff and an OB pin commemorating their successful completion of the course. Brant found this to be a satisfying experience, confirming his sense that he had “grown up” some on the course.

CURT: Okay. How would you say the course affected you personally?

BRANT: It made me a bit more mature, I feel. I feel that it gave me a bit more maturity.

CURT: Maturity in what way? In what ways do you think you grew up a bit?

BRANT: I don't know. I heard from a lot of people that I got a bit more mature—not a bit, a lot more mature.

CURT: what changes specifically do you think you made while you were on the course, or as a result of the course?

BRANT: I don't know actually, to be honest.

CURT: I know yesterday you had mentioned you got a lot of comments at the closing circle, about your leadership and how you seemed to pull it together from the beginning of the course to the end of the course. You felt like people were taking you more seriously. Could you maybe tell me a little bit about some of those changes that you saw in yourself, or that you believe other people saw in you?

BRANT: I guess I'm doing more mature things: like, I'm not outside doing stupid things. I actually make smart decisions now. (semi-structured interview, p. 2)

**Basic theme # 2: Becoming an interesting person through experience.** Brant believed that this OB course provided him with a variety of experiences that made him more interesting, a person better able to hold his own in a conversation with persons he might wish to become friends with. This emerged as an important aspect of his strategy for making and keeping friends and this OB course figured prominently in helping him enhance this personal quality.

CURT: And, why is it important for you...to say that you've climbed your first mountain? Why is that important to you?

BRANT: It's just a cool thing to say because, if you're talking to an adult somewhere and you guys are talking about hiking you say, 'Yeah I've climbed a mountain.'

'Which one?'

'Black Rock.'

'Oh, same.' Then you guys can talk about that. It opens up a whole new conversation with other people.

CURT: being able to have things to converse about with adults, as you have mentioned, that matters to you because...

BRANT: I get to learn things. I get to learn things I didn't know. They could tell you something, like maybe you missed something...that somebody put a goat skull up there.

CURT: it sounds like learning things are important, and learning things from others matters to you because...

BRANT: Don't want to be that one kid who's like, 'What? What does that mean?'

CURT: So, it sounds like it's important for you to have enough experience to actually be able to have a conversation with somebody.

BRANT: Yeah.

CURT: And that's important to you because...

BRANT: I don't know. I just don't want to be that one kid who doesn't know anything about anything.

CURT: And you don't want to be that kid because...

BRANT: Nobody likes that kid.

CURT: Ah. It sounds like if you have something to talk about, you're more likely to be liked by others. Is that what you mean?

BRANT: To have more friends. (SOI # 2, pp. 4-5)

At the start of the course, Brant believed that the OB expedition would help him grow up and also help make him a more interesting person. He seemed confident that these two developments would make him more successful socially. By course end, Brant believed that he had made progress with both objectives. The next two basic themes, combatting boredom and

having fun, and being liked and respected by others, were not viewed by Brant as traits necessary to engender friendship, but rather the consequences of becoming more socially successful.

**Basic theme # 3: Combatting boredom and having fun.** Brant described himself as an active person, who liked hiking, whittling sticks, throwing rocks, exploring his surroundings, and learning new things. He believed that having a group of friends was an antidote to boredom because it provided him with opportunities for shared experience. Since Brant made it clear he didn't like doing things alone, a strong social network of willing participants in adventure was important to develop. He saw the OB course as a way of making some of those connections.

CURT: What would you say is the worst part about not having friends?

BRANT: If you're bored one day, you can't just say, 'I'm going to hang out with my friends. Oh wait, never mind, I don't have any.' I like being active. I don't like being lazy.

CURT: In other words, if you didn't have friends, you wouldn't have people to do things with.

BRANT: Yeah.

CURT: And that would be upsetting to you because...

BRANT: I'd be constantly bored. Nobody likes being bored.

CURT: What is it about being bored that's really hard for you? What's the worst part about being bored for you?

BRANT: Not doing anything, because I like doing things. I'm not that guy who can sit down and watch four days of TV straight.

CURT: You like to be active.

BRANT: Yeah.

CURT: And is it easier for you to be active when you have friends to do those things with?

BRANT: Go hiking by myself; it's not as fun. (SOI # 2, p. 9)

Additionally, the OB course provided Brant an opportunity to do “cool things” and have fun. He clearly enjoyed the prestige that came from doing things he viewed as out of the ordinary (backpacking, climbing mountains, etc.), especially in light of the fact that many of his friends at home were sequestered in their bedrooms engaged in video game marathons, an activity he dismissed as tedious and unimaginative.

CURT: So climbing Black Rock. What else was a success for you?

BRANT: Just completing the course in general. Overcoming all the challenges, and just saying that I’ve been hiking in the mountains for two-and-a-half weeks.

CURT: Do you want to maybe pick one to start with, whether it’s going up to the top of Black Rock, or actually completing the course? Help me understand what those two events meant to you.

BRANT: Black Rock because that’s the first mountain I’ve ever climbed in my life. To say that I’ve been able to climb a mountain at 13, now 14, is pretty awesome because not a lot of 14-year-olds can say that. The only mountains they’ve climbed is getting over their pile of Mountain Dew by their Xbox. (SOI # 2, p. 4)

**Basic theme # 4: Being liked and respected by others.** Brant believed that becoming more mature and more interesting would not only alleviate boredom by helping improve his social network, and consequently, his pool of available comrades for activity, it would also help him command the respect, and affection, of others. In much of the data Brant suggested that his desire for affirmation and respect, from others, and by extension, from self, was extremely important. He put this desire in negative and positive terms, emphasizing it throughout the interviews.

CURT: I suspect...it’s important that you feel that people like you and they respect you and they find you interesting. Is that part of this?

BRANT: Yep.

CURT: Anything else you could tell me to help me understand that, and why that matters to you as much as it does? It sounds like it's very important.

BRANT: I don't know. It's hard to explain. I'm sure it's probably important to a lot of people, and I guess I'm one of them. I like to be respected and not considered a dweeb or anything.

CURT: Do you mean that you want people to take you seriously?

BRANT: Yep.

CURT: Help me understand that. What do you mean by that?

BRANT: I don't want to be talking to someone, and they start laughing because I've done something stupid, something I haven't noticed, and they can't take me seriously. Then I can't get a thought out, and, again, and then they don't respect you as much. And I like to be respected.

CURT: For you, what is the worst part about sensing that someone doesn't respect you, whether it's a peer or an adult?

BRANT: Because if they don't respect you then they don't exactly like you the most. I like being liked by other people. If you're liked by a lot of people then you have quite a bit of friends. (SOI # 2, pp. 4-5)

As Brant talked about the importance of being liked and respected by others, he explicated the notion that his ability to take himself seriously was largely dependent on others. If others thought highly of him, then he was better able to think highly of himself. Conversely, if others looked down at him, and thought he was unworthy of their respect or admiration, then he was likely to fall into step with that view. As Brant saw it, the OB course provided him an opportunity to shore up his maturity and breadth of experience, which in turn would help him command more respect and affirmation from others. And by influencing others to take him more seriously, he would, consequently, be able to take himself more seriously. In the text below, Brant is reflecting on the closing ceremony, during which his peers and the instructors provide him candid feedback about his performance on the course.

CURT: What was the best part of that for you, hearing people speak of you as they did during the pin ceremony?

BRANT: I don't know.

CURT: sounds like it was important to you. Can you help me understand why?

BRANT: It felt good knowing that not everybody thought you were a complete idiot, but actually some people thought very highly of you.

CURT: Can you help me understand why that matters to you as much as it does, that people like you, respect you, appreciate you, as they shared during that pin ceremony?

BRANT: People know that you're not a complete dud, and that you can actually accomplish things, and that people have good thoughts about you.

CURT: Do you sometimes fear that others see you as a, as you put it, 'dud'?

BRANT: Yeah.

CURT: If you sense that someone sees you as a dud, can you help me understand what that experience is like for you?

BRANT: I like to be respected. When people say good things about you it means that they respect you.

CURT: I'm curious, if someone doesn't like you, or they see you, to use your language, as a 'dud,' or they don't seem to respect you or your point of view, or follow your direction or take you seriously, how hard is it for you to take yourself seriously? How hard is it for you to take yourself seriously when other people aren't taking you seriously? Do you know what I mean? I'm trying to get a sense of how hard it is for you to like yourself when others don't.

BRANT: Pretty hard to take myself seriously when other people can't take me seriously. (SOI # 2, p. 15)

## **Organizing Theme # 2: Building Self-Confidence**

In concert with his desire to have a positive experience in making and keeping friends, Brant also wanted, if only tacitly, to develop his self-confidence. Though his initial presentation during the airport meet- and- greet at the beginning of the course was that of an outgoing and confident young teen (field notes, day 4, p. 5), it became clear early on that Brant's persona was

more show than substance. He felt insecure and was looking for a way to develop more confidence. It is no accident that he picked an OB backpacking course in the Canadian Rockies, a course he knew would challenge him mentally and physically. To really appreciate Brant's pride in carrying a 20kg pack, it is important to note that he likely only weighed a little more than twice his pack weight. With his pack stuffed full and standing upright on the ground, it was nearly  $2/3^{\text{rd}}$  of his height!

CURT: What were the toughest days for you physically and mentally?

BRANT: Probably the first day and re-supply. Those were really heavy packs. Those were really tough days.

CURT: Because of the weight? Were there other really tough days for you?

BRANT: No, just really those.

CURT: Did anything surprise you about your ability to carry all that weight?

BRANT: Yes. I did not believe that I could carry a 20 kg pack for two-and-a-half weeks.

CURT: What does that tell you about yourself?

BRANT: I don't know, but, if you had told me I could do that before that course, you must be smoking something, because I can't do it.

CURT: Really, you would not have believed it?

BRANT: I would not have believed it for a second.

CURT: So, would you say that the course definitely improved your self-confidence?

BRANT: Yeah. (semi-structured Interview, p. 4)

For Brant, there were three qualities that, if improved, would significantly enhance his self-confidence. Those three qualities included: physical strength, perseverance, and self-respect. And for him, one way to develop those qualities was by doing something hard. That is one of the

chief reasons he decided to enroll in the OB course. While his friends holed up in their bedrooms in front of a computer screen he embarked on an outdoor adventure that would test his mettle.

**Basic Theme # 1: Doing hard things.**

CURT: Why don't you pick another card, whichever one you wish?

BRANT: Success. Success was two things actually. Being able to climb to the peak of Black Rock.

CURT: Yeah, that was pretty cool, wasn't it?

BRANT: Plus, there's proof of me actually being up there.

CURT: Did you carve your name in the shed, in the lookout?

BRANT: I wrote my name on a piece of wood and nailed it into the side.

CURT: No kidding?

BRANT: Yeah.

CURT: So climbing Black Rock. What else was a success for you?

BRANT: Just completing the course in general. Overcoming all the challenges, and just saying that I've been hiking in the mountains for two-and-a-half weeks.

CURT: Do you want to maybe pick one to start with, whether it's going up to the top of Black Rock, or actually completing the course? Help me understand what those two events meant to you.

BRANT: Black Rock because that's the first mountain I've ever climbed in my life. To say that I've been able to climb a mountain at 13, now 14, is pretty awesome because not a lot of 14-year-olds can say that. (SOI # 2, pp. 3-4)

To put his achievement in perspective, consider that the Black Rock Mountain hike took 7.5 hours round trip, and gained 892 meters (2,927 feet) in elevation. The trail was, at times, steep, and the footing of the upper third was mostly scree. Some course participants were frightened by the exposure and were visibly shaken coming down. Brant went on to talk about the other measure of success he experienced on the course: simply completing it.

CURT: You mentioned that completing the course was a real achievement for you. Can you help me understand that, that it felt really, really good to finish two-and-a-half weeks of hiking with a heavy pack?

BRANT: I got stronger for sure.... Just to say, at 13, you completed a three-week hiking course is pretty cool. When all the rest of your friends are completing a three-day marathon of video gaming, you're out doing a three-week hike.

CURT: It's pretty cool, isn't it? What does that tell you about yourself, the fact that you've done this successfully?

BRANT: That even if the going gets tough, I don't quit. I can push through. (SOI # 2, pp. 6-7)

**Basic theme # 2: Improving physical strength.** Brant acknowledged getting physically stronger on the trip due to the regimen of daily hiking with a heavy pack over rough terrain. He took pride in his ability to manage the physical demands of the course, given his small stature and young age.

CURT: "So, the question is, what things about the course affected you personally—especially the things that affected you the most.

BRANT: Strength. I definitely got stronger.

CURT: Physically stronger?

BRANT: Yeah" (semi-structured Interview, p. 3).

**Basic theme # 3: Developing perseverance.** Brant identified perseverance as the primary form of mental strength he developed on the course. There were two clear opportunities during the course when participants could have asked to be evacuated from the course: at the beginning before the hiking began and at re-supply, about half-way through the course. But Brant never mentioned, at least not to me, the desire to leave the course early. If anything, he was sorry that he had to leave the course as early as he did. As he was a member of the younger group, and shorter course, he hiked out three days before the older group, something he

complained about during the interviews, citing this early departure as a source of anxiety and dread.

BRANT: Let's do Anxious.

CURT: Ok, anxious, nervous.

BRANT: I was anxious when I had to leave in the morning to start making my way to Exshaw.

CURT: Oh yeah?

BRANT: I didn't exactly like that; I started feeling, in the pit of my stomach, dread of getting there.

CURT: Was this the day that we hiked up over the pass, over the saddle?

BRANT: This was the day that the YAA-29 course ends. The YAA people stayed.

CURT: Oh ok, so you were anxious or nervous about that because...

BRANT: I had to leave all my friends behind.

CURT: Were there reasons, besides what you've already mentioned, that that provoked so much anxiety in you?

BRANT: No. Just sad to leave everything behind. I had to leave all my friends, all my experiences...not exactly my experiences, but a lot of things.

CURT: Is there a part of you that wished you could have continued on to the end with the older students?

BRANT: Yeah. I really wish I could've.

CURT: How would that have changed your experience, if you had been able to continue to the end with the older students?

BRANT: Made me happier because then I would've been able to stay a few days, and maybe I would've been able to collect some more information, like personal info so I could stay in touch with some of those people.

CURT: You might have had more opportunity to get that information to stay in touch. Other reasons why it may have been desirable for you to stay until the end—the absolute end—of the course? Other reasons that may have been really important to you?

BRANT: Getting more experiences, getting to see more things.

CURT: Gaining more experience would've been more important to you because...

BRANT: More experiences, more memories, more things I could share with other people...overall experience was better.

CURT: Is that back to the idea that the more experiences you have, the more you have to talk about, the more interesting you are, and the more likely you are able to make friends because you have things to share?

BRANT: Exactly.

CURT: Is that what it comes back to for you?

BRANT: Exactly.

CURT: And having friends is important because it's a way for you to have someone to do something with. And you like to be active; you don't like to be bored. It's hard to do things alone, but when you have friends to do things with it's just a lot more fun. Am I getting it?

BRANT: Yeah.

CURT: Were there other things that you felt anxious or nervous about on the trip, besides having to leave the older group behind and walk out to the road?

BRANT: No. (SOI # 2, pp. 10-11)

As Brant reflected on the course he repeatedly mentioned the importance of not giving up, the virtue of tenacity, and the expectation of self to always finish what he starts. This was important to him for reasons that appear to tie in with his desire to be taken seriously and to be perceived as a mature young man. He viewed the course as instrumental in strengthening this quality.

CURT: Do you think you got stronger in other ways besides just physical?

BRANT: Mentally.

CURT: How so?

BRANT: I know that I don't have to quit, and that I don't quit.

CURT: That you can persevere even when it's tough—and there were some tough days for sure!

BRANT: When the going gets tough, the tough get going. (semi-structured interview, p. 4)

Brant went on to reveal some of the other reasons perseverance was important to him and continued to underscore his belief that the course was helpful in shoring up this trait. The excerpt below segues into the last basic theme (learning to respect the self) under the organizing theme of building self-confidence.

CURT: What does that tell you about yourself, the fact that you've done this successfully?

BRANT: That even if the going gets tough, I don't quit. I can push through.

CURT: Why is it important for you to be someone who doesn't quit, but is able to dig deep and push through something that's hard? Why does that matter to you so much?

BRANT: Because it means that you can do other things. If you can't complete anything, you can't do anything.

CURT: It sounds like finishing things that you start is very important to you.

BRANT: Always finish something that you start; never start something you can't finish.

CURT: Why does that matter to you as much as it does? Help me understand that—because that sounds like something that you feel very strongly about.

BRANT: You get to do more things.

CURT: And doing more things is...

BRANT: If you can start something and finish it.

CURT: You mean that it provides more opportunity for you?

BRANT: Yeah.

CURT: And that's important to you because...

BRANT: Meet new people; learn new things.

CURT: Is it back to, it allows you to form new relationships and have something to talk about?

BRANT: Yeah.

CURT: Anything else you could tell me to help me understand that, and why that matters to you as much as it does? It sounds like it's very important.

BRANT: I don't know. It's hard to explain. I'm sure it's probably important to a lot of people, and I guess I'm one of them. I like to be respected and not considered a dweeb or anything. (SOI #2, pp. 7-8)

**Basic theme # 4: Learning to respect the self.** Brant seemed to rely heavily on the approval of others in order to feel okay about himself and he viewed the course as a way of showing others, and ultimately himself, that he was to be taken seriously, his words for earning respect. Carrying a heavy pack, climbing Black Rock Mountain, and completing the course were the primary achievements he identified that helped him believe he deserved the respect of others and that once secured, would help him have respect for himself and his accomplishments.

CURT: What was the best part of that for you, hearing people speak of you as they did during the pin ceremony?

BRANT: I don't know.

CURT: Sounds like it was important to you. Can you help me understand why?

BRANT: It felt good knowing that not everybody thought you were a complete idiot, but actually some people thought very highly of you.

CURT: Can you help me understand why that matters to you as much as it does, that people like you, respect you, appreciate you, as they shared during that pin ceremony?

BRANT: People know that you're not a complete dud, and that you can actually accomplish things, and that people have good thoughts about you.

CURT: Do you sometimes fear that others see you as a, as you put it, 'dud'?

BRANT: Yeah.

CURT: If you sense that someone sees you as a dud, can you help me understand what that experience is like for you?

BRANT: I like to be respected. When people say good things about you it means that they respect you.

CURT: I'm curious, if someone doesn't like you, or they see you, to use your language, as a 'dud,' or they don't seem to respect you or your point of view, or follow your direction or take you seriously, how hard is it for you to take yourself seriously? How hard is it for you to take yourself seriously when other people aren't taking you seriously? Do you know what I mean? I'm trying to get a sense of how hard it is for you to like yourself when others don't.

BRANT: Pretty hard to take myself seriously when other people can't take me seriously. (SOI #2, p. 15)

### **Organizing Theme # 3: Struggling with Rejection**

Brant arrived at the course full of hope that he would be able to make lasting friendships and build his self-confidence. He seemed to believe, upon completion of the expedition, that he had accomplished both objectives. My field observations, however, painted a different picture. Brant struggled with rejection (the final organizing theme that emerged from the data) by course participants throughout the trip, and his isolation intensified as the course wore on. As his social experience with others fell on hard times, his fragile self-confidence, tied as it was to the global theme of longing for and seeking approval from others and from self, appeared to falter. It was this struggle with rejection that seemed to punctuate his experience, though he minimized it by stating all was well, except with one course participant with whom he acknowledged having an ongoing feud. Perhaps this disparity can be attributed to Brant's self-deception, lack of insight, or both, but the incongruence between his stated experience and that which I observed was striking. Four basic themes emerged from the data and include feeling isolated and excluded from the group, experiencing interpersonal conflict, failing to meet expectations, and disengaging from the experience and from the group.

**Basic theme # 1: Feeling isolated and excluded from the group.** Brant's sense of isolation began almost immediately and was, at least in part, a function of the course configuration. He voiced some frustration with the fact that two courses of varying lengths (different start and stop dates) were blended, making getting acquainted awkward.

CURT: What were the times of greatest difficulty for you...?

BRANT: The first few days and the first few days after re-supply.

CURT: The first few days were tough for you because, I know, you mentioned the heavy pack. Were there other reasons the first few days were tough?

BRANT: Yeah, because I didn't have any friends there. It seemed like all the older guys (youth from the older group) got to know each other before we even got there.

CURT: Right.

BRANT: They had a bunch of friends. I guess I just kind of felt like the odd one out on the first few days.

CURT: And what was the hardest thing about that for you?

BRANT: I don't know. Everybody else was talking about things, and then there's me just sitting there by myself.

CURT: Did you feel isolated?

BRANT: Yeah.

CURT: And what was the worst part of that for you, that feeling of isolation and not being a part of things?

BRANT: Not being able to talk to anyone. I don't like not talking to people when there's a bunch of people around.

CURT: Can you help me understand what the worst part of that was for you, not feeling like you had people you could talk to?

BRANT: I don't know, just not being able to talk to them, I guess, was the worst part.

CURT: I'm sorry. I didn't hear you.

BRANT: I guess the worst part is just not being able to talk to them. I like to talk to people. I guess just being third wheel is not exactly the best.

CURT: And how did they help you through that tough period where you felt isolated and sort of alone? It sounds like that was pretty tough for you because you like to have friends and be included, and it sounds like the first few days were difficult because you didn't feel that way. What was the worst part of that for you?

BRANT: I don't know. I really don't want to be the third wheel. That's the worst. Nobody likes being the third wheel, I think. (semi-structured interview, pp. 5-6)

In my field notes I wrote that other course participants were often reacting negatively toward Brant, treating him as they might a younger and less mature sibling; someone they found annoying to be around.

“Brant seems solo now, not fitting in as he is the youngest and least mature. The other youth are pushing him away and isolating him” (field notes, days 5-21, p. 2).

I continued noticing his rejection by others early in the course, writing “no one really includes Brant,” and “mostly they ignore Brant” (field notes, days 5-21, p. 10). I observed that though the group was becoming cohesive, Brant seemed like the “third wheel,” to use Brant's language. He was being actively excluded by the others early in the trip, a pattern that persisted throughout Brant's time in the field (field notes, days 5-21, p. 3)

**Basic theme # 2: Experiencing interpersonal conflict.** Brant acknowledged struggling with one course participant in particular and noted that his conflict with this person was never resolved. He admitted that the conflict negatively affected his experience of the trip by taking up time and limiting the measure of fun he enjoyed while on course.

CURT: What's the worst thing about not having friends, about someone not liking you? What's the hardest thing about that for you?

BRANT: I don't like fighting with people. I don't like it. There was, I'm sure you remember on the course, one person I never got along with.

CURT: Right. What was the worst part of that for you?

BRANT: Constant bickering. I hate bickering around with people. I hate it.

CURT: What is it about bickering that you find so difficult or off-putting?

BRANT: I don't know; it's just not a positive thing. I can't stand it because then I'm thinking about it for a while and it's like, 'What the hell? Why am I even....' It's a waste of time, pretty much.

CURT: It sounds like it costs you time, and that's upsetting to you because...

BRANT: Because I like putting my time into use. I'd rather be jumping around on rocks, setting up tents, and having fun than being stupid and arguing with other people. (SOI # 2, pp. 5-6)

What Brant did not acknowledge verbally, at least not as directly or unequivocally, was his ongoing rejection and exclusion by many other course participants besides the one person he clearly identified. I'm unsure if this omission was due to his lack of insight and his inability to read social cues or shame that made it hard for him to acknowledge his difficulty forming positive relationships. He implied that he had made a lot of friends on the course and that the only reason he was unable to secure their contact information at course end was because he wasn't able to remain on the course to the very end.

CURT: Oh ok, so you were anxious or nervous about that because...

BRANT: I had to leave all my friends behind.

CURT: Were there reasons, besides what you've already mentioned, that that provoked so much anxiety in you?

BRANT: No. Just sad to leave everything behind. I had to leave all my friends, all my experiences...not exactly my experiences, but a lot of things.

CURT: Is there a part of you that wished you could have continued on to the end with the older students?

BRANT: Yeah. I really wish I could've.

CURT: How would that have changed your experience, if you had been able to continue to the end with the older students?

BRANT: Made me happier because then I would've been able to stay a few days, and maybe I would've been able to collect some more information, like personal info so I could stay in touch with some of those people. (Brant, SOI #2, p. 10)

Looking at the data, it appeared that Brant was having difficulty with multiple course participants and that his sense of isolation came as a result of his off-putting behavior and the unwillingness of course participants to tolerate that behavior. I made numerous notations that suggested Brant was in conflict with more than just the one person he identified:

“Just now, Mike (course instructor) called the group out on teasing Brant” (field notes, days 5-21, p. 2).

“Brant tried hard to lead but most people ignored him, hiking ahead, choosing their own route” (field notes, days 5-21, p. 24).

Though his one clearly identified conflicted relationship was lived in the open, by way of name-calling and other forms of verbal hostility, his other conflicted relationships took on a more subtle manner in that he was simply ignored by those who were irritated with his behavior.

**Basic theme # 3: Failing to meet expectations.** Though Brant did not acknowledge his failure to meet expectations in any of the interviews I conducted with him, my field observations suggested he struggled to meet a plethora of course expectations, a reality that likely precipitated and fueled his rejection by many course participants and the numerous challenging interactions with course instructors.

His shortcomings included his inability or unwillingness to: 1) pick up on social cues, 2) acknowledge his mistakes, 3) take his leadership responsibilities seriously, 4) manage time well, 5) complete camp chores, 6) show consideration for others, and, 7) remain engaged. Of course, there were instances when Brant did meet expectations and these instances were, at least initially,

acknowledged by his peers. But as the course wore on, and his disappointing performance became more consistent, his intermittent attempts to engage in thoughtful behavior and provide adequate leadership were largely ignored by his peers. The one exception to this pattern of failing to meet expectations and receiving negative feedback was with me. Perhaps sensing my neutrality, as I was neither course instructor nor peer participant, he went out of his way to be nice to me. At resupply, a mistake was made with the food rations, and we ended up being one ration short for the last half of the course. That required rationing so that all course participants (excluding instructors since they organized their own food separate from students and researcher), myself included, would have an equal measure of food to eat, even if it was less than what had been planned. Brant, sensing, perhaps, an opportunity to experience some social success, reached out to me and started offering me his dessert. This pattern persisted throughout the remainder of the course, and it seemed clear that Brant had found a way to experience a positive interaction with someone on the trip; something he had struggled to do prior to resupply.

**Basic theme # 4: Disengaging from the group and from the experience.** With an awkward beginning during which Brant felt like a “third wheel,” significant, overt, and ongoing interpersonal conflict with one other course participant, and his failure to meet many of the expectations on the course held up by his peers and course instructors, Brant ended up spending a lot of his time alone. It seemed to be a form of avoidance, intended to minimize his exposure to negative interactions. He skipped out on important meetings, or when he did attend, he rarely paid attention. When attempting to fulfill leadership responsibilities (navigator, leader, sweep) or complete camp chores (cooking, cleaning up, erecting the bear fence, hauling water), he often failed to engage in a timely or meaningful way. After a hard day of hiking, he would often go off

by himself and jump around, explore his surroundings, throw rocks, or use his knife to whittle a stick. This behavior would likely have been okay with the group if he had helped first with camp chores or taken his leadership role more seriously. By going off on his own to “have fun” and by failing, as a consequence, to take care of his responsibilities, he created resentment among his peers earning a steady stream of complaints and negative feedback. The more negative the group became toward him the more he pulled away and disengaged.

When asked about his impact on the group and about the group’s impact on him, he had difficulty answering the question. It isn’t clear why this was the case but I think it was likely one or more of the following four reasons: First, he was having difficulty concentrating during the semi-structured interview which was conducted over the telephone and some of his answers to other questions were equally incomplete. Second, he simply lacked the insight to provide a meaningful answer to the question. Third, he was too uncomfortable thinking about the issue of his relationship to the course participants so he elected to not consider the question in order to avoid the negative feelings that might follow. Fourth, given his meaning-making at the 2<sup>nd</sup> order or consciousness, he simply lacked the ability to take in the points of view of others and coordinate them with his own. In other words, he was unable to practice cross-categorical thinking, and consequently, unable to coordinate perspectives.

CURT: How do you think the group affected you, Brant?

BRANT: I don’t think it affected me at all. I just had a brain fart.

CURT: In other words, do you think the group made a difference to you in some way? Did the group impact you in some way, or change your mind about anything?

BRANT: No. Not really, no.

CURT: How do you think you affected the group?

BRANT: I have no idea how I affected the group.

CURT: Do you have any sense of how you may have affected them?

BRANT: Not a clue. You'd have to ask people from the group.

CURT: So, no sense about how you may have affected them?

BRANT: No.

CURT: Any other ideas about how they may have affected you?

BRANT: No. (semi-structured interview, pp. 7-8)

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS: DEREK'S PROFILE

In this chapter I describe how Derek made sense of this wilderness backpacking experience.

For Derek, three organizing themes emerged including building self-confidence, opening up to the opportunity, and handling the course with ease. These three organizing themes and their variations (basic themes) as well as the global theme (making the best of it) are explored below and illustrated in Figure 3.

### **Global Theme: Making the Best of It**

Derek reports he was “strongly encouraged” to attend this course by his parents and he admitted that his initial response to their urging was irritation. He enjoyed summers on the island where he lives and he was looking forward to spending time relaxing with his friends and family after a stressful junior year in high school. Thinking this might be his last summer to enjoy his hometown before moving away to attend a post-secondary program, he had plans to work in the local grocery store, save money for a car, and spend time at the beach with his friends. I asked him if this was an attempt by his parents to reform some undesirable behavior, and he said it was not. He indicated his parents wanted him to have a positive experience during his last summer at home and they believed he would not do this unless pushed. Derek made, at least to some degree, a series of conscious decisions to make this unsolicited wilderness experience a positive one.

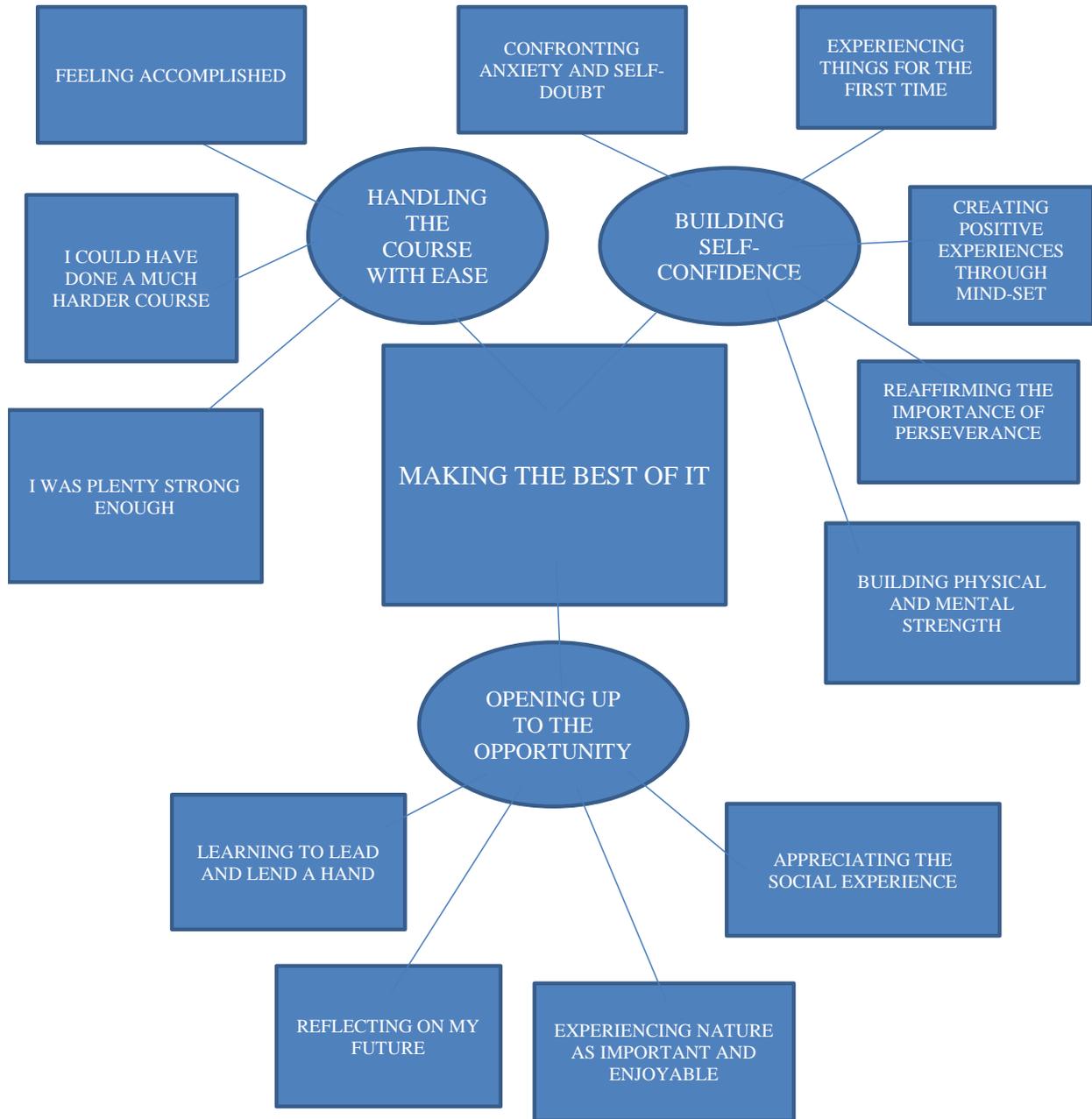


Figure 3. Derek's thematic network.

The three organizing themes explored below include: 1) building self-confidence, 2) opening up to the opportunity, and 3) handling the course with ease.

### **Organizing Theme # 1: Building Self-Confidence**

Derek admitted feeling somewhat worried when he first arrived in Calgary awaiting pick up by the Outward Bound (OB) staff. He was concerned he would be too “soft” to easily manage the physical demands of the course. He also worried that his three-week absence from home, friends, and family (the longest he had ever experienced) would make for an unpleasant trip into the mountains. His concerns were short-lived. He quickly realized he was physically capable and that he was more than able to manage his homesick feelings. Anxiety and apprehension quickly gave way to self-confidence and he ended up enjoying the trip far more than he thought he would. I will explore five basic themes below: 1) confronting anxiety and self-doubt, 2) experiencing things for the first time, 3) creating positive experiences through mind-set, 4) reaffirming the importance of perseverance, and 5) building physical and mental strength.

**Basic theme # 1: Confronting anxiety and self-doubt.** My first impression of Derek was that he felt uncomfortable out-of-doors, and seemed uneasy with what was coming (field notes, day 1, p. 2). He seemed apprehensive about the mental and physical challenges awaiting him, as this was his first backpacking trip. Derek had never spent more than two consecutive nights camping and that was done in proximity to the family vehicle. He also worried about how he would get along with the other students, and how he would manage the solitude while on solo. His initial anxiety, per his self-report and my own observations, was mild, and dissipated soon after the course began.

CURT: Before you actually got out here, what were you most concerned about or most upset about in terms of the thought of coming out here for such a long time?

DEREK: Probably the cardio, and the physical trek. I go mountain biking, but I'm definitely not that physical of a person. I'm kind of lazy. I go to the beach, sit around.

CURT: Were you worried?

DEREK: A little bit, but not too much. (SOI # 1, p. 2)

When I asked Derek what else he was nervous about, he mentioned the solo, stating "It will be a lot of time to myself" (SOI # 1, pp. 16-17), and "meeting new people" (SOI # 1, p. 15).

**Basic theme # 2: Experiencing things for the first time.** Derek stated there were a number of novel experiences he engaged in during the course. This OB course was his first backpacking trip, his first extended time living in the mountains, his first solo without the usual distractions of home, and his first hike to the top of a mountain. Managing these novel experiences helped shore up his self-confidence as he learned that he is capable of accomplishing tasks he perceives, at least initially, as difficult.

CURT: Other things about the solo that you may be a bit anxious about?

DEREK: Just being alone for that long without television or very obvious things to do that don't really require any effort. I'm going to have to entertain myself—that's going to be something I've never done before.

CURT: Oh you've never done that?

DEREK: No way. My parents will leave me at home for a few days, but that's like more of a good thing.

CURT: Television, iPad, music...

DEREK: I've got the fridge right there.

CURT: Fridge, food.

DEREK: Humongous speakers, that's all I need. Even if I had my mini speaker and iPod I would be looking forward to it big time. No way I was bringing that though—my mini speakers are actually pretty heavy.

CURT: So, it sounds like this is a novel experience, and you're a little bit nervous because you don't really know what to expect.

DEREK: Exactly, I don't know what to expect at all. (SOI # 1, p. 18)

**Basic theme # 3: Creating positive experiences through mind-set.** Given the fact that enrolling in the OB course was not Derek's idea, but his parents, he struggled initially with anger toward his mother and father for their decision. He had never been away from his friends for such a long time and he lacked confidence in how he would hold up physically. As the text below will show, Derek came mentally prepared for making the OB experience a positive one, even if his participation was pushed on him by his parents.

DEREK: Alright, I'll just start with #1, I guess, Angry. I was sent on this trip, but I'm making the best of it since this is such a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

CURT: So, going on the trip...sounds like it was not really your idea.

DEREK: It wasn't, but it's working out fine. I'm enjoying myself.

CURT: Initially how angry were you?

DEREK: I wasn't so much angry. It was a lot of summer I was missing, that I could be working, saving up for a car and stuff in the future, but it's alright. There's lots of time for that later in life, I'm sure.

CURT: It sounds like when it started off it was kind of a bummer, but you changed your mind about it. Can you help me understand why the change of heart about this?

DEREK: Because I didn't have that much of a choice; there's not much point in just being bummed about it for so long. You just accept it, right? Make the best of it.

CURT: I guess you figured that you had a choice: you could either be miserable because you got sent here—even though it really wasn't what you wanted to do, or...

DEREK: Actually have a good experience. (SOI # 1, p. 1)

He also spoke decisively about the importance of shaping one's experience through mindset, even if the experience is not a pleasant one. When anticipating the solo, something he

had considerable reservations about, he made it clear that his experience would depend mostly on his attitude and only to some degree on the circumstances of the solo (weather, location, stimulation from the natural environment, etc.)

DEREK: But no matter what happens I'll have to adapt to it and accept the situation—even if it's not that nice out, try and not have a bad time.

CURT: Why is that point of view important to you, to kind of roll with it and accept it?

DEREK: I think in life it's definitely pretty important to try and be more positive than anything because what's the point in being sad? You're not getting anything out of that.

CURT: Do you think you can decide how you're going to respond to something?

DEREK: Definitely, a little bit. If you're just like, 'Alright it's not even that bad,' it's probably not going to be that bad.

CURT: To what degree do you think you have control over how you feel about situations that might be a bit beyond your control?

DEREK: If it's like hurricanes, thunderstorms, I'm probably not going to be having the best time, but, even still, you kind of work with it, I guess.

CURT: So, it sounds like you're pretty intent on creating your own experience—at least to some degree.

DEREK: I definitely want to have a good experience.

CURT: So, to what degree do you think that's sort of a matter of your own mindset?

DEREK: I think you're mindset's everything!

CURT: Tell me more about that. What do you mean?

DEREK: Some people are not having a good time before they even get out in the wilderness. You've got to go at it with a positive mind, and you'll probably have a better time. (SOI #1, p. 18)

**Basic theme # 4: Reaffirming the importance of perseverance.** Derek went through three noticeable periods of frustration with the course; at the beginning as he was adjusting to being sent on the course by his parents, on day 13, when weather conditions (heavy rain, strong

winds, cold temperatures) were particularly difficult, and on day 17 as Derek led the group through challenging terrain without an adequate supply of water. Derek stated that giving up and going home early was never a serious option for him even though there were times he clearly would have preferred to be finished with the course and back at home among family and friends.

CURT: As far as finishing the course, how important was that to you?

DEREK: It was definitely super important. Not really anything I'd considered; it was just going to happen.

CURT: It was never really on your mind that you might quit?

DEREK: No, not really an option.

CURT: I know the one conversation we had, you mentioned that quitting is not really a part of your vocabulary, is it?

DEREK: Not something I really enjoy doing.

CURT: Yeah. And why is it important for you to finish things that you start?

DEREK: It's a personal goal.

CURT: It's a personal goal because...

DEREK: I don't know. It's just who I am, I guess.

CURT: Any other reason why finishing the course was important to you?

DEREK: Definitely a bit of pride.

CURT: Tell me more about that.

DEREK: Just to be able to say that I did that.

CURT: And that's important to you because...

DEREK: It's kind of cool; it's kind of a cool thing to be able to say, and looks good on a resume.

CURT: It sounds like finishing what you start is pretty important to you.

DEREK: Definitely, when it comes to larger things.

CURT: Other reasons you think that's the case?

DEREK: It's a family thing, I guess.

CURT: What do you mean, 'a family thing?'

DEREK: My dad and mom are like that too. We like to finish things we start.

CURT: So they hang in there even if it's tough?

DEREK: Yeah, definitely. (SOI # 2, pp. 6-7)

**Basic theme # 5: Building mental and physical strength.** Derek noted that the course helped him develop his physical and mental strength. Carrying a heavy pack several hours each day through mountainous terrain was challenging, though not as much as he initially anticipated. He appreciated the improvement in his physical condition, as he had plans for working as a tree planter the following summer, and he thought the course was good preparation and training for that endeavor.

CURT: Anything else about this experience that you expect will help you feel a sense of pride and achievement?

DEREK: Definitely just getting stronger and getting into better physical shape.

CURT: Why is that important to you?

DEREK: I'm probably going to go tree-planting next year, and in my future it's definitely going to be kind of crucial. (SOI # 1, p. 4)

In addition to improvements in his physical strength and endurance, Derek noted the mental development he made on the course. He stated that managing the physical demands of the course depended mostly on mental attitude.

CURT: As far as the physical demands of the course, what was at stake for you? Because you were trying to size up whether you would have the physical capacity to complete the trip.

DEREK: It was basically all mental. I thought it was going to be a lot harder than it was, but it really turned out not to be that bad. (SOI # 2, p. 6)

He went on to say that his mental strength increased because of the necessity of learning to get along with others who were different.

CURT: What other changes did you notice in yourself, as a result of the course?

DEREK: Well, definitely, just getting physically stronger.

CURT: Any other changes?

DEREK: Maybe I got a little bit more mentally accepting of others.

CURT: How so?

DEREK: Getting along with all sorts of different kinds of people, and whatnot.

CURT: How did the course push you to do that?

DEREK: Just because you're with the same people every day; so, even if you're not very similar to them, you have to get along with them and form a good relationship. (semi-structured interview, p. 2)

## **Organizing Theme #2: Opening Up to the Opportunity**

Even though Derek's parents were the primary reason Derek showed up for this three-week expedition on a hot day in July, 2015, he decided, from early in the course, to make the best of it. He did this by opening up to the experiences awaiting him and by thinking about the trip as an opportunity to grow. During the three-week course he found a way to appreciate the social experience, decided that experiencing nature is important and enjoyable, reflected on his future, and learned to lead and lend a hand. These four basic themes will be explored below.

**Basic theme # 1: Appreciating the social experience.** At the beginning of the trip, Derek expressed concern that it might be hard for him to make friends given the small number of peers on the course (SOI # 1, p. 13). As it turned out, Derek was popular with the others, and quickly made friends. Throughout most of the course Derek maintained a positive attitude toward the other students. He seemed genuinely pleased that nearly all of the students who started the course completed it.

CURT: What about moved/touched?

DEREK: Just watching everyone finish the course because I knew they could do it.

CURT: Why did that move you?

DEREK: It's just cool to see. Some of the people I didn't think they were going to pull through and finish it, but they all did. Good for them. (SOI # 2, p. 11)

Another part of the social experience that Derek commented on was the diversity he encountered among the other students (SOI # 1, p. 16). While these differences initially surprised him, it turned out that it made the expedition more interesting and helped him more readily accept persons who see the world differently than he does.

Another aspect of the social experience that Derek called attention to was the importance of the moral support he received from others. He mentioned that the positive attitude of peers and instructors helped motivate him when he was tired from the exertion and frustrated with the difficulties encountered.

CURT: How do you think the group affected you?

DEREK: I don't know. Definitely helped me keep on trekking when I was feeling tired.

CURT: How did it do that for you?

DEREK: Certain people were really positive all the time.

CURT: And you found that helpful?

DEREK: Yeah, definitely.

CURT: And it was helpful because...

DEREK: It just keeps you going, when everyone's in a good mood. (semi-structured interview, p. 5)

**Basic theme # 2: Experiencing nature as important and enjoyable.** Derek arrived for his OB course with no backpacking experience and no extended time in wilderness. The extent of his time outdoors was constituted by casual mountain bike forays into the woods surrounding his island home in British Columbia and lazy days at the beach soaking up summer sunshine with high school friends.

Derek commented on his enjoyment of what he saw while trekking through the Ghost River Wilderness. The scenery from the summit of Black Rock Mountain was a highlight, made all the more impressive by its commanding view of the entire hiking route some 10 days into the course.

CURT: What do you think it is about the course that you were on that makes the difference? In other words, what were parts of the course that you think were the most transformative, or the most powerful?

DEREK: Black Rock was definitely pretty significant, just because I didn't think a few people were going to make it to the top. But they ended up getting there.

CURT: Other reasons why Black Rock was such an important part of the course?

DEREK: It was pretty significant to see where we started, 10 days before, and people could look at the whole path we'd taken to get there.

CURT: Did it help you put it in perspective and realize how much you had achieved?

DEREK: Yeah, definitely.

CURT: Was it that ability to be up high, and to actually see where we had started and how far we'd come, that made a difference?

DEREK: Yeah, definitely a combination.

CURT: Were there other things about climbing that peak that you think spoke to you, or were powerful, in your experience?

DEREK: Not really, just pretty cool to be up that high, and see where we camped the night before. (semi-structured interview, pp. 5-6)

He went on to share how impressed he was with another mountain scene. It was a canyon we hiked to on day eight that was littered with enormous blocks of rock that had let loose from the vertical walls above. Many of the blocks resting on the valley floor were the size of a small house and this sight made a lasting impression on Derek. When gazing upon the aftermath of these cataclysmic rock slides, Derek mused that the scene was "pretty cool indeed" (semi-structured interview, p. 3)

Derek arrived at the course no fan of hiking, but to his surprise, he ended up enjoying it; enough so that he intended to continue hiking once home. This new-found interest seemed related to the physical fitness required and achieved and the satisfying views experienced along the way, especially when hiking to lofty summits.

DEREK: My optimism, when it comes to hiking, was improved a lot, along with my physical stature.

CURT: When you say your 'optimism,' do you mean your attitude toward it?

DEREK: Yeah, definitely. I didn't really enjoy hiking before, but it's definitely something I'd do again.

CURT: And you'd do it again because...

DEREK: It's pretty satisfying to get to the top of a mountain or a summit. You get some pretty incredible views.

CURT: What is it about the incredible views that stir you so? Why are they important to you?

DEREK: It's really cool to see nature at its finest. A lot of people live in cities their whole lives, and never get to see that. (SOI # 2, p. 13)

Derek also spoke about how relaxing the course was. He referred to the rhythm of wilderness travel, and the tranquility that comes with leading a simple life. He was able to focus almost entirely on the basics of food, shelter, water, and travel and this simplicity helped him relax. Derek found this aspect of the course deeply satisfying.

CURT: How do you think the course affected you personally?

DEREK: It was definitely a pretty good experience, spending a lot of time outdoors in the mountains. Pretty cool.

CURT: Did you notice any changes in yourself that you think came as a result of the course?

DEREK: Maybe it made me a bit more relaxed.

CURT: How so?

DEREK: I didn't really have any worries out there; you're just trekking every day. Kind of got a very basic routine to get into. (semi-structured interview, p. 2)

**Basic theme # 3: Reflecting on my future.** Derek reported some anxiety as he anticipated the 36-hour solo that began in the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup> day and lasted until the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> day. He felt worried about being alone that long with "nothing to do" (SOI # 2, p. 3).

Upon conclusion of the solo Derek joked that one thing he learned about himself while on solo was that he could "spend 36 hours with nothing to do and not die!" (SOI # 2, p. 4). On a more serious note, he reported that all that time alone provided him with an opportunity to think about his future after high school. Although the solo did not result in an epiphany or profound discovery it did clarify some of his options.

CURT: What else did the experience (solo) tell you about yourself, relative to becoming more optimistic and knowing that, physically, you can do something hard?

DEREK: I guess, mentally, it's cool to know what you're capable of, and what you really enjoy doing in life.

CURT: And that matters to you because...

DEREK: It helps me know where I want to go in my future, and what I want to do for a living.

CURT: And, at this stage in your life, that's important to you because...

DEREK: It's definitely something I have to start thinking about soon, as I get to the end of high school.

CURT: Do you think this course helped you sort that out at all? I know that you said you spent a little bit of time thinking about it on the solo.

DEREK: A little bit.

CURT: Yeah?

DEREK: Kind of helped me a little bit more.

CURT: What do you think it was about the course that helped you sort some of that out?

DEREK: Probably the solo. It was a lot of time by myself to think. (SOI # 2, p. 14)

Derek also called attention to the time spent reflecting during our last rest day. On day 20 we spent the entire day in camp with no agenda except preparing breakfast and dinner. I asked Derek about the most transformative components of the course, and he answered that climbing Black Rock and interacting with the instructors constituted the most powerful aspects of the course. I then asked him what the high points of the course were and he mentioned this rest day just one day prior to the completion of the course. It seems this was important to him because he likes to relax and the rest day provided a time and space to reflect on the course and his memories of the experience.

CURT: What was the high point of the course for you, Derek?

DEREK: Definitely when we split up in our two groups, and we got to have that day on the rock, not really doing anything.

CURT: You mean the day in camp, the next-to-last day?

DEREK: Indeed, yeah.

CURT: Where we had a pretty low-key day. That was a high point?

DEREK: That was a pretty good day.

CURT: And that was a pretty good day because...

DEREK: It kind of symbolized the whole wrap-up of the trip. It gave us lots of time to think about all the good memories.

CURT: Are you glad that we stayed in two extra days, or would you have rather gone out with the younger group?

DEREK: I'm glad we stayed those extra days. (semi-structured interview, pp. 6-7)

**Basic theme # 4: Learning to lead and lend a hand.** Derek, from the beginning, helped out with camp chores, was usually packed up and on time for hiking, provided direction to others when things needed to be done, engaged meaningfully in the trip meetings, and attempted to take his leadership roles seriously. There were only a few times during the course when I noted behavior that seemed either insensitive or irresponsible. The most noteworthy was on day 17, after descending into Exshaw Creek from Exshaw Pass. Cooper was leader of the day and struggled to hold it together. Sensing this, Derek stepped in and took charge, allowing Cooper to fall back to the middle of the hiking group. As Derek led the group on what turned out to be the longest hiking day of the course, his concern for others steadily diminished as the day wore on. Ordinarily the leader would keep the last hiker within earshot, a safety measure introduced early in the course. But Derek hiked on with little regard for the ever-increasing distance between the front and the back of the pack. At the behest of the rest of the group Derek finally stopped to

allow the trailing hikers to catch up. Upon their arrival, his comments to them directly and under his breath were marked by impatience and irritation, making an already difficult day even worse.

But for the most part, Derek appeared to have earned the respect of his fellow students and instructors by way of his strong performance on the course. When asked what role he played in the group, Derek responded:

DEREK: At the beginning I was just mingling, but towards the end I definitely had more of a leadership role, when we entered final.

CURT: What are your thoughts and feelings about the role that you ended up playing?

DEREK: Well I wasn't really trying to necessarily play a role—just helping that group get to where we needed to go, make good time, and whatnot.

CURT: The role of leader that you ended up adopting...any thoughts or feelings about that?

DEREK: What do you mean?

CURT: In terms of the experience and what it was like.

DEREK: I don't know. It was pretty good. Definitely didn't carry all the weight, but enjoyed helping out and watching the group succeed.

CURT: And that was important to you because...

DEREK: It's just easier on everyone when everyone's having a good time. (semi-structured interview, p. 4)

When asked how he had affected the group, Derek called attention to the work he had done early on with the younger members of the expedition. On day three, when the younger group joined the older group, Derek stepped in, as the instructors met to discuss the trip, and helped orient and integrate the younger campers (semi-structured interview, p. 5). He taught them some of the basic skills of cooking and cleaning, and showed them around the campground.

Derek also led others by maintaining a positive attitude, setting an example for students who might be struggling with physical exhaustion or with feelings of frustration.

### **Organizing Theme # 3: Handling the Course with Ease**

Derek reported the course to be easier than anticipated. He expected the physical demands of carrying a pack through the mountains to be much harder than it was. Consequently, his self-confidence grew quickly and he was able to maintain, with a few notable exceptions, a positive attitude throughout the course.

**Basic theme # 1: I was plenty strong enough.** Though Derek expressed initial anxiety over his ability to adapt to the physical demands of the course, his fear soon gave way to relief that the course was not as difficult as imagined, and to confidence that he was strong enough to manage. He also noted that, to his surprise, the physical demands of the course were not as much an issue for him as the mental challenges he faced. Maintaining a positive attitude in the face of long and difficult days seemed to be the harder course element, and the aspect he came to understand as the primary challenge. In the excerpt below Derek calls attention to the physical difficulties imagined and realized.

CURT: “Any other things that either surprised you or didn’t meet your expectations?”

DEREK: I definitely thought I was going to have a harder time with the physical part of it, but it wasn’t even that bad” (semi-structured interview, p. 1).

In this next excerpt, Derek refers to the mental challenges of the course being more significant than the physical challenges. For Derek, the mental challenges were constituted by a number of perceived difficulties: 1) maintaining a positive attitude in light of the fact he was sent on the course by his parents against his wishes, 2) managing his frustration when he was tired, hungry and bored with hiking, 3) keeping his cool when other students engaged in behavior that

annoyed him, and 4) being away from home for such a long time and missing his friends and family.

CURT: As far as the physical demands of the course, what was at stake for you? Because you were trying to size up whether you would have the physical capacity to complete the trip.

DEREK: It was basically all mental. I thought it was going to be a lot harder than it was, but it really turned out not to be that bad. (SOI # 2, p. 5)

**Basic theme # 2: I could have done a much harder course.** Derek seemed clear, at least after the course was over, that the course could have been a lot harder than it was. He found the challenges of the course to be in his “green zone,” referencing a teaching tool used by the instructors to indicate the degree to which a student was struggling with the course. The green zone is within one’s comfort zone. The yellow zone suggests being just outside one’s comfort. The red zone implies great difficulty, which may lead to a total shut-down. Derek described most of his experiences on the course as occurring within his green zone.

CURT: What aspects of the course were challenging and disorienting?

DEREK: I don’t know, I didn’t find it to be that challenging of a course, other than the physical aspects.

CURT: Do you think it could’ve been made to be quite a bit more challenging than it was?

DEREK: It could’ve been, yeah. (semi-structured interview, p. 8)

**Basic theme # 3: Feeling accomplished.** As he reflected on the course, Derek noted several things he felt proud of. The most important accomplishment was completing the course. This was a reinforcement of his identity as someone who doesn’t quit, as a person who finishes what he starts.

CURT: Important to me?

DEREK: Definitely just finishing the course, to be able to say that I did something like that is pretty cool.

CURT: When you say it's 'pretty cool' to be able to say that you finished it, help me understand that a little bit more. It's cool because...

DEREK: If I had just come back and said, 'Oh yeah, I didn't even finish the course. I just quit,' that's pretty lame, right?

CURT: And it would be lame for you because...

DEREK: It's who I am. I just don't like to quit things.

CURT: In other words, it would've been contrary to the way you see yourself?

DEREK: Yeah, definitely. (SOI # 2, p. 15)

Derek also took pride in his physical strength and the ease with which he managed the rigors of wilderness backpacking.

CURT: "What did that experience tell you about yourself?"

DEREK: Just that I can do it. I can make the trek...very able-bodied" (SOI # 2, p. 5).

Additionally, summiting Black Rock Mountain was a highlight as it allowed him to see the vast distance he had travelled in reaching that point. It was also the first mountain he had climbed and its difficulty reinforced his sense of competence and strength.

DEREK: Ok, Success. Summiting Black Rock, that was pretty cool.

CURT: And that was cool because...

DEREK: It was just a crazy accomplishment. We were sitting down at the camp, and you could look up at this massive mountain, and it was like, 'Oh, we climbed that yesterday.'

CURT: It was pretty big, wasn't it?

DEREK: It's pretty big.

CURT: What was the best part about that experience for you?

DEREK: Looking over from the top and seeing that green house where we started, and the first campsite. That was pretty cool.

CURT: And that was cool because...

DEREK: Just to see how far we'd come. It looked very, very far away. (SOI # 2, p. 5)

Finally, Derek felt proud of the group and his contribution in helping the group complete the course together. He exercised leadership in an attempt to help others keep going when the hiking was hard. That everyone finished the course (except for the one girl who left the course before the hiking portion began) was a source of pride for Derek and yet another aspect of his sense of accomplishment.

CURT: What about moved/touched?

DEREK: Just watching everyone finish the course because I knew they could do it.

CURT: Why did that move you?

DEREK: It's just cool to see. Some of the people I didn't think they were going to pull through and finish it, but they all did. Good for them. (SOI # 2, p. 11)

## CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS: KEVIN'S PROFILE

In this chapter I describe how Kevin made sense of this wilderness backpacking experience.

For Kevin, two organizing themes emerged including pushing limits and having fun while building a better life. These two organizing themes and their seven variations (basic themes) as well as the global theme (living life to the fullest) are explored below and illustrated in Figure 4.

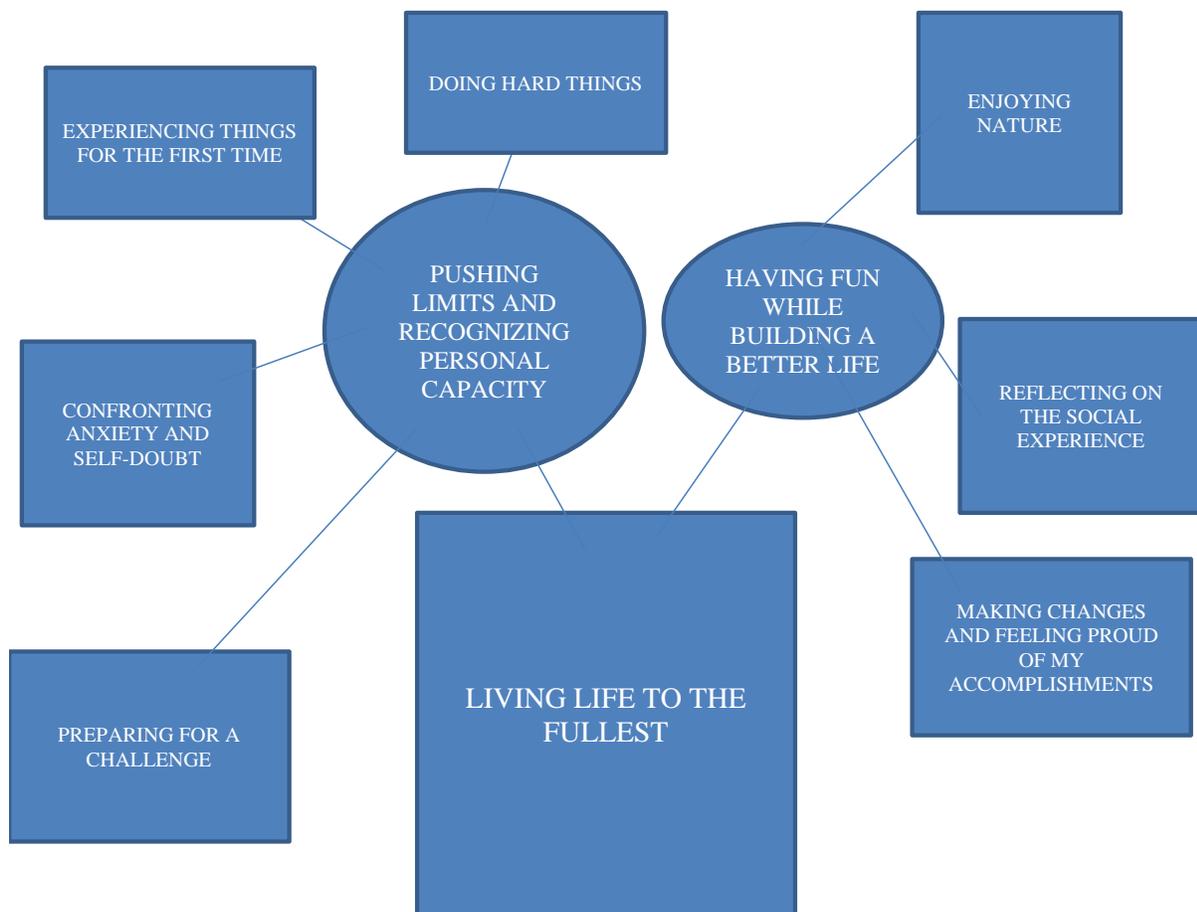


Figure 4. Kevin's thematic network.

### **Global Theme: Living Life to the Fullest**

For Kevin, “living life to the fullest” captured the driving force behind his participation in the Outward Bound (OB) course. Living in an upper-middle class suburban household, with parents who worked as attorneys, Kevin acknowledged a significant measure of respect for his parent’s success, and was keen to follow their example. So when they encouraged him to accrue as many diverse experiences as possible, one means, they believed, of achieving the “fullness” of life, he readily agreed to their suggestion of participating in this OB course.

CURT: Experiencing more in life matters to you because...

KEVIN: Because life is very important, and living it to your fullest is something I like to accomplish, and I have a lot of time left to do that.

CURT: I’m curious. Why does that matter to you as much as it does?

KEVIN: Why does it matter that much?

CURT: Yeah, to you. Because maybe to some people it wouldn’t be a big deal, but for you it sounds like it’s really important, and I just want to understand, as best I can, why living life to the fullest is important to you.

KEVIN: I think it’s a one-chance thing, and I think I’d rather kick the bucket knowing a lot than knowing a little, or having more experiences.

CURT: And, again, I’m pushing you a bit here because I’m curious, why having more experiences—looking back at your life when you’re at the threshold of death, as you put it ‘kicking the bucket,’ looking back on your life and saying, ‘wow, I did a lot’—matters to you.

KEVIN: I think it just matters because it’s the same thing that my parents have done. I think I got that from my parents, possibly.

CURT: Do you mean, that seems to be the way your parents lead their lives?

KEVIN: Yeah. I also agree, so I would like to do the same.

CURT: Do you mean that their example has been a powerful influence on you, and it makes sense to you?

KEVIN: Yeah.

CURT: And you're interested in following their lead on this because you've watched them do it and it makes sense. It looks like the right thing to do.

KEVIN: Yeah. (SOI # 2, pp. 11-12)

The two organizing themes explored below include: 1) pushing limits and recognizing personal capacity, and 2) having fun while building a better life.

### **Organizing Theme # 1: Pushing Limits and Recognizing Personal Capacity**

Kevin stated that he expected the OB course to push him to do things that were frightening, novel, and difficult and that this expectation of being pushed was one of the primary reasons he attended the OB course. He endorsed the belief that the “whole point of the Outward Bound trip is to do what you're capable of” (semi-structured interview, p. 17). Kevin stated he had goals prior to embarking on the OB course, goals which included: 1) wanting to become a better team player, or someone who is more helpful, 2) wanting to become a better leader, and 3) wanting to become more optimistic and tolerant. He also endorsed learning more about himself as an important objective for the course. He viewed the physical and mental challenges that he might encounter on this OB course as a suitable crucible for the kinds of changes he had in mind. And as it turned out, ascending Black Rock Mountain proved to be the ultimate test of his grit and provided the basis for his chief learning experience: that he is capable of far more than he thought.

CURT: I'm curious, what was the best part of summiting Black Rock for you?

KEVIN: I think it was the view, and knowing that I have accomplished something huge.

CURT: And ‘accomplishing something huge,’ as you put it, that was important to you because...

KEVIN: It was important because I've never climbed a mountain before, and climbing a mountain that's 2.5 km high for your first mountain is, I think, a pretty good accomplishment. I felt very good about myself after summiting Black Rock, and knowing that hard things that happen back at home are not as hard as things that you could probably be doing.

CURT: Do you think that it was a way of telling yourself that, even if things are really difficult, you can still do them?

KEVIN: Yeah.

CURT: And that if you just hang in there, you'll get through it?

KEVIN: Yeah.

CURT: Wow. And that's an important lesson for you because...

KEVIN: It's an important lesson because it tells me that I can accomplish more. Don't limit yourself; try new things. I think you shouldn't be limiting yourself and you should believe in yourself, that you can do more than what you think. That's what I think. (SOI # 2, p. 11)

**Basic theme # 1: Preparing for a challenge.** Kevin reported taking pride in being a self-disciplined person who takes his responsibilities seriously. He recounted the preparation he undertook in a variety of situations including making good grades in middle school in preparation for entering high school, spending nearly two hours per day for two weeks rehearsing a speech he gave to his graduating class, and preparing for this OB course by breaking in his hiking boots, running 3 km per day, and studying the birds he was likely to encounter on the course.

KEVIN: I think, that I like to be prepared for things, to keep myself relaxed and have an understanding of what's coming. Just like on this trip, I did a little bit of research of this trip before I came here, so I have a sense of what's going to happen.

CURT: Knowing, having some idea of what's coming is important to you. Why does that matter so much to you?

KEVIN: Sometimes it's fun to not know what's coming because, in life, you can't know exactly what's coming, but I think it's good to have a strong understanding of what's

going to happen because it gives you something to work with. If you know you're going to be setting up a tent, looking for a camp area from a certain distance, you would have less trouble getting confused on that way.

CURT: In other words, if you have an idea of what you're looking for, it's easier to make good decisions about where to set up your camp?

KEVIN: Yeah.

CURT: What's the best thing - for you - about being prepared?

KEVIN: How relaxed you feel. (SOI # 1, pp. 1-2)

**Basic theme # 2: Confronting anxiety and self-doubt.** Kevin acknowledged having many fears and anxieties related to the course as this was his first wilderness backpacking experience. He mentioned feeling afraid of the solo, because he had never before been alone for 36 hours. He talked about feeling afraid of getting separated from the group and becoming lost. He expressed fear over the possibility of wild animal encounters, fearing he may be injured in an attack. He expressed anxiety about getting caught in harsh weather. Finally, he reported feeling anxious that he might not be up to the task physically, and as a consequence, might be "left behind" and become separated from the group. These anxieties were substantial for Kevin and provided at least some of the motivation for his pre-course preparation.

CURT: Were there things that you were concerned about before starting the course?

KEVIN: I was concerned about the solo.

CURT: And you were concerned about the solo because...

KEVIN: Because I haven't stayed alone for two days before, in my life—especially in the woods.

CURT: What were you most worried about as you thought about doing that?

KEVIN: Something happening to me. (semi-structured interview, p. 2)

**Basic theme # 3: Experiencing things for the first time.** Most of the experiences Kevin had on the OB course were new to him: multi-day hiking with a heavy pack, climbing a mountain, cooking his own food, living in the mountains for an extended period, struggling to find water, learning to navigate, managing animal hazards, and the like. Kevin found these experiences deeply satisfying, and talked about them as a way of learning more about himself; what he likes, what he doesn't like, what he is good at and what might need some work. For Kevin, increased self-awareness was one of the important lessons learned on the course.

CURT: Why do you think that climbing Black Rock mountain was important to you?

KEVIN: First of all, it's the first mountain I've ever climbed.

CURT: And that's important because...

KEVIN: That means I've tried something new, and I've enjoyed it.

CURT: Why is it important to you to try new things?

KEVIN: People could tell you what it's like to climb a mountain, but, until you do it, you can't be 100% sure what it's like to actually climb a mountain. Doing it yourself gives you the full experience.

CURT: Why was it important for you to have the full experience, to be able to know it instead of just to think about it?

KEVIN: From what people tell you about climbing a mountain, they're probably going to give you the things that were really hard, and they wouldn't pay so much attention on the positive things. If you do it yourself, you know for yourself there are positives, and pros and cons to climbing and mountain. You know if you would like to do it again, or not; and I'd like to do it again.

CURT: And you'd like to do it again because...

KEVIN: I think being that high up is really cool. It's also a challenge to get up there. I also enjoy the challenge. (semi-structured interview, p. 10)

But it wasn't just the increased self-knowledge he attained that made an impression. He spoke of the new experiences he accrued as life changing, noting they had expanded his sense of the possible.

CURT: So, again, those new experiences matter to you because...

KEVIN: The new experiences matter because it's changed my life completely. It's the first time this has ever happened to me.

CURT: So, what does this experience tell you about yourself, that having new experiences is important, that getting out of your comfort zone is important?

KEVIN: The most important thing that you should learn from the trip is that you are capable of more things than you think you are. (SOI # 1, pp. 20-21)

**Basic theme # 4: Doing hard things.** Kevin admitted that the course was hard for him. He also reported feeling considerable self-doubt regarding his ability to manage course expectations. The fact that the course was hard for him, per his own report, was one of the chief reasons he learned and grew as much as he did.

He talked about the difficulty of the solo and how hard it was to be alone, free from the electronic distractions to which most teens are accustomed, a reality he marked up as the "main reason that the course changes you in a good way" (semi-structured interview, p. 8). He recounted the difficulty of adjusting his expectations regarding when the hiking day would end as we discovered our proposed campsite had no water.

KEVIN: Ok. Sad? I think the only sad thing...was finding a campsite and then not finding water at the campsite. It was the only sad thing that happened on the trip.

CURT: And you felt sad because...

KEVIN: Because we put a lot of time and dedication to finding a camp spot on the map that would be suitable for us, and then knowing the fact that what's on the map is not what's actually there, the water's not actually there. This was, first of all, misleading; and second of all, we realized there was no water. The group morale dropped. We're all

pumped to put up tents, camp in one km, we're all super pumped and then you get there and you just see a bunch of rocks, and everybody literally stops and sits down, takes off their backpacks and just lies there. (SOI # 2, p. 16)

Kevin mentioned that he was always hungry and that the mistake around rations was a hard error to accept. He reported that travelling and living in the mountains, generally, are really hard things to do; much harder than the summer camps he had attended since childhood. Finally, he talked about the most difficult experience he encountered on the course:

CURT: Other things about the course that you think made it the experience that it was, or produce the effects that it did?

KEVIN: Being in the mountains, and climbing a mountain, is a really hard thing to do. It teaches you that, if you work hard, there's always a reward. In this case it would be climbing Black Rock, to see all of Calgary in one blink of an eye. You could see Calgary with the naked eye.

CURT: Would you say that Black Rock was the hardest thing on the trip?

KEVIN: I think Black Rock was the hardest thing on the trip. (semi-structured interview, p. 9)

## **Organizing Theme # 2: Having Fun While Building a Better Life**

During the first interview near the beginning of the course, Kevin stated, "I think I'm going to end up liking camping after this" (SOI # 1, p. 26). As he settled into the rhythm of wilderness travel, he relaxed and seemed to genuinely enjoy the trip. Though there were difficulties throughout the course including a lack of water, shortages of food, bickering among course students, and all the usual challenges of self-propelled wilderness travel, he reported having a really good time, stating afterwards that "the trip was pretty much 99% fun" (SOI # 2, p. 16). As a part of his effort to have fun on the course, he fell into the self-proclaimed role of "course comedian," engaging in a variety of juvenile behaviors that he and a handful of course participants found amusing. While hiking, and as a way of "promoting group morale" Kevin

loudly repeated words or phrases over and over again (e.g., “Ball!” or “Yah!”) laughing conspicuously and often, with one or two peers giggling alongside. This behavior became tiresome and irritating to me, and perhaps to others, and I often found myself wishing his tongue would stop working so that I might enjoy a few moments of quiet. But in spite of his numerous and often brash expressions of immaturity, there appeared to be an earnest construction project underway, hidden largely from view (mine anyways) that came to light only upon conclusion of the course during the closing circle and again, and in more detail during our post-course interviews. What follows is a look into his enjoyment of nature, his reflections upon the social relationships in which he was engaged, and the changes he claims to have made that led to a real sense of accomplishment.

**Basic theme # 1: Enjoying nature.** Kevin’s enjoyment of nature centered around three facets of the outdoor experience: managing difficult challenges, enjoying the scenery of the Ghost River Wilderness, and viewing wildlife.

Kevin made it clear that wilderness living and travel was hard and that it was, at least in part, the difficulty of the experience that made the course so enjoyable and deeply satisfying. As was previously stated, Kevin’s most difficult experience on the course was climbing Black Rock Mountain. The hike is rated as moderate to difficult, depending on the guide book consulted, is 11.4 km round trip, and entails an elevation gain of nearly 1000 meters. Once above tree line, the trail steepens considerably and consists of significant stretches of talus. Though exposure is minimal, there is the sense, especially for first time mountaineers, that the route is dangerous. Though slipping on loose rock was an ever-present possibility, at least on the upper slopes, falling and suffering injury was both improbable and, with a few exceptions, of mostly low consequence should a slip actually occur. The more significant objective danger was weather

related. While lingering on the summit and taking in the spectacular views, weather moved in bringing with it the worrisome electrical activity that can quickly spoil a day of climbing fun. The scenery from the summit was likely the best of the entire course, with commanding views of Devil's Head, Mount Costigan, Mount Alymer, the Ghost River Valley, and our entire route since our first day of backpacking. The incoming weather added a measure of uncertainty to the experience and insured that the summit would be memorable. Kevin recounts some of his thoughts and feelings related to hiking to the summit of Black Rock Mountain.

CURT: Yeah, so what's next?

KEVIN: Anxious.

CURT: Ok.

KEVIN: Or Nervous, sorry. Anxious, Nervous. I think I was very nervous and anxious when I was walking up Black Rock because we were all walking up from the last part, where it's pretty steep. We're all walking up at a pretty quick pace, and my legs were getting really tired, and I thought I was going to get left behind. Everybody else is in perfect condition, or whatever. Then we get to the top of the mountain, and I think I asked Derek if he was tired while he was walking up Black Rock. He told me it was indeed hard, but he kept saying to himself, the rest of the group keeps going. If you're climbing up a mountain and everybody's tired, and one person opens up and says they're tired, and then everybody thinks that now's the time to talk about how tired you are, and then that slows down the group.

CURT: It sounds like going up Black Rock, you felt nervous because you found yourself getting really tired, and you were worried that the group might leave you behind because you would be unable to keep up?

KEVIN: Yeah.

CURT: What was the worst part about that, worrying that the group might leave you behind? What would've been the worst part about that?

KEVIN: I think it would feel very lonely if I was left behind at all. Summiting Black Rock was the biggest achievement that we've achieved on the trip. Did you guys climb any mountains after we left?

CURT: No.

KEVIN: You didn't?

CURT: Nope. So Black Rock was definitely the high point in terms of climbing.

KEVIN: Yeah. And I think the best part of the trip was climbing Black Rock.

CURT: So, if you had not been able to reach the summit...

KEVIN: It would've been a bummer.

CURT: It would have been a bummer because...

KEVIN: Because you just missed out one of the best things that's going to happen to you on the trip. (SOI # 2, pp. 8-9)

Kevin also reveled in seeing wildlife, noting a particular fascination with birds. He signed up to do an independent study in birdwatching. He prepared by developing a list of common summer birds of the Rocky Mountains, and by practicing his birding technique during training hikes at home. In the excerpt below, Kevin describes his experience viewing wildlife while on the 36-hour solo. He conveys some of the enjoyment he experienced in watching birds go about their business in a natural setting.

KEVIN: Another thing...I don't remember the name of the birds, but there were these birds that would take a bug and take it up to a tree so they could come back to eat it later.

CURT: Oh really?

KEVIN: A bunch of them would fly in around noon, and they would just start eating off the pine trees. There was also a robin mending its nest.

CURT: Nearby where you set up your tarp?

KEVIN: Yeah.

CURT: Was that cool to watch?

KEVIN: Yeah, it was cool to watch. I watched for like two hours, at least. (semi-structured interview, p. 14)

**Basic theme # 2: Reflecting on the social experience.** Near the end of his first SOI,

Kevin summed up things that matter most to him:

CURT: We have time for one more card. You want to pick one more?

KEVIN: I think it was Important to Me. I don't know if I did that. Important To Me is kind of obvious after this entire interview: friends, family, and memories. Those are like the three key and very important things. (SOI # 1, p. 24)

In line with his stated priorities, making friends on the course figured prominently for him. He was outgoing and seemed to enjoy engaging with peers on the course. He believed that the intensity and duration of the course made for closer friendships than he was accustomed to, which was something he appreciated. He also noted how the course length made it hard for others to “put on a fake mask,” stating he wanted to be friends with a real person, not a semblance of one.

KEVIN: I think this memory is going to stay with me for life.

CURT: Yeah? You mean that this is going to be a really important one?

KEVIN: Yeah.

CURT: Why do you think this will be so important to you?

KEVIN: Because it's doing something like this, and you have friends in this kind of situation. You usually have a really strong friendship connection because you're doing all these hard things together, and you're setting up tents together, making food together. Everybody's working together. It's not like a classroom where you go in the morning to do class with them, and then you just leave.

CURT: So you think the nature of the experience we're having is going to bring you and the others really closely together? And again, that's very important to you, isn't it?

KEVIN: Some people like to act like somebody they're not, but I don't think anybody here has what it takes to be acting for 17 days or 21 days.

CURT: People are not going to be able to put on a false front, are they? Not for that length of time. So, you think that you're going to see the real deal?

KEVIN: Yeah.

CURT: And why is that so important to you?

KEVIN: Because you don't want to be friends with somebody and then realize they're not who they say they are. But so far I've been liking everyone. I don't think anybody's been putting on a fake mask or anything.

CURT: So, what do you think the best thing about this experience has been so far?

KEVIN: So far...right now it's just been making the new friends and also sleeping in the tent with your friends. That's very fun because you get to talk to them about where you're from, and things like that, inside the tent. (SOI # 1, p. 25)

Kevin shared his thoughts and feelings about the interpersonal dynamics that played out on the course between and among his peers that, in his view, negatively affected his own experience. There were two peers in particular, Brant and Cassie, (the only other female student was asked to leave the course on day four), who struggled throughout the course. They were often involved in "bickering" and exchanges of vitriol. Cassie was especially derisive and continued, throughout the course, to pepper Brant with scathing and scornful comments. Kevin's chief complaint about this was that the negativity between these two peers throughout the course compromised his own experience.

CURT: Torn?

KEVIN: Torn. I think I felt torn whenever Cassie and Brant started fighting, during the trip. It happened a couple of times, I think.

CURT: You felt torn in what way?

KEVIN: That people were not getting along on the trip. I thought all the problems would be solved by the end of the trip, but clearly it didn't.

CURT: And why was it important to you, that all the problems be solved by the end of the trip?

KEVIN: Because that way you know that when you leave, and say that all the problems have been solved and if anybody ever asked you about your experience you'd be able to tell them that there are no problems on the trip or anything like that.

CURT: For you that would be desirable because...

KEVIN: Because that would be the best experience possible, I think; learning something on the trip, as well as having a good experience.

CURT: Do you mean that if the problems between Cassie and Brant had been solved by the end of the trip...

KEVIN: They would've gotten along, and that would be nice to see. I think everybody else would feel good because the one major problem was fixed. If they knew that that could be fixed, if something like that could be fixed by staying in the mountains for two weeks, then many other things in life that they thought couldn't be fixed can in fact be fixed.

CURT: Wow. What did the ongoing conflict between Brant and Cassie cost you?

KEVIN: Sometimes I would have to probably try and bring up the group morale. I'd have to break up fights more often, I think. Me and Colby had to break up the fights between Cassie and Brant, but usually the fights were pretty much not a big deal.

CURT: When you said that you had to break up the fights, what was the worst part about that for you?

KEVIN: Hearing what they were saying to each other.

CURT: And that was hard for you because...

KEVIN: Because it was all negative, and what they were saying was all mean.

CURT: And the negative talk between them, that was hard for you because...

KEVIN: I think that was hard because, when you're hearing all the negative stuff, it gets easier for a lot of people to think of the negative things, and thinking positive things is harder.

CURT: Do you think it was easier for you to fall into a negative frame of mind when they were fighting?

KEVIN: Yeah, I think so, but I did not become negative myself. I stayed positive.

CURT: Was it harder for you to stay positive when they were doing their negative thing?

KEVIN: I think so.

CURT: From your point of view, what would you say was the worst part about Brant and Cassie's fighting?

KEVIN: The worst part was the time wasted on the fights, and not on what we were meant to be trying to accomplish.

CURT: And that was upsetting to you because...

KEVIN: Because that steals the spotlight. This didn't happen, but if they started yelling at each other on the top of Black Rock, or something like that, a lot of people would end up concentrating on breaking up the fight, and not the view of Black Rock. (SOI # 2, pp. 13-14)

In spite of the ongoing conflict between Brant and Cassie, and the negativity that Kevin believed it fostered, he also believed that the social experience on the course was largely a positive one.

CURT: Any other feelings or thoughts that you have about the group that you were a part of?

KEVIN: I think the group was very positive, for the most part. Morale would be high, usually, with everybody talking to everybody, not excluding anybody. (semi-structured interview, p. 6)

Although the ongoing interpersonal conflict between two students on the course was a source of frustration for Kevin, and a reality that, in his view, compromised his own experience, he also noted the presence of a student on the course whose behavior and example inspired and motivated him to change. Alec was the most positive and helpful student on the course and his cheerful attitude and desire to help others was unrestrained. It was his ability to maintain this alacrity no matter the conditions or circumstance that set him apart and garnered the respect of the entire expedition. This made an impression on Kevin, partly because he witnessed the frequent accolades Alec received and partly because he had, at least at some level, an awareness that he was in need of change. Kevin's behavior was marked by unwavering attention to his self-interests, using others to fulfill those interests, and demonstrating a remarkable lack of personal

and social awareness. My field notes were replete with entries referring to his selfish behavior, unwillingness to help the group, manipulation of others for his own benefit, frequent irritating demeanor, and sense of entitlement. Nonetheless, he found Alec's behavior inspiring, and admitted to being moved and touched by his peer's example.

KEVIN: I think the person that moved us the most in the entire group was Alec.

CURT: Ok.

KEVIN: Because he was always positive, no matter what the situation. He was always willing to help, no matter what his job was. I think that was very kind, and the nicest thing I've ever seen anybody do—especially considering the fact that we were in an environment that we're not used to being in. It's probably harder compared to the world we live in now, compared to living in the mountains and camping in the mountains.

CURT: It sounds like Alec's behaviour and attitude made a real impression on you. Help me understand that in terms of why his behaviour and attitude struck you the way it did.

KEVIN: We arrived at 12:00 p.m. on the first day. The day after that I saw Alec helping out, bringing the food bags from one part of the camp 500 meters away—or even 1 km, I'm not sure how far it was to the base camp where we'd hang the dromedary and have dinner. I saw him doing that, and I think he motivated or excited me to also help out. Me and Colby also went to get the food bags and get that sorted out, and help out, while everybody else was in sleep mode, get the camp sorted out so we could leave as fast as possible.

CURT: So, in other words, Alec's willingness to help, his example of helping, inspired you to do the same?

KEVIN: Yeah, I think so.

CURT: And why was that important to you?

KEVIN: Because I think at home I could help out my parents more often, and I think meeting Alec and getting to know him inspired me to do that. (SOI # 2, p. 6)

Two other things bear mentioning, with regards to Kevin's reflections on the social experience while on the course. The first is that Kevin enjoyed the wilderness experience far more sharing it with others than he might have had it been a solitary experience.

CURT: During that three-week period, almost three weeks, you'd been with the same group of people in a very intense experience. I'm curious what feelings and thoughts you have about having been a part of the same group for that period of time.

KEVIN: I think being part of the same group helps you socialize with other people, share experiences with other people, and, for sure, the fun, instead of having it all to yourself, if it was a trip for one person. Being able to talk while you hike, I think, was very important. The time goes by fast. But, if you're alone, you just walk and you feel like you've been walking for hours. (semi-structured interview, p. 5)

The second is that the diverse student group was viewed by Kevin as a strength of the course.

CURT: Were there other ways that your experience with this particular Outward Bound group was different than other groups you've been a part of?

KEVIN: Another big difference is that most of the people from Outward Bound were not from the same place. It was a multicultural group, kind of, with people from all over Canada. When I go to a camp, everybody's from somewhere near the camp. If you're from a different province, there are more things to talk about that are more interesting.

CURT: You think there were other differences, by virtue of the fact that people came from all different parts of Canada?

KEVIN: We all have a different way of looking at things.

CURT: How do you think the group affected you?

KEVIN: I don't think it really affected me, except for the fact that I made friends on the trip. It made my experience more fun: being able to talk to people my age while doing something like Outward Bound. (semi-structured interview, p. 7)

**Basic theme # 3: Making changes and feeling proud of my accomplishments.** As

mentioned above, it did not appear to me that Kevin was actively involved in thinking about or making changes to his attitude or behavior while on the course. He seemed largely the same at the end of the course as he did at the beginning. I certainly did not expect to see any change in his SOI score, from pre-course to post-course administration. My field notes were consistent throughout noting that Kevin was entitled, self-serving, comfortable using others to do what he

didn't want to do (i.e., chores), unable to demonstrate even a modicum of self-awareness, irresponsible, childish, and largely disinterested in the welfare of others. In short, Kevin was all about getting his needs and desires met with little demonstrated interest in helping others. His mindset seemed clearly located in Kegan's Imperial Balance, or second order of consciousness. I had to check myself that I didn't say out loud what I had been thinking about him, when referring to him in my field notes as "King Kevin": a moniker given to him by peers frustrated with his self-serving behavior. It wasn't until Kevin's last night in the field that my impression changed. At the closing circle with all members of the expedition participating, Kevin demonstrated a rare measure of earnestness, self-awareness, and courage. He shared what he had learned about himself while on the course, admitting he was too self-centered and should be more helpful to others (field notes, days 5-21, p. 25). I was dumbfounded. After nearly three weeks of watching this young man focus almost entirely on serving his own interests, and failing to take his responsibilities seriously, he was admitting that changes were in order.

In my interviews with Kevin following the course's conclusion, he provided a glimpse into his thinking and feeling that helped me better understand the impact this wilderness backpacking course had on him. His reflections were memorable because they were so markedly different than my experience of him on the course, with the exception of that last night during the closing circle. Kevin related a plethora of positive impacts from the course; impacts that were changing the way he thinks and behaves. I discuss the most substantive changes below.

In the lead up to this next excerpt, Kevin had been telling me why it was so important that he push his personal limits and step out of his comfort zone. What followed was his assessment of the single most important learning event on the course: that he is capable of far more than he previously imagined.

CURT: So, again, those new experiences matter to you because...

KEVIN: The new experiences matter because it's changed my life completely. It's the first time this has ever happened to me.

CURT: So what does this experience tell you about yourself, that having new experiences is important, that getting out of your comfort zone is important?

KEVIN: The most important thing that you should learn from the trip is that you are capable of more things than you think you are. (SOI # 2, pp. 20-21)

The realization that he was capable of far more than he had earlier imagined is important because it was the information he needed to anticipate change of a scale much larger than he earlier thought possible. In other words, his OB course experience threw open his expectation of what he was capable of, not just physically, but emotionally and behaviorally. He realized that his pre-course need for and capacity to change (e.g., to be more helpful) was likely far too modest given his new-found capabilities. Additionally, after witnessing other members of the course (especially Alec) repeatedly attend to the needs of others and take their responsibilities for working as a team seriously, he was no doubt impressed with what is possible.

KEVIN: Before the trip I was the kind, optimistic guy that sometimes could be helpful; but now I'm the guy that you can turn to if you ever need help, or super helpful, optimistic, and a good leader too.

CURT: It sounds like making this shift has been important for you. Can you help me understand why this matters to you as much as it does, that is being seen by others as helpful and optimistic?

KEVIN: It was important to me because being helpful was one of my goals for the trip. I wrote it down in my journal.

CURT: And that was one of your goals because...

KEVIN: I thought I could be more helpful to other people. Setting that as my goal, I thought, would help me achieve it. When you write it down, you commit to it. Becoming a helpful person meant a lot to me.

CURT: Again, it means a lot to you because...

KEVIN: Because I like helping other people out, and I like making other people happy.

CURT: And you like helping other people out because...

KEVIN: It makes them happy, and they end up liking you more than they used to. They might help you in return if you're ever in need.

CURT: If I were to ask you, what is the best part about helping others, what would you say?

KEVIN: The smile on their face after you finish helping them. The smile of 'thank you' you get.

CURT: The smile on their face and the thank-you that they offer, those are important to you because...

KEVIN: Because that way you know you've helped someone out, and that can make your day. If you're ever going through something bad and you help someone out, they thank you and you have a better day.

CURT: Got it. What does this experience tell you about yourself, having been inspired by Alec to be more optimistic and more helpful?

KEVIN: I learned that I was capable of more things, I think. After a while of knowing yourself, and what you're good at, and what you're not good at, you start to think who you are and you're going to stay like that. But I think Outward Bound has done a good job—in this case Alec has done a good job—to let me know that I can also be a helpful hand if I try hard and dedicate myself to doing that.

CURT: Have your parents noticed a change since you've gotten home?

KEVIN: Yeah.

CURT: And how have they responded to you?

KEVIN: I think because I'm more helpful around the house, I get to be more free at home. I get to go out with my friends more often, or do things that cost money with my friends: like, I'd be allowed to go to the movies more often. (SOI # 2, p. 6)

As you may notice, Kevin's decision to be a more helpful person at home and elsewhere was not driven so much by a desire to make the lives of others better or easier. The motivation was driven largely by his recognition that helping others would improve his own experience:

more friends, increased personal enjoyment, greater likelihood of having a favor granted, more freedom bestowed by parents, etc., all of which were desirable experiences from his point of view. In other words, his motivation to be more helpful was, at least in part, self-referencing which is consistent with his scores on both SOIs. Nonetheless, per his self-report, he became a much more helpful person at home as a result of his experiences on the OB course.

Besides learning that he was capable of far more than he imagined, which he described as the single biggest learning event of the course, and his decision to become a significantly more helpful person than he had earlier thought possible, he endorsed other changes that were important to him.

First, his self-confidence blossomed. His successful ascent of Black Rock Mountain, which he described as the hardest day of the course, served as an important catalyst in his developing belief in himself and in his ability to complete difficult tasks. This burgeoning self-confidence was very closely related to his realization that he is a much more capable young man than he had thought prior to the course.

CURT: What would you say was the high point of the course for you?

KEVIN: The high point, I think, was also climbing Black Rock. After climbing Black Rock, you know you're capable of climbing a mountain that's 2500 meters high. You're capable of doing everything else on the course, unless you're going to climb a higher mountain, then you might second-guess yourself.

CURT: Do you think that it affected your self-confidence?

KEVIN: I think it boosted my self-confidence.

CURT: A little, or a lot?

KEVIN: A lot. You wouldn't think that your first mountain would be two-and-a-half kilometers high. (semi-structured interview, p. 11)

Second, Kevin reported becoming more conservation minded as a result of experiences he had on the trip. Finding water was a daily challenge as the Ghost River drainage is aptly named. Water can be flowing down canyon as one would expect only to completely disappear beneath the surface, re-emerging several kilometers downstream. This proved a fascinating and frustrating phenomenon for all concerned, and led to some very long days in search of water. Reflecting on this daily difficulty led Kevin to an interesting conclusion: don't take water for granted!

KEVIN: Actually, I think there was a benefit of not finding water.

CURT: How so?

KEVIN: Which would be, when you come home and there's water coming out of your tap, you know that you should not be wasting that water.

CURT: So, you think there was a lesson in the hardship?

KEVIN: Yeah.

CURT: And that was that water is a precious thing?

KEVIN: Water is a very precious thing, and it's very important.

CURT: What does that experience tell you about yourself, Kevin?

KEVIN: I think in the past, before this trip, when you turn the tap you don't really think where the water's coming from; but, now that you've gone on an Outward Bound trip to the Rockies, and you know how hard it could be to look for and find water in a river, you don't want to use as much water as you would use before this trip.

CURT: Has your behaviour changed now that you're at home?

KEVIN: I've been drinking water, but I haven't been wasting water or anything.

CURT: I'll be darned.

KEVIN: I thought it was weird just turning a tap and having water come out. (SOI # 2, p.

Difficulties finding water provided Kevin with his third opportunity for self-improvement. Developing his leadership skills was a goal he identified before embarking on the course, and the dearth of water provided what seemed to him a perfect opportunity for leadership. When water became scarce, group morale would often plummet and hiking efficiency would drop precipitously. Kevin took advantage of this and attempted to intervene:

CURT: When we were hiking, looking for water, and having difficulty finding water, what was at stake for you?

KEVIN: Actually, it helped me improve on my leadership skills.

CURT: How so?

KEVIN: By keeping the group morale high, and helping out others. The day of re-supply I think I shared my water with five people.

CURT: Wow.

KEVIN: I was Leader that day.

CURT: And that was important to you to do because...

KEVIN: Because that way I'm helping others. I'm killing two birds with one stone.

CURT: How so?

KEVIN: Being a leader by checking on everyone and making sure everyone's ok, and also being helpful by sharing my water with the people who had no water.

CURT: Why was it important for you to do those things, sharing your water and leading by example?

KEVIN: The goal was, I think, an act of kindness.

CURT: An act of kindness, it sounds like that matters to you. That matters because...

KEVIN: Because when you're kind to others, they will be kind to you. One of the most important things about being a leader is respecting your followers, as you would like to be respected. (SOI # 2, pp. 17-18)

A fourth change had to do with the significant increases in physical and mental stamina he enjoyed over the course of the trip. During the first portion of the trip, the group was moving very slowly, taking rest breaks every 15 minutes or so, and Kevin was among those who felt the need to stop as often as possible. By the end of the course, Kevin was hiking as well as anyone. He took pride in this increased physical capacity and modified his behavior once at home:

CURT: How do you think the course has affected you now that you're home?

KEVIN: Now that I'm home...I don't take the bus as often. I usually tend to walk to places now. What I'm used to is walking around with a 40-pound backpack. (semi-structured interview, pp. 14-15)

Finally, Kevin reported he was more open to social encounters, and was actually soliciting them by wearing his OB pin. The hardships he encountered and overcame on the OB course gave him an abundance of stories to share, and he seemed eager to do just that.

CURT: Are there other things that you experienced this summer that you think will carry over to your normal life? You've already mentioned the things about helping your little sister, and helping with the laundry and with cooking.

KEVIN: I think I'll be talking to more people now that I have the Outward Bound pin. People will probably start asking, or talking about stories and things like that. It's already happened a couple of times. (semi-structured interview, p. 16)

In wrapping up this section on changes Kevin made and the sense of accomplishment he felt, it is worth noting some comments he made about the importance of the OB course to his overall development.

KEVIN: One more card. Let's go with #10.

CURT: Important to me, ok.

KEVIN: I think #10 was Important to Me. Everything that happened. I don't know if you agree, but I think the entire experience was important.

CURT: And it was important to you because...

KEVIN: It was important because now I learned a lot more about myself. I think I've changed—not completely changed. I'm saying, I've left some negative things behind and brought home new characteristics and personality that will help me in life.... (SOI # 2, pp. 18- 19)

## CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS: COOPER'S PROFILE

In this chapter I describe how Cooper made sense of this wilderness backpacking experience.

For Cooper, two organizing themes emerged including recognizing personal capacity and making important life decisions. These two organizing themes and their nine variations (basic themes) as well as the global theme (reclaiming happiness) are explored below and illustrated in Figure 5.

### **Global Theme: Reclaiming Happiness**

The circumstances surrounding Cooper's decision to participate in this Outward Bound (OB) course had everything to do with problems at home. Earlier in the summer he "flew into a rage" during an argument with his mother after she laughed at one of his comments. He became so unhinged that his mother, who was divorced from his father and lived with Cooper in Hamilton, ON, decided to send him to his father's home in Edmonton, AB where he would spend the entire summer. The purpose of the change in residence was to help Cooper "reset" and think about his behavior. The OB course was understood by Cooper as a way to help him sort some things out though Cooper was not entirely in favor of the idea. He reluctantly agreed to cooperate and attend the course.

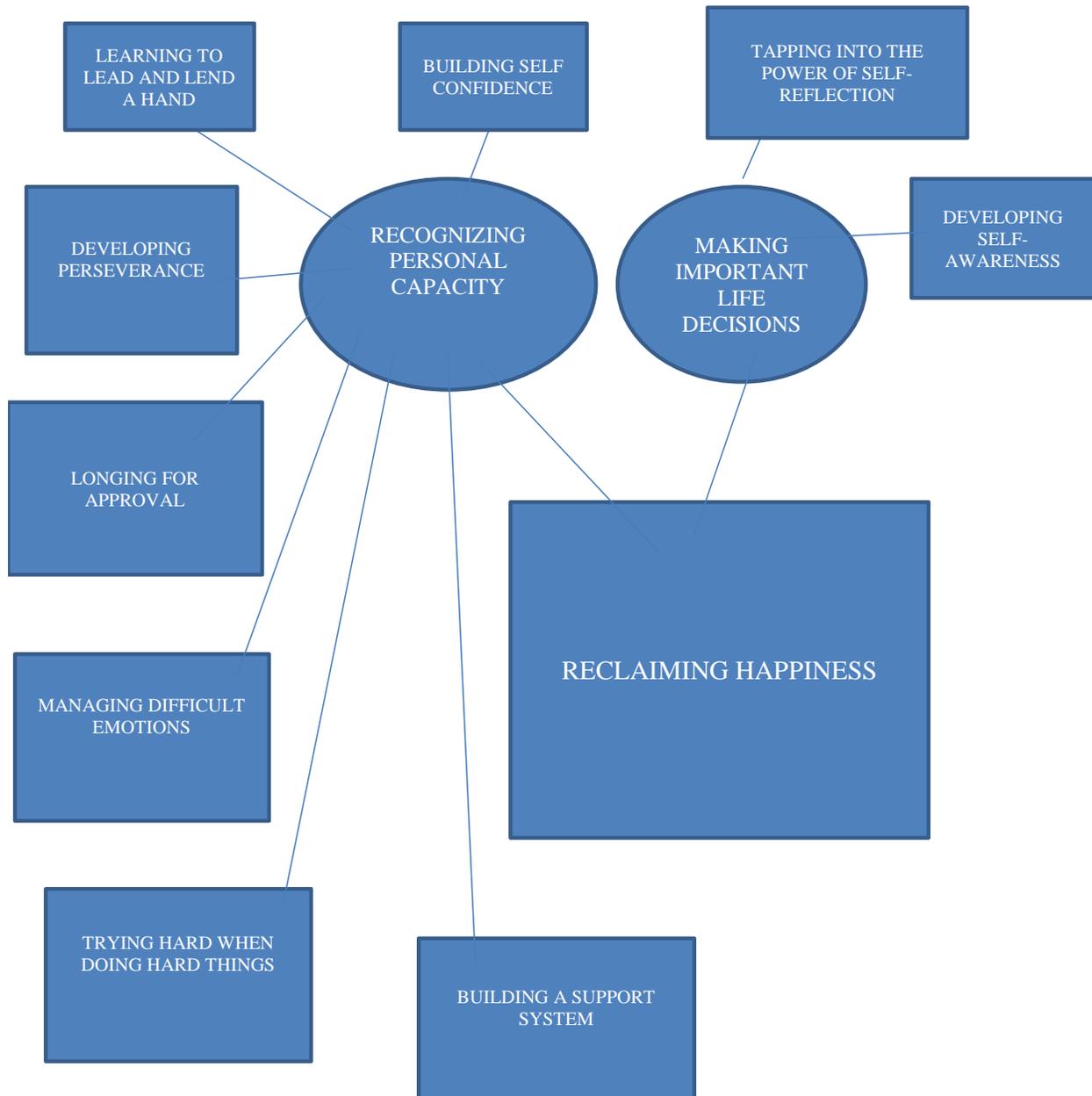


Figure 5. Cooper's thematic network.

Cooper's chief goal on the course was to find a way to turn an experience he wasn't too keen on into something worthwhile; an experience that might help him find happiness again. In the excerpt below, Cooper describes how he "lost" his happiness, relating the story of what

happened after telling one of his closest friends about his parent's divorce and his father's disclosure of being gay. Though this text doesn't relate specifically to his experience on the course, it does provide the backstory to the global theme that underpinned his OB experience.

COOPER: I don't know. I'm kind of done with feeling shitty, to be honest. I'm tired of it. When I was younger I had a lot of issues with being bullied. Up until Grade 6, or so, I was on the edge or fringe of the popular kids' group, or whatever you want to call it. Then, in Grade 6, my parents divorced and my dad came out, as I mentioned.

CURT: Came out, as in, came out as gay?

COOPER: Came out as gay, yeah.

CURT: Oh wow. Okay.

COOPER: I was fully accepting of it; I had no issues with it. I felt it was something I should only tell the people I trust. So, I told one girl at school who was like my one really close friend, Natalia, and she went and told the entire school within a day, and told the entire Grade 6 class. I got ripped on a lot for it from Grade 6 to Grade 8.

CURT: So, kids were not kind, were they?

COOPER: No, to the point where, as soon as my dad came out as gay, it made me gay. I was constantly being asked if I was gay, asked if I hear my dad having sex, asked really personal questions that I shouldn't have to be asked, of course. It wrecked my self-confidence and wrecked my self-esteem. I guess that's what tore that happiness away from me. It just never really came back after that. Even after I got myself out of the school where it was happening—and now I've got a really close support group who all loves me and thinks I'm a great guy. It's just that spark and that happiness never really came back with it.

CURT: It's like you lost it then. Things got so hard for you that it took a big hit—the happiness that you felt—and you've never really gotten it back. At that point, when your dad came out as gay and left your mom, you said you were okay with your dad being gay and coming out. What would have changed your experience at that point in time?

COOPER: If everyone just accepted it the way I did. If, when I told Natalia, she had just sat me down and told me that was cool, and was okay with it and kept it to herself. Or, if you told everyone and they were like, 'Yeah, who cares? His dad's gay.'

CURT: Like, live and let live.

COOPER: Yeah, and it didn't work out that way.

CURT: But because she told people, and people didn't accept it as you had, it put you in a position where they were now picking on you and giving you a bad time, and it made it really hard for you.

COOPER: I don't see that as the main reason I got picked on. Like I said before, I was never really in with a group of kids, and I guess I was kind of a target to start out with. As soon as they had something reliable that they could use against me at all times, it just got a hell of a lot worse.

CURT: What do you think that experience cost you, of being picked on the way you were, and treated the way you were by your peers?

COOPER: It cost me my happiness. That's how I see it. Up until that point I was perfectly happy, I was constantly smiling, always laughing. It felt like that was torn away once all that started happening. (SOI # 1, pp. 15-16)

Though Cooper often felt angry about being on the course and on more than one occasion reported "hating" wilderness backpacking, he did find a way to use the experience to better recognize his personal capacity and make some important life decisions (field notes, days 5-21, p. 16). These two outcomes seemed to restore in Cooper the hope that he might once again lead a life marked by happiness.

### **Organizing Theme # 1: Recognizing Personal Capacity**

In Cooper's first SOI, he mentioned that he had never really done well in school (SOI # 1, p. 13) due to learning disabilities and because "In school I don't put in much effort, to be completely honest" (SOI # 1, p. 13). He also mentioned that he wasn't good at anything because he tended to give up when things became difficult.

CURT: What would you say is the worst part about not finishing something you start (the worst part for you)?

COOPER: Just the fact that I've never really stuck with something long enough to get really, really good at it. Over this past year or so I've been looking a lot at what I can do in the long term and where I can go, and I look back and I go, 'What the hell am I good at?' I'm just mediocre at everything. I feel like, if I really stuck stuff out more, I could genuinely say that I'm good at something. I don't really have that satisfaction right now. I don't have that fulfillment now. (SOI # 2, p. 4)

Early in the course, Cooper realized that the expedition would provide him an opportunity to test his grit and pluck by doing something hard. Struggling as he did, hiking up Mount Allen with only a day pack made that fact clear (field notes, day 2, p. 3). At some point he decided to use the experience as a way of testing his ability to persevere in the face of difficulty, and as a consequence, discover something new about his capacity to succeed. This proved to be one of the most important aspects of the experience for him, and led to a measure of confidence and happiness that had eluded him for years.

CURT: Cooper, how do you think the course affected you personally?

COOPER: I think it almost gave me more motivation, in the sense that it made me realize my potential a little bit more than I gave myself credit for. Now I'm more ready to go home and really put my all into things, instead of just not.

CURT: Do you mean that you developed more self-confidence or realized that you're capable of more than what you gave yourself credit for? Is that what you mean?

COOPER: Yeah, pretty much. A lot of the time I would tell myself that I can't do things, and that when it gets hard it's easier to drop out. It made me realize that I can accomplish a lot more than I thought I could.

CURT: And that's important to you because...

COOPER: Because of all the quitting I've done in the past, I guess, because I never really stuck with things to the end. Now I know that I'm, by far, physically capable, and mentally capable, to complete things.

CURT: You think one change is that you're less likely to quit when something's hard?

COOPER: For sure. (semi-structured interview, p. 2)

But in order to make it through the twenty-one-day expedition, full of physical and mental challenges, he knew he had to shore up his social support. His first order of business would be to assemble a support team that would help him through the inevitable difficulties he was certain to face.

**Basic theme # 1: Building a support system.** In his first SOI, Cooper talked about the agonizing decision of leaving his girlfriend of ten months because she was unwilling to remain in relationship with him if he transferred schools. His desire to transfer schools was rooted in his belief that the new school would provide him with a better social support system, a benefit he viewed as indispensable. His description of “the most important thing to me” underscores the central role played by good relations with family members and a robust network of friends.

COOPER: I guess the last one I’ll choose is Important to Me. Probably the most important thing to me is the people at Portage District. And my mother. Just because, even when things are going wrong, those are the people who are there for me. Even when my mom’s screaming at me and I storm out of the house, I give Kris a call or I give Helen a call or I give Jennifer a call—any one of the people from that school—and it’s like, ‘Okay, come over, sit down, we’ll have a good talk. Coffee pot’s on, let’s go!’

CURT: They are ready to go with you, whatever you need.

COOPER: They’re really supportive. They’re kind of my rocks—at this moment at least.

CURT: Those relationships are different relationships than you have with your mom or your dad. They’re important to you because...

COOPER: Because it’s the first real friendships I’ve had like that. I feel like ‘I help them and they help me’ kind of relationships. Of course everyone goes through hard times and everyone has issues. Whenever they have issues, I’m often the one who gets the call to talk. I’m often the one who has to help them out.

CURT: And how does that feel?

COOPER: It feels good to be wanted and needed. They really reciprocate when I’m in the same situation. It’s the first really mutual friendships I’ve had like that—in a long time at least. (SOI # 1, pp. 22-23)

Given the weight Cooper placed on family relations and relationships with friends generally, it wasn’t too surprising that he underscored the importance of developing friends on the course. In fact, he went so far as to say that he likely would not have completed the trip if he had failed to develop some sufficiently close friendships.

CURT: If you had not developed a close relationship, like you did with Kyla, or like you did with Derek, what would've been the worst part about that for you, if you had not been able to find someone that you could feel close to?

COOPER: I don't think I would've finished the trip, to be completely honest.

CURT: Because...

COOPER: Because I need that support in my life. At home I have a very strong, close group of people that I can talk to about anything. If I didn't have that for those three weeks it would've been extremely difficult on me. (SOI # 2, p. 12)

Completing the course wasn't the only thing at stake for Cooper. With his long history as a bully victim at school for being overweight, slow, inept on the athletic field and a poor academic performer, he was no stranger to social anxiety. He had spent a lot of his primary school years alone, without any friends to dispel the social isolation that can make school a difficult and lonely experience. As he reveals below, having a close friend or two on the course would help in other ways as well.

CURT: So, finishing the course was one thing at stake for you in terms of forming a close relationship. Were there other things at stake for you in terms of forming close relationships—or a close relationship?

COOPER: Just, almost, keeping myself normal, keeping myself going. I've been an outcast before in a lot of situations, and it really, generally, sucks. Having those connections just makes things a lot easier.

CURT: Do you think those close connections with others significantly affect your own mood or how you feel about yourself?

COOPER: 100%.

CURT: And, likewise, not having those close relationships, not having someone to talk to, also, I would presume, affects your mood pretty significantly.

COOPER: Yes. Big time. (SOI # 2, pp. 12-13)

Upon further reflection, Cooper acknowledged that the friendships he made on the course turned out to be critically important to his experience on the trip. That the expedition went as

well as it did for him seemed inextricably linked to the support he received from his fellow students and the instructors. In the excerpt below, Cooper responds to a question about feeling nervous at the beginning of the course, as he waited for other students to arrive at the rendezvous point at the airport in Calgary.

CURT: You felt nervous because...

COOPER: I guess it relates back into the last question. I really need those close relationships and those close connections. I was nervous that I'd end up with a bunch of kids that I really didn't connect with, and it would really ruin the experience for me.

CURT: And that you would feel alone.

COOPER: Yeah.

CURT: It sounds like whether you would develop those connections or not was, perhaps, the single most important thing about going on the course, in terms of whether it would actually go well or not go well. Would you say that's accurate?

COOPER: Yeah, that's accurate.

CURT: Would it be safe to say that the relationships you formed turned out to be the most important aspect of the course for you?

COOPER: Probably, in the terms of whether it would go well for me or not. It's something that I really rely on, I guess. (SOI # 2, pp. 14-15)

When asked about his experience with the group he admitted to mixed feelings about the wide range of ages among students. A last-minute decision was made by OB to blend two different courses together, one for 16-18-year-olds, and the other for 13-15-year-olds. This was done due to insufficient enrollment on the older course and oversubscription of the younger course. It proved beneficial in some ways and detrimental in others, at least as far as Cooper was concerned. His complaint centered around the perceived differences in maturity level and the effect he believed those differences had on the depth of sharing that took place over the course of the trip.

CURT: Well, what feelings and thoughts did you have about the group?

COOPER: I thought the group was pretty good. I definitely would've preferred the experience, I think, if it was not the split age group, just because that would have opened the door for more in depth group discussions. When you're at two different stages of development, the young kids are more focused on a lot of different things than the older kids are focused on. Say that it was just a group of 16-18-year-olds: it would open the door for these more in-depth discussions to happen as a group, instead of just happening between one or two people. (semi-structured interview, p. 5)

On the positive side, Cooper believed it was the presence of the younger group that opened the door to his leadership opportunity; a door he proceeded through reluctantly. As it turned out, he was glad for the chance to lead because it was one of the significant factors contributing to his recognition of increased personal capacity. Additionally, some of the younger students looked up to Cooper, and inadvertently, became a part of his support network by relying on him to provide the leadership and help they were looking for. This played into Cooper's need for respect and affirmation of his potential.

CURT: How was your experience with this group different from your experience with other groups?

COOPER: Other groups, in a sense of just life?

CURT: Yeah, the other groups that you've been a part of—not necessarily in the wilderness experience, but just other groups that you've been a part of, whether at school or in the community.

COOPER: Definitely, my dynamic I played in the group was different. In my life at home I tend to fade into the background of groups and not really stand out. I think, when I had those people looking up to me, it made me want to stand out and want to try to make impressions and stand out as a leader. I think that was the main difference. I tend to follow others when I'm at home. Once I had people who want to follow me, it made that easier to step up, in that sense.

CURT: Cooper, what do you think it was about this Outward Bound trip that put you in a position of feeling like it was time for you to lead? What do you think it was about the trip that set that up for you?

COOPER: I'm really not sure.

CURT: Was it the difference in ages among the students?

COOPER: Possibly the fact that I was almost—not forced, but—put in a position where I had to spend that amount of time with that age group. I really wouldn't at home, normally. When I was put in that position that I had to do that, and I saw that they were struggling with what was going on, it made me want to step up and help them so that they could, in the long run, help me with actually getting stuff done.

CURT: I know that you said that one of the drawbacks to the experience was the difference in age, and that it limited your ability to have in-depth conversations with the group other than with the one or two people that you were able to do that with; but, do you think that the difference in age contributed to this opportunity for leadership? In other words, do you think that you would've been compelled in the same way, to step up as leader, with a group of only 16-18-year-olds? How would that have played out?

COOPER: I think it did help with the opportunity for leadership.

CURT: The difference in age?

COOPER: Yeah, just because it forced you to. Otherwise you would be dealing with a bunch of kids who didn't know what was going on or what they were doing. If you helped them, you were obviously going to teach them what you had under your belt already, and they would be able to step up more. It put you in the position where it was mutually helpful to help them.

CURT: In other words, helping them it made your own experience better.

COOPER: Yeah, for sure. (semi-structured interview, pp. 6-8)

It wasn't only the students who helped Cooper through the course. He acknowledged the important role the instructors played and how their understanding and support made a big difference in his experience, especially when the course difficulties increased.

CURT: You said that the instructors were helpful. How did you find them helpful and supportive?

COOPER: I found them really helpful and supportive in the sense that, whenever someone was not feeling it and having a bad day, they were really good at turning that around and making them see the positives and making sure they kept going even though they were not having the greatest day. I remember one day I was really just not feeling it. Maddy was like, 'Hey, you know what? If you need to walk at the back of the group, don't worry about them. You're absolved of your duties for the time being. Don't worry about it; just get through today and then we'll figure it out when you feel better.' I think

they were just really supportive. They really helped people through stuff, no matter who it was and what issues they had. I always noticed them helping everyone through it. (semi-structured interview, p. 14)

**Basic theme # 2: Trying hard when doing hard things.** The difficulty of the course seemed, at least to Cooper, an indispensable element of the experience; one that played a prominent role in helping him realize his potential. Facing difficult physical and mental tasks, with few opportunities for avoidance, forced him to push through challenging circumstances and prevail. As previously disclosed, he was used to quitting whenever things in life became difficult. This pattern of avoidance had begun to weigh on him, leaving him with feelings of disappointment and inadequacy, and the belief that he was likely to quit whenever things got hard.

CURT: What do you think it is about the course that makes it have the effects that it has? You mentioned self-reflection, you've had a bit of a change in perspective, your behaviour has changed, especially in terms of being less likely to give up, feeling more capable of what you're able to do, more self-confident. You adopted a leadership role, which ordinarily you would not have adopted with other groups...what do you think it is about the course that has pushed you in these ways?

COOPER: I think a few things: for starters, just the general difficulty level really helps with the self-realization of potential.

CURT: Tell me more about that.

COOPER: It was, by far, probably, the hardest thing I'd ever done. When it was so difficult, to give up when giving up wasn't really an option for a lot of it, it forced you to realize what you could do, which was a big part...

CURT: So, in other words, the fact that it was as challenging as it was, made a big difference?

COOPER: Yeah, for sure. (semi-structured interview, p. 9)

When asked what the most difficult elements of the course were, he mentioned two: climbing and descending Black Rock Mountain, and contending with the dearth of water along

the route. Black Rock was an eye-opener for Cooper, as he didn't believe he had a fear of heights prior to the hike to the top of this Canadian peak. But coming down put the lie to that belief as Cooper struggled with a gripping fear during the descent from this rocky summit. He was also surprised by the difficulty encountered finding water. Because of the...

porous limestone rock underlying much of the area, the South Ghost River disappears at various points along its bed, seeping into faults to flow underground. Only in the spring, when snowmelt is at its highest, does the South Ghost River flow above ground its entire length. (Alberta Wilderness Association, n.d., para. 3)

This hydrological phenomenon provided an unexpected challenge to Cooper, as he attempted to manage his water intake and decision-making around filling up his water bottles, a process made onerous by the need to purify water via a filtering pump. When Cooper mentions the "red zone" below, he is referring to the system introduced by the instructors to identify a participant's level of discomfort with a particular activity: Green is within one's comfort zone, yellow is outside one's comfort zone but possible with effort, and red so far exceeds one's perceived capacity that the person is likely to shut down or abort the activity.

CURT: Cooper, what did you find to be the most challenging or disorienting aspects of the course?

COOPER: The most challenging aspects, you said?

CURT: Yeah, or disorienting. What things took you out of your comfort zone?

COOPER: Going up and down Black Rock was extremely challenging and extremely disorienting, although in a good way: it didn't put me completely into the red zone where I shut down and couldn't do it. It put me in a position where it was very difficult to do, but it proved to me that I was able to work through it. Another really difficult part for me was the water issue, even though that was a natural challenge.

CURT: And that was difficult because...

COOPER: Because I wasn't great at always being on top of that. Suddenly, when we hit water issues, I'd realize that I only had half a bottle left, and I'd be in serious trouble, and I'd end up getting to the final campsite extremely dehydrated and not ready to take on what I needed to take on once we were there.

CURT: It was challenging because your own management of water could have been better?

COOPER: For sure.

CURT: Other aspects, besides Black Rock and the water that you found challenging or disorienting?

COOPER: I'm not really sure of specific aspects. The course in general was good at that, I guess: throwing me out of my usual comfort zone. Everything we did basically took me there. (semi-structured interview, pp. 14-15)

In summing up his resolve to "try harder" when faced with challenging circumstances, Cooper had this to say:

CURT: How do you think this Outward Bound course will affect how you approach new situations in the future?

COOPER: I'm definitely going to put a hell-of-a lot more effort in. When the going gets tough, keep going, instead of giving up. Keep trying a lot more than I have in the past.

CURT: Any other ways that you think the course that you were on will affect how you approach new situations?

COOPER: I'm going to give it my all a lot more often. I tend to put in a half-assed effort and then be upset when it doesn't work. It made me realize that sometimes you've got to put in 100% if you want to get any benefit from things. I'm definitely going to be trying to put that 100% in more often in more things that I do. (semi-structured interview, p. 19)

**Basic theme # 3: Managing difficult emotions.** Managing emotions, especially difficult ones, was a challenge for Cooper. He was not happy to be on the course in the first place given the fact his parents sent him as a sort of intervention to improve his behavior. But early on he decided to make the best of it and to perform in a way that would make his parents proud. There were times throughout the course where he stated flatly that he hated wilderness camping and

simply wanted to go home. But he persevered and completed the course with a sense of accomplishment that shored up his self-confidence. Along the way, he struggled with numerous negative feelings. He reported feeling anxious and afraid, torn, unhappy and apathetic, homesick and angry.

Cooper's anxiety and fear came into sharp focus during his descent of Black Rock Mountain, which took place on day ten. Though going up had been hard for him, going down terrified him to the point he needed constant encouragement and coaching to navigate the steep upper slopes of the mountain. Though the hike did not require difficult scrambling (use of all fours as required in class III or class IV terrain) it was steep and intimidating for this novice hiker. Additionally, we were under pressure to descend quickly as an approaching thunderstorm was moving quickly.

COOPER: Ok, the first one I'm going to go with is Anxious. I was most anxious during the trip when I was climbing up Black Rock.

CURT: Tell me about it.

COOPER: I got to the summit fine. I was feeling a little nervous and a little shaky, but I pulled it through with no issues. At the summit I felt fine, but then, as soon as we started coming back down that slope to the first plateau, I don't know what happened, but it was instant fear and instant wobbly knees, and really, really anxious.

CURT: Any sense about why you felt as anxious as you did, why you were so scared, or what you were most afraid of?

COOPER: Not really, even. I knew I was going to be safe in the end; I knew I could get down it. It was weird. I hadn't really experienced that before.

CURT: You hadn't experienced the fear like that, or you hadn't experienced going down a mountain like that?

COOPER: I hadn't experienced a feeling like that. I've never been one to be afraid of heights. I love roller coasters. Heights have never bothered me in the slightest, but...

CURT: That day they certainly did.

COOPER: Yeah, for sure. It froze me up.

CURT: Any idea why you had the experience that you did?

COOPER: Not really, no.

CURT: So, it's really a bit of a mystery.

COOPER: Yeah. I know my dad has a fear of heights—a crippling fear of heights.

CURT: But that's never been something you've struggled with?

COOPER: No, never.

CURT: Any sense of what may have changed the experience for you, what would've made it different?

COOPER: I guess, maybe, because I'd never done something like that, in the sense of climbing a mountain. It was a completely new experience, and I was probably higher up than I've ever had to deal with, plus the mountain forces you to go down face-first, and face it head-on. It really freaked me out. (SOI # 2, pp. 1-2)

I asked Cooper what this experience revealed to him and he referenced his ability to manage difficult emotions. The exchange between us is below.

CURT: What does this experience of feeling as anxious as you did, or as afraid as you did tell you about yourself?

COOPER: That I definitely have an unknown fear of heights, that I know I have now, for starters; but, secondly, that I can overcome that fear and do it anyways, even though it's a little terrifying for me. (SOI # 2, p. 3)

The next emotion that appeared in his interviews was the feeling of being torn; torn between staying on the course and bailing out during resupply. The day after summiting and descending Black Rock Mountain (day 11) we hiked to our rendezvous point for resupply. Staff from the OB office in Canmore met us at the rendezvous point via four-wheel drive vehicle and brought new rations which we divided up among course participants and instructors. Cooper knew that resupply would be the one time on the course he could, with relative ease, ask to come

off the course and be sent home. Cooper admitted to agonizing over this decision during the two hours the in-town staff spent with us distributing rations and checking in about our progress and experience. Of course, Cooper decided to complete the course and his description of that decision is below.

CURT: You want to pick another card?

COOPER: Sure. I guess Torn. I was feeling pretty torn on re-supply day because I knew I could go home if I just asked to. It was just one question away. At the same time I had a strong stand to really finish it and kick some ass. I was divided.

CURT: How intense was that division, that internal struggle about whether to stay or whether to go?

COOPER: It was pretty intense. I'd say I actually felt it more after Dan left, than while he was there. I guess while he was there I was thinking about it, but after he was gone it sunk in: wow, I could've just hopped on the back of that truck and been outta here. I wouldn't be trekking right now.

CURT: What would you say was the best—and maybe the worst—part of that torn feeling and that tension between staying and finishing the course, and bailing out halfway at the re-supply and going home?

COOPER: The best part was probably being able to tell myself, 'Ok, you kept going. You went through a tough decision. You chose probably the right path.' The worst was probably just thinking about going home. I realized an hour after Dan left, it was like, 'Hey, I'd probably be back in Edmonton right now. I'd be back in the city—not in the mountains not wearing this pack, washing my clothes and taking a shower every day,' which kind of sucked. (SOI # 2, 10)

On day 13 we awoke to heavy rain and cool temperatures. It was the kind of weather that soaks everything you own and makes staying warm and dry a challenge. Cooper was struggling with his decision to continue on the course. He still felt torn but was now thinking he had made a mistake by staying in the field. The following excerpt is from my field notes on July 16, day 13.

Cooper is struggling and wants to go home. He is homesick, hates Alberta and hates wilderness camping. He is a self-proclaimed city boy, misses his friends, misses his girlfriend and misses his mother. He is still hurting over his parent's decision to

unilaterally send him from Hamilton, ON (mother's residence) to Edmonton, AB (father's residence). He wants to go home and is really struggling to hang with it. He teared up while talking about this. He hates this trip. Cooper mentioned that climbing Black Rock Mountain was the only good day for him on the trip. (field notes, days 5-21, p. 16)

On day 17, five days prior to completion of the course, Cooper was leader of the day. We had just completed the solo the day before and we were hiking into the alpine over a saddle that would provide our first view of our final destination: the junction of Exshaw Creek and the TransCanada Highway, some 13 km distant and nearly 1000 meters below our vantage point on Exshaw Pass. Cooper began the day feeling confident and leading well. He set a good pace up and down the saddle but started having problems once we entered the drainage below treeline. The route-finding was difficult and we were getting low on water, with no opportunities for replenishing water bottles. The day was hot and Cooper started to struggle with intense feelings of unhappiness and apathy. He reflects on those difficulties in the text below.

CURT: It sounds like your sense was that you sort of shut down once we got over the saddle and descended into Exshaw Creek.

COOPER: Yeah, a bit.

CURT: What was that about? What do you think was going on for you?

COOPER: I remember we dropped down into the creek bed and within 10 minutes I'd dropped off of a big rock and landed on my knee. No, no, no, I didn't drop off of the rock; I fell on a little bit of a slope and slid down and jammed my knee at the bottom. It twisted weird. I really buggered up my knee, and 15-20 minutes after that I was walking down something else and a stick jabbed right into my ear canal and actually drew blood on the side of my ear. It was little things like that, after little things like, that that really dragged on me and made me not happy to be there and unmotivated, and was a trade-off onto the group and upset me.

CURT: What was the worst part of that day for you, or the worst part of that experience that you've described?

COOPER: Probably the fact that I knew I had to keep going, but I was very, very unhappy with it.

CURT: And that was the worst part for you because...

COOPER: It just really weighed on me. I just really didn't want to be in that moment, and it really sucked that I had to keep going. (SOI # 2, pp. 18-19)

Finally, Cooper wrestled with anger toward certain students on the course. Throughout the course Cooper acknowledged his mixed feelings about the course being constituted by two different age groups, the course with 16-18-year-olds (his course) and the course with younger students, ages 13-15. He complained how two of the younger students (on the age 13-15 course) failed, at least in his mind, to pull their weight.

COOPER: Ok. I guess one thing that made me angry over the course was—I don't want to point out specific fingers—some of the immaturity in the group. I hope to view myself as a fairly mature person, someone who can deal with situations accordingly and, generally, mature in my ways. It digs at me when I've got to deal with people who aren't at that same level of maturity—especially on a day-to-day basis for 21 days.

CURT: What was the hardest part about that for you, of travelling with people who were at a different developmental stage than you? What was the hardest part or the worst part of that for you?

COOPER: Just the way they dealt with things. I noticed some of the time, again I don't like pointing extra fingers at anybody.... Say Brant would have a hard day, and would get back to camp and he would instantly just run off into the river and go play in the river for three hours until people called him for dinner.

CURT: Right.

COOPER: Cassie would almost do the same thing in the way she would shut down when she was having a bad day. At the same time, I would be having a bad day, and I'd be like, 'Ok, well, you know, it sucks, but I've got to keep going. I'm not going to ruin other peoples' experience in my unhappiness. I'm just going to push through and keep trying to move on the best I can.' We'd get to camp and I'd be setting up tarps and trying to get shit done, and others would just be shutting down, and it dug at me. (SOI # 2, pp. 20-21)

**Basic theme # 4: Longing for approval.** Cooper beamed with pride when telling me about the math course he passed earlier in the year; a feat made possible by earning an 86% on his final exam, which, in light of the earlier grades in the course was quite an achievement. His

sense of pride had a lot to do with pleasing his parents, something that was obviously important to him. I share this text in order to provide some context with the basic theme of longing for approval.

CURT: So, what was the best part of getting that 86% for you?

COOPER: Probably my mom calling and telling me that she was proud. I didn't even know that I passed until I was already in Edmonton. My mom gave me a call while I was sitting in my dad's couch, and just kind of was like, 'Hey, so Ms. Ang called me today. You passed the course. Good job. We are proud of you. She told me you got an 86% on the final, which is amazing!' Just kind of ran through it, and it was like, 'You know what, I did it.' She's happy, she's proud. It just felt good.

CURT: Felt good because...

COOPER: Because I don't get much of that.

CURT: From your mom?

COOPER: From either of them.

CURT: Or your dad?

COOPER: Nope.

CURT: You mean sort of the 'good job' kind of thing?

COOPER: My relationships with them...they normally focus on the negatives. They tell me what I need to step it up on, more than what I'm doing good at. When I got the call, and she was just flat out telling me she was happy, and that she was proud, it was like, 'Hey, you know what? There were no negatives to that.' It felt good.

CURT: It felt great, didn't it?

COOPER: Big time. (SOI # 1, pp. 11-12)

So, whether it was pleasing his parents by doing well in school, taking the difficult step of changing schools in order to be around a group of peers that accepted him, or investing time in a girlfriend who reciprocated his kindness and willingness to listen, Cooper was continually searching and longing for acceptance from others. In the excerpt below, Cooper talks about the

important role his relationship with his girlfriend played, a story that provides further context and background for the approval he sought while on the OB expedition.

CURT: What was the best part of the relationship with her for you?

COOPER: It's a couple years ago, so it's not 100% fresh, but that's a really good question. The way that we needed each other... First of all, I hadn't had someone relying on me in a long time. I had always just been trying to feed off of other people. When someone actually cared and wanted and needed me, it was a big change and it felt really good. And also the other way around—I needed her and she was there. I needed a rock, I needed someone to talk to you, I needed someone to be there for me and she was the first one that had really been there in a long time, so it really kind of [resonated]. It felt good to have that mutual relationship that I hadn't really experienced in I can't even tell you how long—like years and years and years. I guess since Grade 2 when I transferred to Girdwood Village, which was the school at which I got bullied at. The entire time I was there I was the awkward, weird kid who couldn't play basketball. I used to be very chubby as well. I wasn't fast and couldn't play soccer well, couldn't kick a ball well, and couldn't play football like the rest of the guys. I hadn't felt that mutual connection and mutual, almost, want and need for so long that it felt really great to finally get that back and get that in return. (SOI # 1, p. 19)

On the course, Cooper's longing for acceptance continued but it seemed to center around two aspects of the expedition in particular; completing the course and providing strong leadership to the group. His desire and struggle to complete the course permeated nearly everything he said and did throughout the expedition. It was *the* issue for him to manage and it seemed to be the issue with the most significant consequences for him socially and personally. Had he not finished, I suspect his perceived approval from others (parents, friends, course instructors, etc.) would have been diminished. Certainly, his approval of self would have suffered as he would likely have berated himself, reiterating his belief he is a quitter, and that he is a person who doesn't have the fortitude to finish difficult challenges.

CURT: When you don't finish something that you start, what does it cost you?

COOPER: I guess just disappointment in myself, mainly. I don't know; it's hard to say. Mainly disappointment to myself, and disappointment to my dad and my mom. You

could say it doesn't really cost me much per se. It can be the easier choice in my options. It's just general dissatisfaction. (SOI # 2, p. 4)

In the next excerpt Cooper suggested that his father's acceptance, or confirmation to use his words, mattered a lot to him. He indicated that, historically, his father had focused more on his limitations than on his strengths and that this, in turn, had contributed to a lack of self-confidence. Cooper saw an opportunity on this OB course to complete something hard, something he believed his father would likely be unable to do, and something, if he was successful, that might shift his father's perception of him, from a child who easily gives up to a young man who has the wherewithal to persevere through difficulty. In light of the importance Cooper placed on the relationship with both parents, completing the course seemed a very big deal.

CURT: Why was it important for you to be able to do something that, 1) your dad probably could not have done, and, 2) to do something hard and actually finish?

COOPER: I guess I haven't gotten a lot of confirmation from him. He tends to focus on what I'm doing wrong, and what I'm not succeeding at, more than what I have succeeded at. I guess it was a big thing for me to actually get that confirmation from him. (SOI # 2, p. 7)

CURT: Now that you have finished the course, and you did it well, how has that affected your relationship with your dad—if at all?

COOPER: He seemed really proud when I got home. He was really happy I got through it. He was happy to hear about it, etc.

CURT: How did that feel?

COOPER: It felt pretty good.

CURT: What was the best part of your dad's pride in your accomplishment?

COOPER: Probably just that he came and said he was proud of me; he came to congratulate me and pat me on the back, and say, 'Good job!' That felt really good. (SOI # 2, pp. 9-10)

The other aspect of the course that seemed to matter a lot to Cooper, and consequently played into his desire for approval from others, had to do with his ability to lead and set a good example for others. Like others on the course, Cooper had several opportunities to lead the group either as navigator, sweep, or leader of the day. On day 17, we hiked up over a pass into Exshaw Creek, and Cooper was leader of the day. Though he did well, going up the saddle and part way down the other side, he started having problems once we dropped into the Exshaw drainage. Water was scarce, route-finding was difficult, and the group became irritable as dehydration and difficult hiking took their toll.

CURT: What would you say was at stake for you that day. The day when you were struggling to maintain your position as leader once we dropped down the saddle into Exshaw Creek?

COOPER: Probably partly pride, and not recognition but leaving a good impression on the group.

CURT: And a good impression on the group was important to you because...

COOPER: It really felt like I was letting them down when I was in that position.

CURT: And the concern that you might be letting them down was of concern to you because...

COOPER: I felt like a lot of them looked up to me, and I didn't want to ruin that. I didn't want to leave them with that instead.

CURT: And it was important for you to maintain that reputation as a leader because...

COOPER: I'm really not sure. I haven't had a lot of that recognition before, so it was really nice to get that. The thought of ruining that unsettled me. (SOI # 2, p. 19)

**Basic theme # 5: Developing perseverance.** Struggling to finish the course loomed large in Cooper's experience. He described it as his "one main goal" (SOI # 2, p. 6), something he felt "really strongly about" (SOI # 2, p. 6), the achievement that led to "this new look that I want to start finishing some stuff, and actually start doing well instead of just being mediocre" (SOI # 2,

p. 11). He talked about the course as “the hardest thing I have ever done,” and described day 17 (the day we hiked to the pass above Exshaw Creek, which would provide the primary descent route to the TransCanada highway and the end of the course) as his “biggest moment of success” because it was then that he realized he would complete the expedition (SOI # 2, p. 3).

CURT: Ok, you want to pick a different card?

COOPER: Ok. Let’s go with Success. The biggest moment of success for me was when we climbed over that ridgeline from the creek bed, which was actually our first packs-on climb. Then you could kind of see everywhere around us, and actually see Exshaw. It just felt like we really pulled it off. We’re just about done. We can see our final destination.

CURT: That was the day we climbed up through that creek bed, up to the saddle. Is that the day?

COOPER: Yeah.

CURT: And we could look down at Exshaw Creek, yeah. You said that felt like your biggest moment. Tell me more about that.

COOPER: It felt like you finally did it: you finally pushed through it all. You can feel where you’re going now. It’s just the final push. It just felt good.

CURT: What was the best part of knowing that you had finished the course? What was the best part of that for you, knowing that it’s sort of all downhill from here?

COOPER: The fact that it was so difficult getting up to that point. Over the entire trip it was definitely the hardest thing I’d ever done: being able to know that I actually just finished it because I don’t finish tons of stuff in life. I tend to have quitter tendencies—when the going gets tough, drop out. When I actually was able to see the end goal, and be like, ‘Wow, you finished this,’ it felt really good. (SOI # 2, p. 3)

In my field observations, I noted on several occasions that Cooper “hated” wilderness camping (field notes, days 5-21, p. 16), felt homesick for friends and family (field notes, days 5-21, pp. 2, 11,13, 16), wanted to abandon the course and go home (field notes, days 5-21, pp. 13, 16), felt afraid when climbing and descending Black Rock Mountain (field notes, days 5-21, pp. 9,10) and felt depressed that he had been sent on this course (field notes, days 5-21, p. 17). All of

these negative emotions weighed heavily on him, making his completion of the course a substantive achievement and something that he understandably felt proud of. Of course, in some ways, he really didn't have a choice about finishing or not finishing. With the exception of the very beginning of the course, when we were still camping in front country, and then again during resupply (day 11) when OB staff drove to the rendezvous spot and could have easily evacuated Cooper, there was no simple way to quit the course given the nature of the route we took. It was a wilderness backpacking course with limited and complicated evacuation options. This, no doubt, helped "push" Cooper toward completion. Nonetheless, he did forsake the two options to quit that did beckon him, especially during resupply on day 11:

COOPER: I was feeling pretty torn on re-supply day because I knew I could go home if I just asked to. It was just one question away. At the same time I had a strong stand to really finish it and kick some ass. I was divided. (SOI # 2, p. 10)

I asked Cooper how he approached the plethora of new situations he encountered on the course as he admitted that he felt outside his comfort zone for most of the course. He responded by saying:

COOPER: I'd say a lot of it, I just muscled through it, like, 'You know what? I've just got to get it done,' and then I got it done. I think that was my view on a lot of it: you're faced with a challenge; you've got to finish the challenge; go for it.

CURT: Sort of just brute mental and physical strength?

COOPER: Yeah, just give it, go for it, and hopefully come out on the other side.

CURT: How was this different from the way you usually approach things?

COOPER: Usually when I approach things, and it gets that difficult, I stop trying whatsoever, lose all motivation, and withdraw.

CURT: So, it sounds like the approach you used on the Outward Bound course was quite a bit different than the approach you've been using at home.

COOPER: For sure. I had this feeling that I needed to get it done. I don't look at a lot of things that way when I'm at home. I tend to make excuses as to why I can give up and not have to worry about it. (semi-structured interview, pp. 18-19)

When asked how he thought the OB experience would affect the way he approaches new situations in the future, this is what he said.

COOPER: "I'm definitely going to put a hell-of-a lot more effort in. When the going gets tough, keep going, instead of giving up. Keep trying a lot more than I have in the past" (semi-structured interview, p. 19).

**Basic theme # 6: Learning to lead and lend a hand.** At home, Cooper was a self-proclaimed follower.

COOPER: Definitely, my dynamic I played in the group (OB course) was different. In my life at home I tend to fade into the background of groups and not really stand out. I think, when I had those people looking up to me, it made me want to stand out and want to try to make impressions and stand out as a leader. I think that was the main difference. I tend to follow others when I'm at home. Once I had people who want to follow me, it made that easier to step up, in that sense. (semi-structured interview, p. 6)

Perhaps it was because of his history of being bullied in school, or the difficulties he had developing friendships marked by mutual regard and concern; Cooper's typical position in the social hierarchy was not at the top, providing leadership and direction. On the OB course that changed. With the blended group, constituted by a mix of ages, and with the older group (to which Cooper belonged) having arrived at the front country campsite some two days prior to the younger group, Cooper was in a position to conduct a social experiment, one that would assist the younger students in settling into the experience, and an experiment that would help him try on a social role different from the one he employed at home. The new role seemed a good fit given his desire for respect and approval and his interest in helping others have a positive experience. In his mind, this combination of benefits was a win-win.

CURT: What role do you think you played in the group?

COOPER: I think I definitely played a bit of a leadership role. I could've played it a little better, I think, but I think some of the people there were looking up to me. I played a bit of a leadership role. I hope I played a role where I could help people, and that I was a good person to talk to.

CURT: Why did you adopt those particular roles, and why are they important to you?

COOPER: I don't know why, exactly, I adopted the role. It seemed like it fit. In the first few days I noticed people were asking me questions and inquiring to me, even. It seemed like if I stepped up and really made an effort, I could do something positive there.

CURT: And that was important to you because...

COOPER: Because I really like leaving a positive impression on people. I enjoy it when people can look back and go, 'Hey, that Cooper kid was really cool. That Cooper kid was a great leader and he helped me through some stuff.' If I can leave that impression on people, that makes me happy. (semi-structured interview, 6)

Many of my field observations suggested that Cooper did a pretty good job leading others. I noted a variety of positive behaviors including: helpful and pitching in (field notes, day 3, p. 1), positive leader (field notes, day 3, p. 1), eager to please (field notes, day 3, p. 5), acting very responsibly (field notes, days 5-21, p. 3), checking on others, making sure jobs are done, (field notes, days 5-21, p. 3), taking role seriously but not too much (field notes, days 5-21, p. 3), stepping up as leader (field notes, days 5-21, p. 4), doing great job as leader, looking after others, helpful (field notes, days 5-21, p. 3), taking others into account (field notes, days 5-21, p. 4), thanked for positive and helpful attitude (field notes, days 5-21, p. 5), continues to check in on others, thoughtful (field notes, days 5-21, p. 9), offering accurate reflections of group ups and downs (field notes, days 5-21, p. 10), packed up and ready on time (field notes, days 5-21, p. 10), doing well as navigator, in good spirits (field notes, days 5-21, p. 3). But this run on good will from the group, and his burgeoning self-confidence that was at least partly related to being seen by the others as a bona fide leader, was not to last. On day 17, his second stint as leader of the

day, he struggled to maintain the positive momentum he had built over the past two and one-half weeks. He led the group up and over the Exshaw Pass and all was well until we dropped into Exshaw Creek, below treeline. The initial euphoria of the unrestricted view of the Canadian Rockies atop Exshaw Pass, and the proximity of the TransCanada Highway, which marked the end of the course, eventually gave way to one of Cooper's most difficult days of the entire trip.

CURT: What was the low point of the course for you?

COOPER: The low point was probably the day where we first came up the creek bed and over the ridge (Exshaw Pass), and we could see Exshaw, and then we started walking down that creek and there was no water, and it was one of those 'so close, yet so far away' moments.

CURT: What made that so hard for you, and such a low moment for you?

COOPER: For starters, because I knew I was so close to finishing it, yet it was so difficult that exact day. It was like, 'Ah, I don't really want to be here'; and, secondly, because I was supposed to be Leader that day, and I really dropped the ball. It just really didn't feel good.

CURT: Would you say that that day was the low point more because it was a hard day physically, and then, to get to Exshaw Creek only to find it dry; or would you say that it was a low point because you started out as leader, you started out really strong, and then, when we discovered there was no water and that hiking became so very difficult that you had trouble staying focused as leader? Do you think it was more one or the other, or was it just a combination of the two?

COOPER: I think it was at least a little more the second one.

CURT: About the leadership role?

COOPER: The first one just added onto that and made it worse.

CURT: What was the worst part for you of struggling to maintain your leadership role that day? What was the hardest part about that?

COOPER: Just because I'd done so well in the past with that, and I was actually looking forward to being Leader again, and then I goofed it up so hard I beat myself down over it.

CURT: When you say you 'goofed it up'...because we didn't find water?

COOPER: No, because I wasn't being a leader. I fell back into the second or third person behind, I wasn't being vocal, when people asked for breaks I'd be like, 'I don't care, take a break!' I wasn't being a good leader.

CURT: Do you have some insight now, looking back on it, in terms of why you made that choice to step back as leader and let Derek take over?

COOPER: As to why, I'm not sure. Probably because I wasn't feeling very good that day to start.

CURT: Physically, mentally, or both?

COOPER: A little bit of both. More mentally. It was such a high point when we were at the top of the ridge (pass), and then we got down there and it was like, I hurt my knee and then I hurt my ear, and people weren't listening to me. It just all compounded and overwhelmed me a little bit, and I think I shut down.

CURT: Any other thoughts or feelings about that low point, to help me understand your experience of what it was like?

COOPER: Not really, just the fact that it really beat me down, made me really unmotivated. (semi-structured interview, pp. 11-13)

On this day so close to the end of the course, Cooper struggled with leading the group. He struggled with remaining engaged. He reported feeling overwhelmed by his own physical and mental discomfort brought on by fatigue (it was one of our hardest days of hiking), dehydration (we failed to fill up with water at the pass, resulting in water rationing through a very hot, difficult and lengthy section of hiking), homesickness (he stated numerous times that he wanted to be home and be done with wilderness hiking) and the pressure of assuming leadership on the first day of "Final" (students assume primary leadership for decision-making). In looking back on that very hard day as leader, he felt bad about letting others down, and, as a consequence, letting himself down as well.

CURT: What would you say was at stake for you that day, when you were struggling to maintain your position as leader once we dropped down the saddle into Exshaw Creek?

COOPER: Probably partly pride, and not recognition but leaving a good impression on the group.

CURT: And a good impression on the group was important to you because...

COOPER: It really felt like I was letting them down when I was in that position.

CURT: And the concern that you might be letting them down worried you because...

COOPER: I felt like a lot of them looked up to me, and I didn't want to ruin that. I didn't want to leave them with that instead.

CURT: And it was important for you to maintain that reputation as a leader because...

COOPER: I'm really not sure. I haven't had a lot of that recognition before, so it was really nice to get that. The thought of ruining that unsettled me. (SOI # 2, pp. 19-20)

In my field notes, I observed Cooper's near total disregard for others on that hard day of leading. I noted several negative experiences that day after descending from the saddle into Exshaw Creek including: lashing out at another student (field notes, days 5-21, p. 19), unable to effectively assess the route options (field notes, days 5-21, p. 21), giving up and shutting down (field notes, days 5-21, p. 21), ignoring another student's wise suggestion that we handrail the creek in easier terrain rather than hiking in the very difficult creek bed (field notes, days 5-21, p. 22), failing to pull the group together to consult (field notes, days 5-21, p. 22), and ignoring how far behind the slower hikers had fallen (field notes, days 5-21, p. 22). Toward the end of the day, Cooper did pull it together enough to ask the group where they wanted to camp. His self-confidence as a leader, which had increased significantly during the course, had been compromised, and it showed as he attempted to navigate during the last days of the course. I noted in my field observations that he was spending a lot more time talking to his friends than navigating, and that though he was doing an okay job of keeping us on route, he required a lot of coaching from instructors. My final note on his leadership was that he seemed largely

disinterested in learning to lead or navigate well, appearing preoccupied with socializing and going home.

**Basic theme # 7: Building self-confidence.** From the beginning of the course, Cooper made it clear that his primary goal was to complete the expedition. He knew it would be hard so he focused on getting through it without giving up. For Cooper, completing the course was motivated by a combination of proving to his parents he was capable of finishing something hard and proving to himself he had the mettle to persevere through difficulty.

CURT: You mentioned for strong stand, finishing the trip and doing well was really important to you. Were there other reasons that finishing the trip mattered, besides showing your dad that you could do something hard, something that he probably would not have been able to do? Were there other reasons why finishing the trip mattered to you as much as it did?

COOPER: Just to finish it. Just to prove to myself, even, that I could really do it, and I could do it well.

CURT: How much of this do you think was to prove to him or to your mom that you could do it and do well, and how much of it would you say was to prove to yourself that you could do it and do well? It sounds like it was a combination of the two.

COOPER: I think it was almost a 50/50 combination of the two. I really wanted to do it for me, but at the same time I wanted to show them I could do it too. (SOI # 2, p. 9)

Completing the course served as a paradigm shift for Cooper because he had a history of giving up on many things when difficulties arose. His completion of the course shored up his self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy; the belief he was able to do hard things and not give up. Though he was not free of these familiar moments of weakness, as made evident by his struggle to lead the group on day 17 (described above), he, by and large, enjoyed a significant increase in self-confidence by completing the course.

CURT: You mentioned getting another new bicycle in order to learn to be more tenacious, to persevere. Tell me why that's important to you.

COOPER: It was the same sort of thing as how I also used to quit stuff. When I had my old bike, I tried to learn a couple things on it. I tried to go to the skate park every once in a while. I wasn't making tons of progress, so I stopped trying to learn anything new, and used it as a bike to get to school and get home. I feel like, if I really put effort into it, I could get good at it, and it would give me some assurance—almost the same sort of thing that the trip did—that I can work through something and do alright at it in the end, and kick some ass at it. I feel like that could give me the same, almost, recognition in myself if I really tried at it.

CURT: And recognition maybe from others, that you're good at something, or recognition from yourself, or both?

COOPER: Recognition even of myself, that I can.

CURT: Is it another way of talking about developing self-confidence?

COOPER: Yeah, I think so.

CURT: And that's important to you because...

COOPER: Because it's something I really don't have much of—that I need to work on. (semi-structured interview, p. 17)

Until Black Rock Mountain, Cooper believed that heights did not bother him. He professed confidence that he could ascend and descend the peak with ease. His experience, however, proved otherwise. He was gripped by fear, going up and coming down, and managing this fear proved challenging. Coming down, he moved very slowly, relying on support from peers and instructors to keep moving and avoid a total shut down. The impending lightning storm no doubt added an additional impetus and measure of perceived risk and stress. His success, made possible by his perseverance and determination to complete the climb, was among the two things that led to his increased self-confidence—completing the course was the other—and his success on Black Rock proved to be, for him and many others, the highlight of the course.

CURT: What was the high point of the course for you?

COOPER: Probably getting to the top of Black Rock.

CURT: And that was a high point because...

COOPER: It was something that I'd never really ever experienced, in any sense of the word: never done something that difficult, never been that high up before, never climbed a mountain before. It was a lot of firsts. It really struck me when I got up there, as one of these 'Wow, you did it!' moments.

CURT: So, it was, again, a self-confidence booster; you're capable of a lot more than you've given yourself credit for, and that you really can do things that are hard—mentally and physically.

COOPER: Yeah. And getting down was another high point.

CURT: Because you were scared, and you were able to manage the fear and actually get through it?

COOPER: Yeah.

CURT: Other high points for you, or was that the main one?

COOPER: I'd say that was the main high point.

CURT: Any other reason Black Rock was a high point for you, besides what you've already mentioned?

COOPER: At least going down, it really forced me to face things head-on. Normally, when I feel anxiety like that, my main source of coping is to distract myself and escape it. When there was no escaping it, you just had to man-up and deal with it, it forced me to face things head-on. (semi-structured interview, p. 11)

## **Organizing Theme # 2: Making Important Life Decisions**

In keeping with his interest in reclaiming happiness, Cooper used the course to rethink the direction of his life and doing so led him to consider making changes. His proposed changes were wide-ranging and demonstrated the power of self-reflection which wilderness travel affords, and the consequent self-awareness that comes from that self-reflection.

CURT: What plans do you have to change things or do things differently as a result of this course?

COOPER: I decided a whole bunch of stuff I need to get done when I get home, while I was on the trip.

CURT: Such as...

COOPER: For starters, I want to get myself into a therapist that I can talk to... for an extended period of time; secondly, I want to get into some family counselling with my mom, so that I can work out whatever's going on in that relationship; third of all, I want to get myself a job, just to get myself some sort of responsibility, in the sense of 'I need to get this done,' in the sense of constant responsibility; I want to find myself a solid hobby that I can get into and really work at, and have to be forced to persevere in. I was thinking that I wanted to buy myself a new bike and really get into that, and really start biking; and, also, definitely trying harder in school next year. Got to get some better grades.

CURT: That's a pretty substantial list!

COOPER: Yeah. Basically, I looked at what I was doing before, and decided that that's not going to get me anywhere, and I'm not going to get any happier if I just continue doing dick-all and sitting around doing nothing. (semi-structured interview, pp. 15-16)

**Basic theme # 1: Tapping into the power of self-reflection.** Cooper reported that the difficulty of the course and the challenges those difficulties presented were one of the primary factors of the wilderness experience that led to the personal changes he made or intended to make. Another factor that loomed large as change agent was the freedom from distractions and the opportunities for self-reflection that provided.

CURT: You said the challenge or the difficulty level, that was one thing that made the changes happen for you. What was the second thing?

COOPER: I think the separation from distractions was the second big part of all of it.

CURT: Can you be more specific?

COOPER: When you're in modern lifetime, you can just distract yourself whenever you want. There's no real time when you are forced to sit down and think and reflect. Being out there really forces you to do that, and that's a really powerful thing. When you're at home, like I mentioned, if you're not feeling too hot you can just go for a walk or grab your laptop or grab your phone or grab whatever, and, instantly, you're not thinking about what you were before. But, when you're out there, there's no real distracting yourself like that. You have to face things head-on, and that's pretty powerful.

CURT: What are the distractions in ordinary life that tend to keep you away from this place of self-reflection?

COOPER: Probably a big one is my friends, (at the moment) video games because there's not much else to do out here in Edmonton. If I'm at home, say I'm not feeling too hot; I'll just meet up with one of my friends and hang out at his house or go to a movie or whatever. You don't really think about it anymore once you're with someone else and chatting and not worrying. (semi-structured interview, p. 10)

The solo, which took place on days 15-16, figured prominently in his understanding of how the wilderness experience in general, and the OB course in particular, was able to facilitate the depth of self-reflection he experienced. Cooper referred to the solo as “probably the most profound moment for me, the most helpful in self-reflection and realizing what I need to get done, and the most helpful in the long run” (semi-structured interview, p. 13).

CURT: Have you had that experience of having the space to think and reflect in other experiences that you've had, or would you say this was unique in that way?

COOPER: This was fairly unique in that way. First of all, a big part of it was the solo. I've never done anything like that, and that was a big part of where that reflection came in. Also, with everyday life, you never have that time, really. You don't get that experience at all. I sit there, either on a computer or on a phone—or at least with access to one—checking it fairly often. There's none of that real time to just sit down and think and ponder, which you get a lot of when you're completely detached from everything.

CURT: How much of that time alone to think and ponder came from the solo, and how much would you say came from the other aspects of the experience of being on the trip, aspects that were not related directly to the solo?

COOPER: I think the solo was a fairly large part of it, but, at the same time, you do get a lot more than what you do in everyday life, just on the other aspects. The solo amps that up to a level that's even more intense than just the average day out there. (semi-structured interview, p. 3)

But it wasn't only the solo that made possible the kind of space for self-reflecting he found potent. The rest of the course promoted, even if in a less intensive way, the same opportunities for a distraction-free space for self-reflection; the kind that led Cooper to some important life decisions. He even found his participation in this research study to be a catalyst for self-reflection.

CURT: I'm wondering, is there anything else, any other thoughts or feelings, that you think might be important for me to know in order to understand how you experienced this course?

COOPER: Nothing in particular, other than the fact that your interviews helped a lot with that reflection on the course. I feel like having the researcher there made a big impact on how I looked back on it, and how I looked at it in general. I don't think I would've reached that same level of reflection if I didn't know that I was going to have to be reflecting and really thinking about it in depth at the end of it. Not anything specific—other than that.

CURT: Ok. So you do think having a researcher on board was part of the push for you to take the experience seriously?

COOPER: Yeah, for sure. (semi-structured interview, pp. 20-21)

**Basic theme # 2: Developing self-awareness.** Cooper came to the course hoping it might help him sort his life out. He admitted having no idea what he enjoyed, what he was good at, or what he wanted to do as an adult. He felt profoundly unhappy and had the sense that unless something shifted in his thinking and behavior, he would remain unhappy and without direction indefinitely. He longed for a greater awareness of the things that matter to him and the things he might enjoy doing in order to avoid the inaction and apathy that had beset him.

CURT: It sounds like it's important to you to identify one or two things and focus on those things in order to do them well. Help me understand what the best thing about that would be if you were to do that. What would be at stake for you in terms of finding something to do and do well? What difference would it make to you?

COOPER: Just to have that fulfillment, I think. Right now, even when my parents ask me, when we're trying to figure out something for me to do in the long term, what to go to school for or where I'm going to go in the long term, it's like, 'Well, what are you good at? What do you like?' And I sit there and I'm like, 'I honestly don't know what I'm good at.' I don't know what I like, at this point. It'd just be nice to have that fulfillment and say, 'Hey, I like this,' or 'I'm good at this,' and be able to actually go from there.

CURT: It sounds like what you'd love to have is some direction: some compelling passion or some interest that was strong enough that it would provide scaffolding or direction to your life. Is that what you're after?

COOPER: For sure.

CURT: And that's important to you because...

COOPER: Just because it's something I really don't have right now. I've never really experienced it.

CURT: Any sense of what's at stake for you in this?

COOPER: Where I'm going to go. If I never develop an interest, then I'm just going to be doing something I'm unhappy with my whole life—or never doing anything at all. If I really had something to work for and go after it could give me, again, like you mentioned, a sense of direction, a sense of where to start and where to go.

CURT: It sounds like you're somewhat worried that you may not develop that sense of direction, and that you might be a bit rudderless and not really headed in any particular direction. Is that what you're worried about?

COOPER: For sure. (SOI # 2, pp. 5-6)

Over the course of the 21-day expedition, Cooper made some important decisions about how to approach life once he returned to his father's home in Edmonton. His list of goals identified and developed during the expedition included: 1) finding a psychotherapist to help him learn to better manage his anxiety and build a closer relationship with his mother, 2) getting a job and developing a greater sense of responsibility, and 3) working hard and doing well in school in order to enjoy more options for his post-secondary career (semi-structured interview, pp. 16-18). He credits the development of this substantive list of goals to the self-reflection he engaged in and the challenges he faced and overcame.

CURT: If I were to ask you what you got out of the experience, what would you say?

COOPER: I'd say mainly just a sense of what I need to do. Before the trip I was motivation-less and just letting myself get completely down on myself, and I came out of the trip with a sense that, 'Ok, if you don't want to just be down on yourself, and don't want to continue on the cycle, then you have to do this, this, this, and this to break that cycle.' I think the trip and the self-reflection helped me gain that.

CURT: How significant do you think this is for you, this realization, or this motivation, to do things differently?

COOPER: For me, definitely very significant. I mentioned to you in the past that it's been a while since I've been happy. I think that if I follow my plan, and I really work towards it, I've got a fairly decent idea of what I need to do in order to get there—which is highly significant to me. That's something I really need.

CURT: So, for you this has been a pretty big deal?

COOPER: Yeah. It will be, if I stick to it. (semi-structured interview, p. 3)

Cooper reported that the course changed his mind about things and restored a sense of hope that he could, once again, enjoy a measure of happiness that had eluded him since he was bullied by others in school around his father's sexual orientation. I asked him if he thought the course he completed was of sufficient value to warrant making it more widely available to others. He responded with an emphatic yes. When asked why he thought so he responded:

COOPER: "Because of the change of perspective I've witnessed—at least in myself. I'm not sure if anyone else got the same experience that I did. The change in mental state that I came home with was 'very significant'" (semi-structured interview, p. 20).

## CHAPTER 8: FINDINGS: ALEC'S PROFILE

In this chapter I describe how Alec made sense of this wilderness backpacking experience.

For Alec, three organizing themes emerged including developing independence, managing challenges, and enjoying wilderness. These three organizing themes and their ten variations (basic themes) as well as the global theme (chasing dreams) are explored below and illustrated in Figure 6.

### **Global Theme: Chasing Dreams**

Alec enrolled in this course because he longed to explore and enjoy the beauty of the Canadian Rockies. He was equally interested in further equipping himself with the skills necessary for launching a solo wilderness expedition of his own. Alec had already completed a five-day winter Outward Bound (OB) course in Ontario, Canada, so he arrived with some experience and a hunger for more. My initial impression of him was that of a young man full of enthusiasm and energy for his next wilderness journey, a youth who loved wild, beautiful places, and a young man with big dreams (field notes, day 3, p. 2).

ALEC: I've got two big dreams in the world: I want to become a folk singer, and I want to go to the Yukon. How did I come up with those, you might ask. I don't know; it's weird. I guess I'm blessed to know what I want to do, but then again, it's kind of a thing that you just wake up and you're like, 'I'm going to do this.' Does that make sense? (SOI # 2, pp. 18-19)

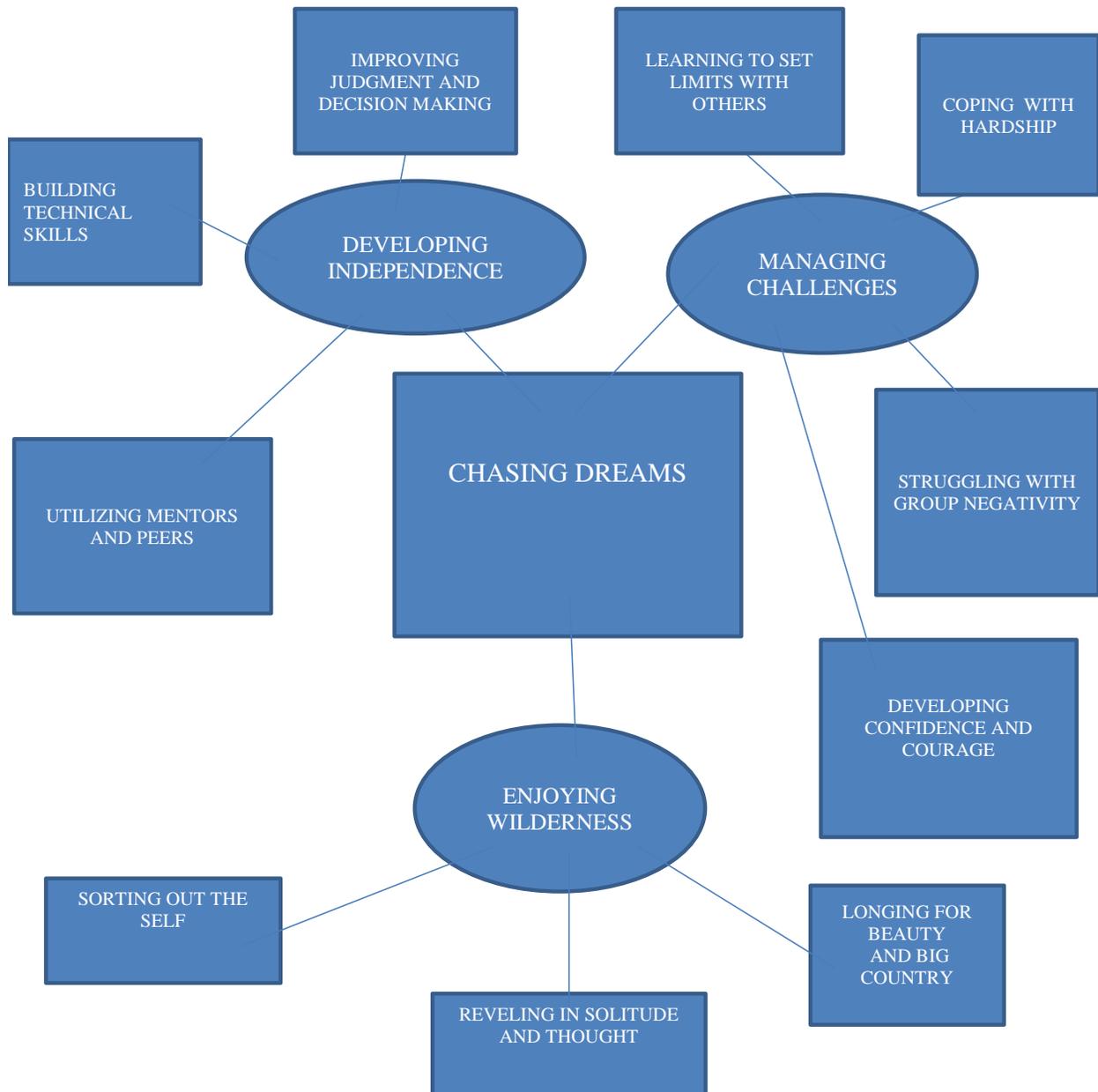


Figure 6. Alec's thematic network.

Alec arrived with a pretty good idea how he wanted his young adult life to unfold and it was a life, at least in part, very much unlike the one created by his parents. Following graduation from university he planned to travel around the country singing Scottish folk songs at bars and

pubs. He was earnest in his pursuit of guitar and vocal skills, spending at least two hours each day prior to the OB course studying, practicing, and honing his craft.

CURT: You mentioned that you come from a family of lawyers, and you're a little worried about how you're going to make a living as a folk musician—if that is indeed what you pursue. What's at stake for you with this passion of yours?

ALEC: What's at stake is, if I don't do it, that dream of going out and playing at pubs or bars, and going across Canada with a guitar in a Jeep, rolling around and travelling. I think that dream would be at stake if I didn't do it. (SOI # 1, p. 5)

Of equal importance to him was his dream of organizing and completing a solo wilderness journey in the Yukon Territory in search of increased self-awareness, the Aurora Borealis, and the kind of beauty that only northern wilderness can provide. His decision to explore the Ghost River Wilderness with OB was grounded in two beliefs: first, that he would need additional skills in order to safely embark on his Yukon wilderness trek, and second, that the Canadian Rockies were a beautiful range that warranted exploration.

CURT: Why is it important for you to see the Northern Lights?

ALEC: I think I want to go through this life appreciating beauty and searching for it in the wilderness. So, the Northern Lights are definitely something that I want to see. It's a goal of mine right now to see them. That's my goal: to go through the world and search for beauty in the world, in the wilderness more specifically.

CURT: What's the most important part of that for you? What's at stake for you with this dream of searching for beauty in wild places and appreciating that beauty?

ALEC: The thing that's most at stake is not doing that. To follow this dream, I think I need to do that.

CURT: Will following this dream cost you anything?

ALEC: I don't know. I have to experience that. You know what I do know, though? It's definitely something that is contrary to this culture's thought of living: I don't want to spend a life working at a desk, if you know what I mean.

CURT: Oh yeah.

ALEC: I find that so interesting because that's what both my parents do; they're both lawyers, and I don't want to be anything like them when I grow up. They're both good people, but I don't want to do what they do when I grow up. (SOI # 2, pp. 19-20)

### **Organizing Theme # 1: Developing Independence**

Developing independence from his parents and others whose opinion of him mattered was a significant theme throughout the data. Alec, as indicated above, had dreams of becoming a folk singer and wilderness explorer. These dreams diverged significantly from the life his parents had built and caused real anxiety for him, mostly because he was a self-described "people pleaser." In the excerpt below, Alec talks about the ease with which he embraces the dream of earning his living as a folk singer but acknowledges the difficulty he is likely to face in actually executing that dream.

CURT: How hard was it to arrive at that decision to go a different direction from your family, that is to not be a lawyer but be a folk singer instead?

ALEC: It was simple. The only question is, can I make that decision? That's going to be the hard part, deciding I want to become a folk singer, I want to do this in my life, and I don't want to do this. That's going to be the hard part. The hard part has yet to come.

CURT: The hard part will be actually fulfilling the dream?

ALEC: Yeah.

CURT: And why will that be the hard part for you?

ALEC: Because of the appeasing part, again. I want to live up to my parents' expectation, and I want to please them. It's probably an irrational thought, but this, in my sense, won't happen if I leave. I know it sounds weird, but that's how I think of it. It's not logical. They probably will love me just the same.

CURT: Do you mean that there's this tension between following your own path, which is to be a folk singer and have an adventure in the Yukon, and pursue and search for the experience of beauty? There's this driving force within you to do that as a way to being true to self, but there's this tension with wanting to appease or please or make good with the people you care about, like your mom and dad.

ALEC: Yep.

CURT: It sounds like this tension is pretty significant!

ALEC: It is. Right now it's not very significant, but I'm sure it will become more significant as the chance of me leaving increases.

CURT: Right. As you get closer to being able to execute your dream, you suspect that tension will increase?

ALEC: Definitely.

CURT: So how do you think you'll resolve that tension?

ALEC: I think, right now, the way I can resolve that is learning to say no. Doing what I want to do and being ok with that. The only way I will ever make that decision is if, a) I learn how to say no and do what I want to do, or b) I don't learn. I ultimately hope that I will learn to do what I want to do and put my needs above the needs of others, as weird as that sounds.

CURT: Yeah.

ALEC: I guess that's the only way I can make that choice. (SOI # 2, 20-21)

In order to develop the independence needed to pursue his dream of safely exploring the Yukon wilderness alone, Alec knew he needed help in acquiring the needed skills and mindset. Three basic themes emerged that helped explain how Alec viewed the OB course in terms of its ability to prepare him for future wilderness travel and exploration. Those themes include: utilizing mentors and peers, building technical skills, and improving judgement and decision-making.

**Basic theme # 1: Utilizing mentors and peers.** Alec possessed a sufficient measure of self-awareness to know he lacked the maturity, array of skills, judgement, and decision-making ability to safely conduct a solo expedition to the Yukon, especially in winter. So, he embarked on this OB course with the notion he could avail himself to the expertise of the OB instructors and his peers in order to shore up his preparedness. Finding water was a continual challenge given the hydrology of the region. On day 12, the group had to decide whether to continue on our

planned itinerary up the South Ghost River and toward a spring that had provided sufficient water the year before, or continue down the North Ghost where finding water was a near certainty. In the excerpt below, Alec comments about how he weighed in on that decision. As navigator, he surmised his opinion might carry more weight. His decision was informed by consulting with course instructors and considering his own goals and interests, a pattern he maintained throughout the course.

CURT: That strong opinion to go to the spring, up the South Ghost rather than continuing downstream on the North Ghost...how do you understand that? Where did that opinion come from? How did you arrive at that opinion?

ALEC: Before I made my decision, I asked the instructors because they've got some experience. I asked them how reliable the spring was, and they said it was a reliable source. I thought to myself that the downstream is probably very reliable and you probably get your water, but it's also further from where we want to be, which I thought was a big problem. And one of the things that was important to me, was ultimately getting to where we wanted to go, and I don't know why that was important to me.

CURT: How influential would you say the comments of the instructors were about the spring being reliable?

ALEC: It was definitely influential because they've done these hikes before, and they've been to the spring before, and I thought that there was first-hand experience that they were giving out, and that's definitely important. It's like having a guide on your team. They are guides, in a way. (SOI # 2, pp. 7-8)

Alec also employed his peers as sounding boards, discussing a variety of topics including his most pressing: how to set limits with others and still be considered a nice guy.

CURT: What aspects of the course did you find most supportive and most helpful?

ALEC: I think the parts of the course that were very helpful, apart from the teachers and the instructors, probably, talking to my peers on the course. I had some really good talks with Colby about self-doubt and the balance between not caring what people think of you to the opposite: freaking out about everything you do. I think Colby talked to me a lot about that. It's interesting to see and hear about other peoples' experiences. That was helpful for me. It's more guidance and advice that people can give to you as you go forward down your road. (semi-structured interview, p. 11)

**Basic theme # 2: Building technical skills.** Alec was motivated throughout the course to learn as much as he could about backcountry navigation, knot craft, camp site selection, hazard awareness and evaluation, bear safety, first aid, and a host of other wilderness travel skills. He appeared determined to become a capable enough “outdoorsman” in order to be properly equipped to plan and execute the solo wilderness expeditions to the Yukon he dreamed of. I made several entries in my field journal about his enthusiasm for learning and about the earnestness he brought to his role as OB student (field notes, days 5-21, pp. 5, 12, 14, 16,22, 23, 25). He excelled when given the opportunity to serve as leader of the day, navigator, sweep, or cook and he always seemed cheerful and enthusiastic, even when the weather was tough and other students became irritable and frustrated. Alec was intent on learning what was necessary for venturing into wilderness alone and that determination played out day after day in his methodical approach to learning: ask lots of questions of peers and instructors, pay attention to their advice, consider your options and the risks and benefits of each, make your best decision and then see how it plays out.

ALEC: One of the reasons I went on this trip was so that I could...execute solo wilderness expeditions in the future, so that I would be able to do that. I wanted to learn to do that, building the necessary skills of climbing and of being an outdoorsman, knowing when to go back, and being safe. It can be dangerous doing these things on your own because if you screw up then you're not going to get so far because you don't have a buddy looking out for you. One of the reasons I went on this trip was to build up those skills. (SOI # 2, p. 23)

**Basic theme # 3: Improving judgement and decision-making.** In addition to the hard skills of navigation, campsite selection, leave no trace, knot craft, backcountry cuisine, and the like, Alec knew he needed practice developing the soft skills of judgement and decision-making in order to become a competent “outdoorsman,” his term for the kind of person who is able to safely travel through the wilderness environment alone for days at a time. He seemed to take his

opportunities for leadership seriously by asking questions, listening intently, practicing often, and requesting feedback on his performance. I made numerous notes in my field journal about how seriously he took his leadership responsibilities, including working as navigator, leader of the day, camp cook, and sweeper (bringing up the rear of the group) (field notes, days 5-21, pp. 8, 12, 15, 16). He seemed genuinely interested in learning as much as he could about all aspects of wilderness travel, but was especially intent on honing his judgement and decision-making skills, as he knew those skills were key to staying safe when travelling alone through wild country. He referred frequently to his use of the cost-benefit analysis as a means of helping him sort through competing options in order to make the best choice. He spoke often of the decision to proceed up the South Ghost to a spring (which was on our intended route) versus veering off course down the North Ghost in search of water.

CURT: Do you want to pick another card?

ALEC: Yeah, sure. I can pick Strong Stand/Conviction. I tried to be an active voice. In our decisions, that we had, I would try and put my opinion in. I thought that during the water crisis, I definitely had a strong opinion on what we wanted to do. This is where I think I'm going to translate into another card, into the Success card. It was very interesting to have your decisions put forward, and which one had water, the one where we had to decide whether we'd go further down the stream to find water, or to go to the spring. I decided that it would be interesting if we went to the spring, and in the morning, when our instructors went out, it was an interesting feeling of success. They come back with the news that there is water there. That was one of the decisions, and you feel success, and it feels good, in a way. When they come back with the water, you know that we've achieved another campsite, and, at the end of every day, because you've hiked the whole day, you plot out how many kilometres you travelled, and that feels really nice too—especially on those days we went 12 km. I think on the last day, we went 12.7 km, and you feel a sense of fulfilment. It translates into something that I was made to do. I loved hiking; it was a lot of fun. Especially, as you said, when we're above the tree line, it's a lot more fun because you get to see the Rockies, and you have that sense of fulfilment. It's like, this is what I was made to do! This is what I came here to do! This is awesome! But, back to how I made my decision... The spring was apparently reliable and it was closer to where we wanted to end up, and I just thought that that was the best of both decisions. Ultimately, what I'm trying to say here is, before I made the decision, I

thought out on both ends and I weighed them on a scale that I thought was appropriate. (SOI # 2, pp. 6-8)

The opportunities for decision-making were important to Alec as they allowed him to practice analyzing risk, formulating a plan, and following through with a decision. He knew these skills would figure prominently in his successful completion of solo forays into the Yukon wilderness and beyond.

CURT: How do you think your experience on this course will affect how you approach new situations in the future—if at all?

ALEC: The experiences on the course will help me with new situations down the road, giving me a level of perspective as to what worked previously, which can help you as you go further down the road. One of the quotes that I'm remembering from the journal right now is, 'Take risks. If you win you will be happy; if you lose, you will be wise.' We definitely took a lot of risks on the trip. I guess we lost a couple, so we know when to not do things. As I go further down the road, I'll know when not to things, as well as when to do things.

CURT: So, it gave you a better sense of when to risk, and when to step back?

ALEC: Exactly.

CURT: And I suppose it also gave you a better sense of when to say no, and when to say yes.

ALEC: Yes. (semi-structured interview, pp. 16-17)

## **Organizing Theme # 2: Managing Challenges**

Alec, like many of his fellow students, faced numerous challenges on the course. He felt anxious about the difficult time we had finding water. He developed a foot fungus that led to long painful hiking days. After reading *White Fang*, the Jack London story about a boy and his wolf dog, he felt homesick for his canine companion back home. He struggled with saying no to others when doing so was in his best interest. He had a hard time maintaining his positive attitude when group morale was low. What set Alec apart from the other research participants,

and even the other students on the course, was his ability to maintain a positive attitude no matter how terrible the weather, no matter how much his feet hurt, no matter how dehydrated he was. His cheerfulness was remarkable. In my field notes I used descriptors such as “quietly enthusiastic” (field notes, days 5-21, p. 4), “helpful and positive” (field notes, days 5-21, pp. 5, 7, 9), “most positive person on trip” (field notes, days 5-21, p. 7), “never complains” (field notes, days 5-21, p. 10), “leads cheerfully” (field notes, days 5-21, p. 16), “always helpful and almost too good to be true” (field notes, days 5-21, p. 16), “helpful, cheerful and honest” (field notes, days 5-21, p. 20), and “mature, helpful, a real leader” (field notes, days 5-21, p. 23). I even noted my concern that the others might find his cheerful attitude, especially in the midst of really difficult conditions, slightly irritating, as though he “ought” to be angry or impatient. But there was one challenge that he found trying, one aspect of the course experience he felt frustrated with and even angry about: group negativity and the constant bickering between two or three course participants. In the section that follows, I will explore this and other difficulties including learning to set limits with others, coping with hardship, and developing self-confidence and courage.

**Basic theme # 1: Learning to set limits with others.** Alec came to the OB course with the tentative belief he needed to make changes in the way he conducted himself with others. By the time he completed the course, he was sure of it. Prior the course Alec had engaged in conversations with his father about his tendency to say yes to nearly every request put to him by friend or acquaintance. He had, from time to time, complained to his father about how his generosity seemed to have a downside. In the excerpt below he references this pattern of behavior that he was aware might need changing.

ALEC: I try to appease people, and it's not really nice when I see other people are really freaking out. It's kind of polar opposites in that way.

CURT: You say that you try to appease people. Why is that important for you?

ALEC: It's important to me because I like seeing people happy, and I like making people happy.

CURT: And that's important to you because...

ALEC: I like to make a little difference and boost people's spirits, in a way. It's important to me because, in making other people happy, I make myself happy.

CURT: It sounds like appeasing people is something you do because it's both helpful for them, but it also helps you feel good.

ALEC: Yeah.

CURT: It's kind of a win-win.

ALEC: Yes.

CURT: How do you tend to do that with your family, peers, at school...?

ALEC: I just try to be as nice as I can, but there's a problem with this scenario, appeasing people to make myself happy. I don't really get...what I need because I'm constantly trying to make other people feel better, and that's the problem with this scenario.

CURT: Tell me more about this downside, that by appeasing others and trying to make others happy you've ended up short-changing your own needs.

ALEC: I do get emotionally and mentally what I need, but I don't really get it physically. If they want something and I can give it to them, I would give it to them just to feel better emotionally; but, physically, you lose something that might be important to you. If you're borrowing, I give people things that I shouldn't.

CURT: Can you give me an example?

ALEC: An important object...if somebody asked to borrow my iPod that's got all my music on it, for a weekend, I'd probably give it to them. I love music, so I'd probably think twice, but I'd probably end up giving it to them.

CURT: And you'd give it to them because...

ALEC: I feel better doing it.

CURT: You want them to be happy, and, if they're happy, you're happy.

ALEC: Yeah.

CURT: But it costs you something, doesn't it?

ALEC: It does, yes.

CURT: It costs you a weekend without music.

ALEC: Yeah. (SOI # 1, pp. 1-2)

By the time the course ended he seemed convinced that this tendency to say yes to nearly every request that came his way was a liability in need of reform. He spoke about how much sense the instructors made when arguing in favor of setting limits. They suggested that doing so would help others learn from natural consequences and would allow him to retain the resources needed for his success. Alec took this counsel to heart and vowed to practice limit setting as a way of growing up and increasing the likelihood of achieving his goals.

CURT: Why is it important for you to be less subject to how people think about you? It sounds like that's maybe a goal of yours, that is to become less reliant on the opinions of others. Help me understand that.

ALEC: One of my problems that I have is this appeasement. I think I brought it up with you on another interview. The problem that I have is helping other people, but putting myself at the expense of that. I'll give you an example that I had on the trip. People asked me for gorp, which was important for me because I needed it to take it on the solo. I had three bags, and I'd saved it all up, which is what I end up doing as I like to save things up. I wanted to give the gorp to people, but the instructors stopped me. They pulled me aside, and they said, 'If you give these people gorp they're not going to learn from their experience,' and so I ended up not giving anybody gorp. Further down the road, though, I think after solo, I gave all my gorp away. It was not good. I learned that, in order to help other people (this is what the instructors taught me), I must first be able to help myself. I won't be able to help anybody else if I don't put myself first. In a sense, that's my problem with appeasement. Being confident allows me to put myself first, instead of taking the easy route and giving other people what they want. It takes courage to say no, and that's my problem.

CURT: It sounds like you've learned to become more courageous at saying no, in order to preserve your own safety, both psychological and physical, or your own well-being.

ALEC: Yes.

CURT: What would you say is the best part about this lesson that you took away from the course, that it's ok to say no, it's ok to take care of yourself? Why is that important to you that you learn this lesson? What's at stake for you?

ALEC: This is a really tricky question; I have to think about this one too. I think I've become more of a complete person, or a step closer to becoming a man, and put myself first. In a way it's another step of manhood. (SOI # 2, pp. 10-11)

Though Alec felt convinced that his tendency to say yes to most requests put to him by others was problematic, and though he expressed determination to change this attitude and behavior by taking his own needs into account before responding to another's request, he knew this change would be difficult to initiate and hard to sustain.

CURT: Why does it matter so much to you, Alec, that you not be perceived as selfish or self-centred? Help me understand that, because it sounds like that's very important to you.

ALEC: Yeah, it is definitely really important to me. I don't know. It's definitely a part of me, and I have a really hard time, as I said before, saying no. The whole appeasement thing. Saying no, not helping out another person...helping another person...I have to do that. It's really hard to say no and not do that. And being perceived as being a selfish person, it's like saying no. That's why it's hard for me. Then again, I guess it's irrational because I'm not a selfish person if I say no. I can help other people if I help myself, and that's my new take on it.

CURT: It sounds like your perspective has shifted a bit, but your behaviour has yet to catch up with your shift in perspective. Would that be fair to say?

ALEC: Exactly.

CURT: I think that makes sense that you're learning that saying no can actually be the best response in a circumstance, and it doesn't necessarily mean that you're letting someone down. It could actually mean that you're helping them, by pushing them to learn from their mistakes.

ALEC: Yeah.

CURT: Letting them learn from the natural consequence as opposed to bailing them out of their situation.

ALEC: Yeah, exactly.

CURT: But because of the way you're 'wired,' as you put it, it's very hard to say, 'no, you can't have my gorp,' even though you know that perhaps it's best that you do that. Is that right?

ALEC: Spot on! (SOI # 2, pp. 17-18)

**Basic theme # 2: Coping with hardship.** Alec noted a number of difficulties encountered during the OB course including carrying a heavy pack, low group morale, difficult hiking terrain, feelings of homesickness, long hiking days, the lack of water, fatigue, sore feet due to a fungal condition, and group negativity. The last one, group negativity, figured more prominently in his interviews than all the other challenges he faced, so it will be treated separately below. He took the other struggles in stride, mostly, and with the exception of the difficulties finding water, seemed none too surprised by the challenges encountered.

Though Alec admitted that the packs were heavy and hard to carry, he noted that carrying the packs got easier with time, as his body got stronger and his mental toughness increased.

CURT: Do you think there were other changes that came as a result of being in that place, doing what we were doing?

ALEC: I got physically stronger. On the physical side, I changed a bit that way. I think the whole group went through that change because we started off with 30 kg packs, and it was definitely quite heavy for us to carry around. I remember we didn't make it that far on the first day, but towards the end we got quite a bit stronger and we could definitely carry those packs. By re-supply we had full packs again, and we managed quite well. (semi-structured interview, p. 3)

My field notes were replete with references to Alec's cheerful disposition, even in the face of challenging circumstances (field notes, days 5-21, pp. 15, 16). His happiness on day 13, as driving rain, cold temperatures, and lightning ended our hike early, was so pronounced that others may have found him slightly irritating (field notes, days 5-21, pp. 16,17) and, at times, difficult to relate to (field notes, days 5-21, p. 24).

Alec led with alacrity actually irritating others with his cheerful attitude in challenging conditions. He was the first to help set up the tarp in driving rain and struggled nearly alone, fingers numb from the cold, to put it away as we prepared to push on to our campsite. (field notes, days 5-21, p. 16)

And although Alec encountered the very same difficulties the other students faced, he seemed less susceptible to low morale. In fact, he viewed himself as the course “morale booster,” a role he took seriously and performed consistently and effectively. He, perhaps more than any other student, focused on helping others manage difficulty.

CURT: How do you think you affected the group? What influence or impact do you think you had on the group?

ALEC: I don't know. I think I tried to be a little bit of a helper in the way of trying to boost peoples' spirits, and trying to say that, 'We're almost there,' or 'We're going to get there', and trying to help people along when they didn't feel so good. There were definitely times when people didn't want to be there, or felt as if they couldn't take another step. Other times, when they were feeling really tired or hungry, I tried to be the one to help them through that.

CURT: And that comes back to your role as 'morale booster,' as you put it.

ALEC: Exactly.

CURT: Do you think that you had any other effect or effects on the group, besides helping to boost morale by encouraging people when they were struggling?

ALEC: Yes. The day of the rainstorm I was the leader for the group. I think I might've been a pathfinder, in a way. We were trying to find a way to get to our destinations. If you can remember, the trail was full of potholes and trees that had come down. I tried to be the helper in a way that I would lift up the trees for other people to get through, and I tried to find that trail, find the path. I guess I might've been a bit of a pathfinder in that way.

CURT: Why was it important for you to play that role for the group?

ALEC: I thought it was important because, at the time, I didn't think anybody had the energy to do anything but keep themselves above water. You had to have at least one other person in the group who could keep themselves above water, but who could also help other people keep themselves above water. There was definitely people in the group who might not have had the energy to keep themselves above water, and you had to have those people to help other people. I was trying to be one of those people.

CURT: Do you think there were any others on the course that played the same role as you, or do you think you were, outside of instructors, maybe, the only one?

ALEC: You know what? I think I played the role the best, but there were definitely times when other people came into the spotlight and helped out. (semi-structured interview, pp. 8-9)

Alec, like the other students, found the course challenging. But unlike the others, he didn't complain. My field notes reflected this: "Alec is cheerful as usual" (field notes, days 5-21, pp. 3,17,19) and I commented on how, even when not feeling well, he still performed his task as "sweep" effectively and without grumbling (field notes, days 5-21, p. 23).

CURT: What aspects of the course would you say were the most challenging and disorienting?

ALEC: Oh wow, most challenging and disorienting parts of the course? Those would definitely be the day that you were hiking quite a long time. One of the last days we decided that we would hike all the way to Exshaw. I think, by the end of the time, we made it 12.7 km.

CURT: Yeah, it was a long day.

ALEC: Definitely a long day.

CURT: Because we were looking for water.

ALEC: Yeah, I know. The hardest part and the most challenging part would be nearing the end of the day when you're tired, hungry, and you just want to get to where you want to be. Those were the hardest parts.

CURT: And what was it about that part of the day that made it the most difficult for you?

ALEC: You start to think about the amount of things you need to do and how much time it'll take to set up camp, and you start to get lost in thoughts that don't really help you. You start to think negatively, which is not very good. By that I mean, when you start to think about camp, you start to get lost in the amount of time it takes to get dinner. I was always hungry. I might've been on another growth spurt. I ate quite a lot. I think it was the time of the day that influenced the negativity because of our tiring hikes, the amount of distance we'd covered, and especially because my feet were not that good. They were covered in this fungus that would swell with blisters. It was not good in the end. That was the time of the day that they started to hurt a little bit. (semi-structured interview, p. 13)

When I asked Alec about the low point of the course, he mentioned just two things: hunger and negative feelings toward the group. He thought he was likely going through a growth spurt, and coupled with the intense physical activity and the shortage of food—the resupply ration was one person short—he was hungry most of the time. But what really bothered him was the negativity of the group, the constant bickering between some students on the course, and the “noise” that conflict presented. He alludes to that conflict in the text below.

CURT: What was the low point for you on the course?

ALEC: Ok, this is a good question. There were definitely times where I didn’t feel up to the task of getting to where we needed to be that day. I think the low point would’ve been when I didn’t want to be here. I wanted to go home because I was feeling hungry, sad, or angry and frustrated at the group and how it was performing, and that we weren’t coming together as a team. The low point would definitely be those moments when I felt hungry, sad, or frustrated at the group.

CURT: And a bit hopeless that the group would ever sort things out, in terms of the conflict.

ALEC: Exactly, yeah. (semi-structured interview, p. 11)

**Basic theme # 3: Struggling with group negativity.** Alec was clear during the post-course interviews that group conflict and negativity was the single most distressing aspect of the course. He arrived with a desire to explore the Canadian Rockies, enjoy their beauty, and to learn the skills that would help him plan and execute solo wilderness adventures. But the ongoing group conflict compromised his experience and served as an unwanted distraction throughout the course. The acrimony was centered between two students, but their open hostility and contempt for one another spilled over into the larger group, and became especially caustic during times of stress, due to weather, fatigue, a lack of water, difficult hiking terrain, or some combination of factors. He felt distracted by the bickering and hostile exchanges and experienced anger toward

those responsible. He kept hoping they would finally work things out so he could enjoy the course in peace; they never did.

CURT: So Alec, why don't you pick a card, and let's just get started.

ALEC: Ok, I'll start with the Anger part. That's the first part that I got. I felt that, in the group that we had, we had conflict, which was a bit annoying. What ended up happening was it drew from the experience quite a lot. It detracted from what I thought we could get out of it. The problem was, it was difficult to enjoy certain moments, and I was a bit angry that, by the end of the course, some people hadn't really figured it out yet. They hadn't really sorted out their differences, which was a bit annoying. (SOI # 2, p. 1)

CURT: You were angry because the conflict, which never really got resolved—even by the end of the course—detracted from your experience? Can you tell me more about that and help me understand your experience on that?

ALEC: What I was trying to say is, when we were trying to appreciate certain aspects of the environment that we were in, it was always a bit detracting when there were little bits of arguments starting up, and conflict between group members; that was very difficult. It added another level of challenge to the course. As we were going through, it was hard to maintain a cool head when you're hiking, especially towards the end of the day. As I said...it was like a chain reaction. If somebody bumped the chain, it would circulate and go to the next person, and it would be harder for them to maintain themselves. I thought it was a bit difficult because, as you were thinking about how to maintain yourself and keep a cool head and try and try and get people to stop arguing, to appreciate why you came here, and why you were in the Rockies, and what were your reasons to be there. So, inevitably, you kind of stopped thinking about your reasons that you came, and instead you switched to the conflict side of things, which was a bit annoying, I find. Remember that day that we were hiking to—I can't remember where we were hiking—but we ended up going off trail, and we were on the side of a mountain? The instructors stopped us, and they gave us these Jujubes, and so we were all completely burnt out, and they said, 'Remember why you're here,' and 'Remember your purpose for coming.' Inevitably, that brought the group together again, and it stopped us from thinking about other things—other little tiny things, and worrying about the little things—instead of enjoying the big picture. That was the problem, I think, with the group, or one of the problems.

CURT: What was the hardest part of that for you Alec, the fact that there was as much conflict on the course as there was?

ALEC: The hardest part for me was enjoying the Rockies, and enjoying the place that I was in as much as I wanted to. For a period, I don't think I was, and I felt a bit sad, in a way, that I wasn't enjoying it as much as I wanted to. You start to worry about other things, and that detracts from the experience.

CURT: It sounds like the conflict among your peers made it harder for you to enjoy the trip because it was a distraction that was hard to ignore. Is that what you mean?

ALEC: Yeah.

CURT: And help me understand the fact that the conflict served as a distraction from your enjoyment of the trip, that was upsetting to you because...

ALEC: It was upsetting to me because you'd find yourself mixed up in something you don't really want to be mixed up in, and because of that you don't really appreciate being where you are as much as you would without the conflict. (SOI # 2, pp. 1-2)

In light of this ongoing conflict, Alec stepped up his "morale booster" role, in an attempt to keep the negativity at bay and minimize the distraction it posed to his own experience. He encouraged others, spent time listening to those who were angry or frustrated, pitched in with chores even though it wasn't his assigned duty, and took other measures to ease the strain of physical hardship, psychological stress, and interpersonal conflict. He threw himself into this role with considerable determination because he really wanted to have a high-quality experience, and for him, the interpersonal hostility between other students on the course served as an unwanted distraction and nuisance.

CURT: When you were listening to Cassie talk about her anger or hostility toward Derek, or providing a shoulder to lean on, or a listening ear to some of the others who were in conflict with somebody else on the trip, what were you hoping to accomplish?

ALEC: I was hoping to be a mediator, in a way: to diffuse the situation as much as I could, to try and help the group get back on track. That's what I was trying to do.

CURT: And for you, what was at stake in getting the group back on track?

ALEC: For me, the thing that was at stake was peace within the group again. Guess that was really important because, as I said, it really drew from the experience, having people lash at each other in the group, which was, to me, very annoying. That's what I was trying to stop from happening. The thing that was at stake was that harmony within the group.

CURT: Help me understand why harmony within the group was so important to you because it sounds like it was critically important that you, insofar as you were able, play a role in helping restore harmony to the group.

ALEC: The harmony was really important because it meant that there would be no more conflicts, and that it wouldn't draw from the experience at all. So that's what I was trying to accomplish. (SOI # 2, p. 5)

Alec admitted he often felt anxious at home—a major Canadian city—due in large part to his anxiety when around large numbers of strangers. By contrast, on the course that anxiety all but disappeared. He posited it was because he loves being outside in beautiful places and because the small group of students and instructors made it easy for him to dispel his sense of social isolation and awkwardness. In his mind, the OB course was an experience that very quickly brought the group together: strangers became friends in a short period of time because the students and instructors shared a common experience that was difficult, intense, and deeply satisfying.

Noticing an absence of social anxiety brought another realization; the presence of anger. Alec noted, with some surprise, that anger was an emotion he rarely felt in his urban home, but on this OB course, it was his constant companion. He felt angry that the group had such difficulty getting along and angry that his own experience was being compromised because others couldn't control their impulses to lash out at those they didn't like.

CURT: I'm curious about your sense that you played more of a role as morale booster, rather than leader. Can you tell me a little more about that perception of yours, that your leader role was more subdued, and your morale booster role was more prominent?

ALEC: I think that the morale in the group took a turn for the worse. It was affected much by the weather, and also by the conflict. When those two collided, you would have the weather influencing the conflict in the group. Especially when it was pouring rain, you'd have people get very grouchy—especially when they were hungry too. That would cause lots of lashing out. I think it was my job to not get influenced by any of that, and to try and stop that. And, if I could not stop that, it would be my job to stop that from

spreading. It was a chain reaction. When somebody got grouchy, and they would lash at another person, that person would get grouchy and they would lash to another person, and the cycle would continue a little bit like that. If you didn't have the energy to stop that, or to help another person, you had to have the energy to not lash at another person. I'm good at that because I don't like getting angry with other people, but, then again, I definitely found that, in this wilderness environment, as I said, I don't get anxious but what I do get is more frustrated than I usually get in cities. The frustration with the group turned into a bit of anger, and then turned into trying to suppress that anger and not let it out.

CURT: And the anger was about the people who continually engaged in conflict with each other?

ALEC: Yes. I got quite frustrated that they didn't sort that out. Especially near the end of the course, it was still happening, so I got quite frustrated at that.

CURT: Who were you most frustrated with, in terms of those negative interactions?

ALEC: I was definitely frustrated with Cassie. She didn't sort out anything with Brant, but I guess that goes both ways, and then, because of this grouchiness, she lashed out at Derek, and then Derek got grouchy and he lashed back, and the cycle continued. I was frustrated at that. It didn't really sort itself out, and that's what the group was thinking. They were thinking: it doesn't matter, by the end of the course it'll all be good, and I think it'll sort itself out. I think that's what the group thought, and in the end it didn't really turn out that way.

CURT: It didn't really sort itself out, did it?

ALEC: No.

CURT: The conflict continued until the very end.

ALEC: Yeah.

CURT: And that surprised you?

ALEC: It did actually—especially at the beginning. I had really high hopes and I was full of energy and ready to go. Towards the end I was starting to think to myself, 'This isn't going to work out, is it?' It was difficult, but in the end there were definitely good and bad moments in the group.

CURT: How do you think the negativity that continually came up in the group affected you? I know you indicated that you felt frustrated, you felt angry, and you found yourself having to suppress your anger. You suppressed your anger because...

ALEC: Because I didn't want to spread the anger. My theory was that, if you lashed out at another person, it doesn't help in any way. It just keeps on going, and the person that

you lashed out at, it'll hurt them emotionally and they'll lash out at another person, and the cycle continues.

CURT: So, you didn't want to perpetuate the cycle that was already going on?

ALEC: Exactly. (semi-structured interview, pp. 5-6)

I asked Alec what he thought may have precipitated the group conflict and negativity and he certainly had his ideas. He mentioned the group composition, noting the decision to blend two different courses (a 13-15 year old group with a 16-18 year old group) as a possible explanation for the difficulties encountered. He thought the differing maturity levels likely adversely affected group dynamics. He also speculated that the near certain reality of no contact between or among course participants upon conclusion of the expedition may have undermined the civility shown. He figured that course participants simply weren't motivated to behave well toward one another since they would probably never see each other again. Had course students all come from the same school or community, he thinks the conflict would have been far less pronounced. In the excerpt below, Alec refers to a prior OB course he completed with students from his home school.

CURT: How was your experience with this group different from your experiences with other groups?

ALEC: That's a really good question. I was a part of another Outward Bound Canada group that was in the Northern Algonquin wilderness in the winter. It wasn't as long; it was a five-day course, or maybe a six-day, I can't remember, but there was not any conflict on that course.

CURT: None?

ALEC: It was interesting, and I think one of the reasons is that we knew each other going in. It was connected to our school. By 'knew each other,' I mean that we knew each other not very personally because they were in different grades. I was in Grade 10 at the time, and I went with one other person from Grade 10, and a couple people from Grade 9. So, you can imagine that the maturity levels were not as varied. That probably influenced the group in a good way. We were all at the same stage in life, pretty much. We were very

supportive of each other. By the end of the course, I think we bonded a lot more than coming into the course. It was interesting. No conflicts.

CURT: How do you explain the difference between the courses in terms of conflict, where you had so much conflict on this one, and so little on the other? To what do you attribute that? Was it just chance or do you think there was something more to it than luck?

ALEC: I think I've got a couple of reasons: Reason 1) we were all the same age, and that definitely helped; Reason 2) we knew each other coming into the course, and by that I mean you don't want to tick somebody off who goes to the same school as you. You'll see them the next day anyway.

CURT: So, more motivation to be civil to each other because you're going to have to deal with them when you get back.

ALEC: Yeah, as opposed to: you're never going to see them again so why be nice to them? I don't know. (semi-structured interview, pp. 6-7)

Alec wasn't entirely jaded by the negativity among course students. He did find moments of inspiration when the students pulled together as a team and helped one another.

CURT: I know that you've said that in terms of the group's effect on you, it certainly precipitated some frustration and some anger on your part. Would you say that the group affected you in any other way or ways?

ALEC: Yeah, definitely. I thought that, when the group came together and we were helping each other and we were working as a team, there was definitely parts where I felt moved by the group. We were a team; we were working together. It felt really good. There were definitely moments where I was feeling good with the team—especially when we were on the trail. I'll give an example: somebody's not feeling that strong, and they're not feeling that energetic, so we helped them get their pack on because sometimes the packs are really heavy. Other times, somebody falls (a couple people fell), and you help them up—especially if you take a break and other people give you a hand because it's hard to get up with 30 kg on your back.

CURT: Indeed. So, those moments where people pitched in to help one another, those inspired you?

ALEC: I could name a couple more: I think there were days when the cooks weren't feeling so good, so I'm pretty sure Cassie got up and she decided that she would be the cook for the day, which was pretty helpful. There were definitely moments like that. There were good moments. (semi-structured interview, pp. 7-8)

**Basic theme # 4: Developing confidence and courage.** Alec reported significant increases to his physical, mental, and moral fortitude. He felt a sense of accomplishment and also reported becoming more comfortable socially and less affected by what others thought of him. He talked about becoming more authentic as his self-confidence grew.

CURT: Developing self-confidence, that's important to you because...

ALEC: It's definitely important to me because it allows me to do things I wouldn't be able to do otherwise.

CURT: And why is that (self-confidence) important to you?

ALEC: I need to think. These are really good questions. You feel a sense of freedom, in a way. Very less stressed. There's definitely not as much stress as when you're unconfident. Being confident allows you to be unhindered by any kind of self-doubt. The self-doubt is a bit of a problem. It doesn't allow you to be yourself, and be the person that you are. It's important for me to be confident because it allows me to be who I am. That's why it's important.

CURT: What's the best part about feeling confident enough to be yourself?

ALEC: You can be more social with other people. That's number one. That's the problem I have with self-doubt. You ask yourself what other people think of you, and you start to really care about what other people think of you, and it's a bad distraction. Being confident allows you to still care about what other people think of you, but less so. You don't dwell on it, which is important. (SOI # 2, p. 10)

These and other changes improved his self-confidence "a lot" (semi-structured interview, p. 2).

There was a reciprocal nature to these changes; as his self-confidence improved, he became more likely to engage in the behaviors that reinforced that emerging self-confidence.

His physical stamina increased because of daily hikes with a heavy pack through challenging mountainous terrain. His mental strength increased as he practiced dogged determination or, in his words, "stubbornness," to complete each day's hike with good style by helping others who were struggling and keeping his negative feelings to himself.

ALEC: One of the things that was important for me was to get where we wanted to go. It's important to me; I felt stubborn about that. It was a stubborn emotion, I guess, about getting to the end, finishing the hike and accomplishing what we set out to do that day.

CURT: Why was that so important to you?

ALEC: I think it was a sense of accomplishment more than anything else: getting to the end you'd say, 'Yes, we made it!' and planning out the next day.

CURT: And for you, why does finishing something that you start matter as much to you as it does? Help me understand that because it sounds like that was a very important part of the experience for you, completing what we had set out to do.

ALEC: I just felt very stubborn about that—very stubborn. As I said, when you get to the end, it feels really good. So there was that. It felt very accomplished. That accomplishment drove us, or drove me. And then, on top of that, I had a lot of stubbornness. It contributed to the group, surprisingly; it was a good thing because it made me strong, and it allowed me to help other people - especially on days that weren't good. (SOI # 2, p. 8)

As mentioned above, Alec felt considerably more comfortable in the wilderness environment than in the urban one in which he lived. He attributed this to his introverted nature and the fact that he felt more at ease around small groups of people he knew and cared for than around large crowds of strangers. He also mentioned the intensity of the shared experience as that aspect of the course that brought the students and instructors close together in a very short period of time. He felt more comfortable putting forward his opinions because he believed his fellow course mates and the instructors cared about him and respected him, opening the way for Alec's more vocal participation in decision-making (SOI # 2, p. 9)

Finally, the solo figured prominently in the development of Alec's self-confidence.

CURT: Other aspects of the course that you found supportive or helpful?

ALEC: I think the amount of time I spent alone, the solo (I did the 36-hour experience), helped. It definitely boosted my confidence. It was one of the main reasons why I got confident because I knew I could spend that time alone, by myself, and I knew I could do it without any problem. I definitely had no problem. As with any other journey, you end up having highs and lows. Is it ever a roller coaster, but, by the end of the solo, I felt

really good with myself. I felt like I had accomplished something really awesome. (semi-structured interview, p. 12)

When asked if he thought the course was worth replicating and offering to a larger cross section of people, Alec was quick to say:

ALEC: I'd actually recommend that because there's a lot of people who don't have the opportunity to do these trips. They build a lot of confidence. I don't know what they did for the other people in our group, but I'm sure they had some positive impacts on them. The experience had positive impact, without a doubt. I would definitely recommend this course, if somebody asked me that.

CURT: And you would recommend it because...

ALEC: Because of the impact that it has on the people that take them. It's a big positive impact. For what I gained...I gained lots of self-confidence, and I definitely gained a sense of mental fortitude, and I learned lots of lessons as I went through the course, and they are lessons that can help me in the future. It's definitely something I'd recommend. (semi-structured interview, p. 17)

### **Organizing Theme # 3: Enjoying Wilderness**

In meeting Alec for the first time it was immediately evident that he loved being outside and he reveled in dramatic and beautiful landscapes. His enthusiasm expressed during preparations at our base camp made it clear he was excited to experience the grandeur of the Canadian Rockies and that beholding their beauty was among the chief reasons he came in the first place (field notes, day 3, p. 2). But his enjoyment of this OB course was mixed, partly because of the group conflict referred to above and partly because the course took place mostly below tree line. Alec had expectations that a significant portion of the course would take place above tree line; an expectation I too shared. In fact, very little of the course emerged into the alpine and this served as a significant disappointment to Alec.

ALEC: I think I'll go over Moved/Touched. The thing that moved me the most is the reason I came out there: to appreciate the Rockies. I was completely moved by the

beauty, and I was a bit disappointed, as you say, that we weren't out of the tree line more than we were.

CURT: Yeah.

ALEC: That's where I felt that the trip's most passionate and extraordinary parts were. They were out of the tree line in full view of the Rockies all around us. It was almost like a 360° view. As we climbed that saddle, you could look around you and they were extraordinary, which was amazing. I think that was what I was most moved by on this trip.

CURT: Climbing the saddle and actually being out of the trees?

ALEC: Yes.

CURT: And then seeing what you were able to see.

ALEC: Exactly. (SOI # 2, p. 22)

Alec underscored his disappointment spending so much of the course below tree line by mentioning it throughout both post-expedition interviews.

CURT: To what extent was the course what you expected it to be.

ALEC: The way I thought it would end up, would be that we would get more out of the tree line. I thought that we would be in the Rockies a bit more. Sorry, not in the Rockies—we were in the Rockies—but I wish we were on those mountaintops, and I wish there were mountain trails that we could go on. That was what I expected it to be.

CURT: Right. I guess the question is, how was it different from what you expected?

ALEC: As you know, we ended up being in the tree line quite a bit. That was how it was different. I didn't think we were going to be in the tree line quite as much as we were.

CURT: Well, I share that with you. I didn't think so either.

ALEC: Yeah, I thought we were going to be out hiking among these mountain trails with full view of the Rockies, but, you know what, it ended up being pretty good. We definitely had those moments where we were either on a saddle or we climbed Black Rock. It was pretty cool. Other than that, once we got out of the tree line my expectations were definitely met when I looked around me. It was kind of how I imagined them to be, and I've only seen the Rockies once before. They definitely looked really cool. Especially when we went through the hail, and as soon as the clouds dissipated and we could see around us again, there was snow on the mountains.

CURT: Yeah, that was cool, wasn't it?

ALEC: That was definitely cool.

CURT: In July.

ALEC: Yeah, there were a lot of cool things on this trip. (semi-structured interview, pp. 1-2)

Alec also mentioned how relaxed he felt in wilderness, in contrast to the anxiety he often feels in urban environments. He reported feeling more at ease around others, more likely to engage in conversation, and more able to develop close and meaningful relationships with others. This was, in addition to appreciating the beauty of the mountain wilderness, one of the ways he found wilderness travel highly enjoyable.

**Basic theme # 1: Longing for beauty and big country.** Alec was clear that searching for and experiencing beauty, especially the kind of natural beauty found in wild places, was a life goal of significant importance. It was one of two chief objectives identified in earlier interviews: becoming a folk singer/musician and travelling to wilderness environs (especially in the Yukon Territory) to embark on solo wilderness treks. These activities figured prominently in his future.

ALEC: "I think I want to go through this life appreciating beauty and searching for it in the wilderness. That's my goal: to go through the world and search for beauty in the world, in the wilderness more specifically" (SOI # 2, p. 19).

Alec viewed the Canadian Rockies and the wilderness contained therein as a natural setting so beautiful, so compelling, that it was imperative he explore them. I asked him "Why the Canadian Rockies?" He said: "Because it's what I came out here to do. I came out to the Rockies for two-and-a-half weeks to examine the beauty in the Rockies and look around and see them with my own eyes, and explore them in my own way" (SOI # 2, p. 3). And since doing so was a

part of his larger dream (to explore the beauty of the world) it was an easy decision for him to make, to participate in this expedition through the Ghost River Wilderness.

CURT: Help me understand that. Why were the Rockies so important?

ALEC: It definitely relates to my big goal of travelling and seeking the beauties of the world. I think they are one of the beauties of the world. It was quite spectacular when we got up there, when you get above the tree line and you can definitely see them. And they go on as far as you can see. They're really cool. You're taken aback by the Rockies, and you look at them in awe, and you wish that you could stay there forever. It's an amazing feeling, that wishing to stay there forever and look at them for as long as you can. (semi-structured interview, 9-10)

Given his enthusiasm for beauty and his penchant for alpine mountain wilderness, it came as no surprise that the high point of the course for him was the second of two vistas above tree line experienced on the course; the pass overlooking Exshaw Creek.

CURT: What would you say was the high point of the course for you?

ALEC: I think that the high point of the course would be when we were on that saddle and we could look at the Rockies and they went on forever. We had the stones, and then we threw our stones off the top of the mountain. They symbolized the extra baggage that we were carrying. The extra baggage that I was carrying was my insecurity and my self-doubt. It was symbolical, I guess, to throw that off and feel more free and have that freedom. Definitely the saddle because of the amount of beauty that you could see—see the Rockies. It was unbelievable—especially because everybody was happy. Nobody was sad. You could see that it was a moment to be shared. I think one of our group members capitalized on that. I think Cassie did a poem on top.

CURT: She did. She read a poem that she'd written the night before.

ALEC: Exactly. It was definitely a really cool part of the trip, and I think it was the best part of the trip for me. (semi-structured interview, p. 10)

**Basic theme # 2: Reveling in solitude and thought.** Alec knew that solo wilderness travel, especially in the Yukon, would be a part of his future, and the 36-hour solo on the OB course would be his first taste of real solitude. His dreamy interest in the Yukon was inspired, at least in part, by the many Jack London stories he had read growing up; stories that included

White Fang which he read while on the course. He dreamed of snowshoeing alone through the Yukon high country, with the hush of winter punctuating a bitterly cold landscape. Alec longed to see the Aurora Borealis and he wanted to witness the spectacle alone.

CURT: Now you mentioned that you love the outdoors, and you want to go to the Yukon some day and see the Northern Lights. Tell me about that interest. Where did that come from?

ALEC: I think that's a recent thing with me as well. I love being on my own and being independent in the bush, and I'm looking forward to the solo. Somehow me being alone with nature is something that appeals to me. I know it's kind of dangerous, in a way, because if you're caught out you're kind of screwed if something happens to you. My mom and dad have been saying, bring a buddy or figure something out if you do get in a bit of trouble. I think the whole dream of being alone with nature comes from...the Yukon's kind of a climate that interests me. I like colder things rather than warmer things. You're in the middle of nowhere, which is also something that appeases me. The Northern Lights would be so nice to see because I've never seen them before. I'm a bit of a city boy, and I would love to do that: go up there and travel around, and be on my own for a bit. (SOI # 1, p. 7)

It seemed to be a combination of things that drew Alec to the northern latitudes and the idea of travelling alone: risk and danger, independence and resourcefulness, remoteness and beauty. Travelling alone through wilderness was more appealing than travelling with others because he was built to relish solitude:

ALEC: I like to appreciate things on my own. It's important to me because it's a sense of fulfillment that you get. You get to somewhere and it's extraordinary, and in order for me to fully take that in I have to do that on my own, and I have to be quiet, and that's how I appreciate things, looking at them—mountain vistas, aurora borealis, etc.—in silence and being there alone. (SOI # 2, p. 23)

But there was something else that drew Alec to the idea of solitary wilderness travel: the opportunity to think deeply about life.

CURT: What do you think it was about the solo that made the difference for you, and what do you think you accomplished on the solo?

ALEC: On the solo, I think the thing that made a difference was the sheer amount of solitude that we were in. By that I mean the whole experience of being alone is definitely important. It gave me a lot of time to think: think about why I was here, what I had accomplished, and it made me feel really good, just the sheer amount of time we got to think alone. It was helpful; it was good.

CURT: So, the space to do some self-reflection without any distractions, is that what you found most powerful about the solo?

ALEC: Yes, and the fact that I could, at any time I wanted to...I had this little perch that I would go up to that I could see the Rockies. There was a little bit of snow on them, I remember. I'm more of a winter guy than a summer guy, so I like to see the snow. I find things a lot more beautiful if they're covered in snow. That's one of the things I like about the winter, the amount of beauty that you can find there.

CURT: Indeed. To what degree do you think you had that capacity to reflect on yourself outside of the solo experience, just hiking along or in the group?

ALEC: I think I had a lesser amount of time because, along the trail, you find yourself absorbed in other peoples' conversations. For some reason that makes it seem like you go faster. Do you know what I mean? If you start talking with another person, you find that you go quicker, for some reason. You get to where you want to go faster. I think you start getting in your head and imagining things. Apart from that, when you're not talking with anybody, you can get lost in your head, and think about things, which is really cool. I think one of the things that influences that is the environment that you're in. You feel a lot more dreamy. There's a lot of food for thought in the environment that you're in, which helps you quite a bit.

CURT: Are you referring specifically to the solo?

ALEC: No, I'm referring to...going along the trail, and while you're going along the trail you start to think about things.

CURT: And how do you understand that? What do you think's going on?

ALEC: I think it's because I think better in a natural environment than I do hunched over a desk in the city.

CURT: What's your sense about that? What do you think is behind that?

ALEC: This is hard. I don't know. I just find myself a lot more creative in an outdoor environment than I am in an indoor environment. (semi-structured interview, pp. 12-13)

**Basic theme # 3: Sorting out the self.** Alec, at the very beginning of the course, reflected on the power of wilderness solitude, thoughts that were mostly speculative in nature,

given the fact he had never really spent time alone in wilderness. His thinking about wilderness solitude seemed tied to his larger life's purpose of making sure he led an authentic life, one marked by the courage to pursue his dreams. He alluded to this in the last text of his profile.

CURT: Why is this important to you, travelling alone through wilderness?

ALEC: I think what ends up happening is, when you're on your own, you find yourself in a way. You take that time off from school, or whatever you need to be from, and you find yourself.

CURT: What does that mean for you, to find yourself?

ALEC: I think what that means is, you find what you truly want to become. The person you want to be, and from that point on you strive to become that person. I think that can only be done through time spent by yourself independently, in an environment that you want to be in. (SOI # 1, p. 7)

## CHAPTER 9: FINDINGS: PRE-COURSE AND POST-COURSE SUBJECT-OBJECT INTERVIEW SCORES

This chapter answers research questions one and four, which relate to the constructive-developmental perspective of each research participant as measured by the Subject-Object Interview (SOI) at the beginning and end of the Outward Bound (OB) Canada course that served as the venue for this research study.

In order to address research questions one and four, the SOI was administered and scored to determine level of mental complexity for each participant at the beginning and at the end of the OB course. Two raters (both certified as reliable) working independently were able to find enough structural evidence to render a score for each interview. With a reliability threshold of the SOI of 1/5<sup>th</sup> of a score, inter-rater reliability was 100%, negating the need for a third rater. Nine of the ten SOIs (90%) were scored identically, and one of the ten SOIs (10%) was scored within 1/5<sup>th</sup> of a discrimination.

As shown in Table 5 For Brant, Derek, and Cooper, SOI #1 scores were identical to SOI #2 scores. For Alec, both scorers indicated a single qualitative transformation (1/5<sup>th</sup> of a discrimination of change) in mental complexity between SOI # 1 and SOI # 2. There was 100% agreement between certified scorers for these four participants. For Kevin, this writer identified a change of 1/5<sup>th</sup> of discrimination between SOI #1 and SOI #2 and Dr. Jones scored Kevin's SOI #1 and SOI #2 the same, or no change, as with other participants.

**Table 5***Pre-Course and Post-Course Subject-Object Interview Scores for Research Participants*

Pseudonym	Age at start of course	Gender and Province	SOI Time One Score	SOI Time Two Score	Non-Significant Change in SOI Scores	Significant Change in SOI Scores
Brant	13	Male/ Alberta	2	2		None
Derek	17	Male/ British Columbia	2(3)	2(3)		None
Kevin	14	Male/ Ontario	2(3)	2(3) - 2/3 *	√	None
Cooper	16	Male/ Alberta	3/2	3/2		None
Alec	15	Male/ Ontario	3	3(4)	√	None

\*This SOI was scored as 2/3 by the author and 2(3) by the co-scorer. This difference remains within the SOI's reliability threshold of 1/5<sup>th</sup> of a score.

## CHAPTER 10: FINDINGS: THE MEDIATING INFLUENCE OF CONSTRUCTIVE- DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

In this chapter, I answer Research Question 3 in a process comprised of three steps. First, I remind the reader of each research participant's developmental score as rendered by the analysis of their pre and post-administrations of the Subject-Object Interview (SOI). Second, I present characteristics of each research participant's particular mindset; a mindset informed by constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994). Third, I discuss how each research participant's constructive-developmental perspective mediated or influenced the meaning they assigned to the course experience.

### **Stage 2-3: Instrumental to Socializing Mind**

#### **Brant**

Brant's developmental score for the pre and post-course SOI was 2, planting him firmly, before and after the course, in the Imperial Balance/Instrumental Mind, or 2<sup>nd</sup> order of consciousness. In this position, he is, developmentally speaking, in complete equilibrium, or embedded in the stage 2 mind.

- Full stage 2
  - Brant is able to distinguish between how someone appears and how they really are. He is now able to reflect on his perceptions and evaluate them. He is also able to understand durable categories; that people tend to have qualities that persist over time. He views your needs, wishes, and interests in terms of his knowing whether who or what you are will help or hinder him in his effort to live his needs, action-oriented goals, plans or interests (Howell & Helsing, 2012; Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix, 2011)

- Other characteristics of Brant's stage 2 mindset include:
  - Self is defined by a very concrete orientation to the world and to his self-interests
  - Characterized by dualistic thinking such as right and wrong
  - Concerned with concrete consequences
  - Others are seen as either pathways or obstacles to getting his needs met.
  - Strong reliance on rules to know how to accomplish something and do it the right way
  - Understanding of the Golden Rule has a tit-for-tat mentality
  - Brant is able to acknowledge another's point of view, understand it, even adopt as his own, as long as it doesn't cost his own point of view something (Howell & Helsing, 2012; Lahey et al., 2011)

Brant expressed, throughout the three interviews, a desire to be accepted by others which he understood primarily as “fitting in” with peers. He also talked of earning the respect of others which he believed would provide the grounds for him to accept and respect himself. This longing for approval was the global theme that organized all of the others.

Brant suggested his inability to make and keep friends was related to “immaturity,” a concept he understood in concrete terms as “doing and saying stupid things.” He hoped the Outward Bound (OB) course might help him “grow up” so he could then attract more friends and enjoy the benefits of a larger social network. His decision to enroll in the course was motivated, to a large degree, by his history of struggling to make and keep friends, a reality underscored by his disclosures about being a victim of school bullying.

In Brant's view, the OB course offered him an opportunity to have fun, do hard things, accumulate experiences that would make him more interesting to others, learn new skills, increase his mental and physical strength, and develop tenacity and perseverance. He believed these course experiences would help to increase his maturity and, consequently, afford him more success in developing and maintaining friendships.

In spite of Brant's concrete understanding of the meaning of maturity/immaturity, he understood, at least at an elementary level, that the difficulties he encountered in attracting people to like and befriend him likely did have something to do with his level of development. Though Brant suggested during the post-course interviews that he had grown up a lot while on the course, the evidence suggested otherwise. First, his Subject-Object Interview (SOI) scores between the pre and post administrations of the SOI did not change and second, the self-serving behaviors so characteristic of an Instrumental Mind were on display throughout the course, setting Brant up for considerable difficulty with his peers.

Brant did not fare well on the course in terms of his relationships with others. He was embroiled in an ongoing conflict with another student that was the subject of intense complaining from his peers. He was, at times, scolded for his behavior, because he failed, day after day, to meet the group's expectations for pulling his weight. His lack of responsibility in completing assigned chores put him at odds with nearly the entire expedition and his attempts at fulfilling his leadership obligations were met with distrust and frustration. When he wasn't being reprimanded he was being ignored; a reality that led to his withdrawal from the group. He ended up spending a lot of time by himself.

That Brant was "in over his head" was obvious. The challenges of the course exceeded his capacity to manage them, and, feeling overwhelmed, he withdrew. He stopped participating

in group meetings, spent most of his time hiking alone, and disappeared after the day's hike, spending time by himself throwing rocks and exploring in proximity to camp. Brant had mistakenly assumed that doing something hard, accumulating interesting experiences, and learning new skills would make him sufficiently attractive that friendship with others would follow. What he failed to realize was that by shirking his responsibilities to the group (cooking, hauling water, erecting the bear fence), by putting his own interest in having fun in front of his obligation to help out, and by failing to bring the perspectives of the other students into the self, at least to the degree he could then predict their behavior toward him, his would-be-friends rejected him. Consequently, he spent much of the course alone, being no closer to his goal of social engagement than when he began the course.

### **Derek**

Derek's developmental score for the pre and post-course SOI was 2(3), the first disequilibrium developmental position between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> orders of consciousness. In this position, Derek's 2<sup>nd</sup> order mindset is the only order actually organizing his experience, but we begin to see the emergence of the new and more complex structure.

- **2(3)**
  - Derek is subject to all of the characteristics of Stage 2 listed above. Additionally...
  - Derek can see that two perspectives exist: your perspective and his.
  - Derek can see that you and he have characteristics that exist over time (durable categories).
  - Derek can see the consequences of his actions primarily in terms of himself.
  - Transition to 3ish order of complexity:

- The transition from stage 2 to 3 begins the moment Derek is able to begin considering your independent view at the same time he is taking into account his own.
- Derek begins to have an internal conversation about how you might feel about his behavior (3ish), but his concern about your feelings, his taking inside him your experience, is done merely to better predict the social consequences of his acting the way he does. In other words, though he is showing an emerging ability to consider how his behavior affects you, he does so only from the perspective of how those effects have implications for his own self-interests. His “taking in” your perspective need not be your perspective. It can be another perspective within him. It might mean orienting to how another part of himself might feel or think (Howell & Helsing, 2012; Lahey et al., 2011).

Derek scored 2(3) on both SOIs and proved to be among the more popular students on the course. Even though he was “sent” on the course by his parents, he elected to make the best of the experience by developing and maintaining a positive mindset. It worked. He ended up enjoying the expedition and getting along well, for the most part, with his course mates. Though Derek’s constructive-developmental perspective was only one discrimination of change beyond Brant’s, his experience of the course seemed significantly different. He became good friends with at least one other course participant (Cooper) and appeared to get along well enough with the other students and instructors. Perhaps because he was older and larger than Brant, he found the physical demands of the course much less difficult than anticipated, noting that the mental demands were more pronounced than the physical ones. What challenged Derek mentally was the decision he had to make, day after day, to maintain a positive attitude when he was

physically uncomfortable (tired, sore, cold, wet, or hungry), irritated with others in the group (especially Brant and Cassie due to their ongoing conflict), or missing home. What may have made the difference for Derek was the emergence of cross-categorical thinking, or the ability to have an internal conversation about how the others (students, instructors, and parents) might feel about his behavior. Though his demonstrated ability to do this was minimal, it appeared to be enough to push him to complete the course (so he didn't let his family down), and to perform his chores consistently (so he didn't let his course mates and instructors down). Additionally, he seemed genuinely glad that the other students completed the expedition, making no reference to any concrete benefits to him of their having done so. This may suggest he was able to internalize the perspective of the others, and to allow those perspectives, however superficially, to impact his own thinking and feeling.

CURT: What about moved/touched?

DEREK: Just watching everyone finish the course because I knew they could do it.

CURT: Why did that move you?

DEREK: It's just cool to see. Some of the people I didn't think they were going to pull through and finish it, but they all did. Good for them. (SOI # 2, p. 11)

Otherwise, Derek approached the course much as I would expect a person with a mostly 2ish constructive-developmental perspective would do. His concerns were largely self-focused and concrete in nature. Anticipating the solo, his expressed concerns focused on physical discomfort and whether or not he would feel bored. His experience of the solo was much as he expected. During the second SOI he reported that thirty-six hours felt like a lot of time alone with nothing to do and his sleeping area was physically uncomfortable. He also noted that he "thought a bit" about his future, clarifying some of his post-secondary career and education

options (SOI # 2, p. 4). His final remark was that the solo allowed him to relax. What was missing in his description of this potentially intense experience was a discussion of inner states or inner conflicts. He didn't seem to have carried on any meaningful sort of internal dialogue about his own competing points of view or his view over against the view of others; others who might have a stake in the decisions he makes about his future.

### **Kevin**

Kevin's developmental score for the pre and post-course SOI was 2(3) as scored by Dr. Jones, and was 2(3) and 2/3 respectively as scored by the researcher. This represents the first and second disequilibrium developmental positions between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> orders of consciousness. In the first position, Kevin's 2<sup>nd</sup> order mindset is the only order actually organizing his experience, but we see the emergence of the new and more complex structure. In the more advanced mindset, or 2/3, the older structure is ruling, though undergoing a process of transformation, while the newer structure is beginning to emerge and exerting some influence.

- **2(3)**
  - Kevin is subject to all of the characteristics of Stage 2 listed above. Additionally...
  - Kevin can see that two perspectives exist: your perspective and his perspective
  - Kevin can see that you and he have characteristics that exist over time (durable categories).
  - Kevin can see the consequences of his actions primarily in terms of himself.
  - Transition to 3ish order of complexity:
    - The transition from stage 2 to 3 begins the moment Kevin is able to begin considering your independent view at the same time he is taking into account his own.

- Kevin begins to have an internal conversation about how you might feel about his behavior (3ish), but his concern about your feelings, his taking inside the self your experience, is done merely to better predict the social consequences of his acting the way he does. In other words, though he is showing an emerging ability to consider how his behavior affects you, he does so only from the perspective of how those effects have implications for his own self-interests. His “taking in” your perspective need not be your perspective. It can be another perspective within him. It might mean orienting to how another part of himself might feel or think.
- 2/3
  - There is now a greater degree of influence on Kevin’s own thinking and feeling; influence by your experience. Not only is he bringing inside himself your point of view, he is allowing your point of view (thoughts, feelings) to influence his own point of view. Your disappointment in him is leading him to feelings of disappointment in himself. He can look at himself through your eyes. Additionally, he is now able to experience what he imagines you think and feel about him, as a source of his own sad feelings. But the 3sh construction in a 2/3 equilibration is usually resolved by a stage 2 level of complexity. Though Kevin can invite your perspective to affect his own, he ultimately resolves or constructs the situation through the lens of his own needs, wishes, and interests rather than in favor of preserving his relationship with you or enhancing the well-being of him and you (Howell & Helsing, 2012; Lahey et al., 2011).

As with Derek, Kevin received a score of 2(3) from both SOI scorers on his first SOI. However, for the second SOI, Dr. Jones rendered a score of 2(3) and I scored him 2/3. Though this difference is within the reliability threshold for the SOI, it did raise a question about a potential developmental nudge brought on during the course.

Kevin was hard to like and I found myself continually bracketing my negative reactions to him, worrying my negative view of his behavior would compromise my ability to write objectively about his experience. To my surprise, my dislike fell away as I listened to him reflect on his experience during the closing circle, a tradition at the end of the course during which each student and instructor summarizes what was learned and the students receive their OB pin.

Consistent with his 2(3) score on the SOI, Kevin behaved as a typical teenager entrenched in the Imperial Balance/Instrumental mind, with just the hint of an emerging ability to bring another's point of view into the self, the essence of cross-categorical thinking and chief characteristic of the move from the Instrumental to the Socializing Mind. For Kevin, self-interest reigned supreme.

When it came to food, Kevin largely disregarded the needs of others or protocol. He admittedly had a huge appetite and may also have been undergoing a growth spurt, but his me-first attitude was a continual source of aggravation to me and to others. Numerous students complained about his frequent attempts to take more food than his fair share, a sensitive issue after resupply as we were one portion short for the latter half of the course. At meal times, he was the first to stand in line, and the first to appear for seconds nearly every time we ate. When it was his turn to prepare lunch, a responsibility that included locating the lunch food, preparing the food (sandwiches usually), serving equal portions to each member of the expedition, then managing seconds and thirds for the entire group, he usually only got as far as locating the food.

Once that was done, he made lunch for himself and perhaps a friend, then set the lunch food aside and went about his own business until ready to return for seconds. My field notes on day eight reflect what became his typical pattern when charged with helping serve the mid-day meal.

Kevin and I are on for lunch and he is 2ish for sure. He wandered down and seemed clueless about helping. I asked him to start cutting bagels which he did. I then asked him to divide the cheese and salami which he did not do. Instead he made his own sandwich first then wandered off, leaving a line of hungry teens to figure out among themselves how much salami and cheese to take. That was Kevin's job which he did not do. He is self-absorbed, me-first, and he seems disinterested in the welfare of others. He just wants to meet his own needs and has little awareness of how his own behavior affects others.

(field notes, days 5-21, p. 6)

When it came to camp chores, he was equally self-serving, doing whatever he could, with few exceptions to find someone else to do his chores. Whether it was hauling water, erecting the bear fence, or washing dishes, he demonstrated a confounding ability to persuade others to do the work assigned to him so he could lounge around and relax after a long day of hiking.

Colby asked Kevin to put his water bottle back into his pack and Kevin ignored him, got up and walked off, intent, as usual, to hike in the front of the group. Last night Kevin said to Colby, 'Hey Colby, would you carry my pack to the tent?' To my surprise, Colby consented to this... request. Kevin was not the least bit interested today in returning the favor in even the slightest fashion. Today the kids even referred to Kevin as 'King Kevin'. (field notes, days 5-21, p. 9)

I had numerous entries in my field notes about Kevin "screwing around" (most often with Brant) when he was supposed to be packing his backpack so we could begin hiking, when we were

trying to have a serious meeting to sort out course difficulties, or when getting shoes and socks back on after stream crossings.

But Kevin surprised me in positive ways as well, beyond his impressive performance during the closing circle. Dinners were configured so that we each took a turn as part of a cooking team which was constituted by two students, or in my case, one student and the researcher. Our job was to prepare the evening meal for nine students and one researcher, then clean up the mess and put away all equipment used during meal preparation. The entire task usually took two hours. The instructors had their own food and cooked as a separate group. One night about midway through the course, Kevin and I were responsible for dinner preparations and clean up, and Kevin offered to take over the entire task suggesting I relax and catch up on field notes. I tried to conceal my astonishment so as not to tip him off to my continued irritation with his behavior, and stood by to help if needed. He cooked one of the most complicated, and as it turned out, tastiest dinners of the entire trip. He even washed the dishes and put all the cooking equipment away as required (field notes, days 5-21, p. 7). I hardly lifted a finger during the entire meal preparation process as I watched him carefully and patiently manage dinner for ten hungry people. On day 11, as we headed toward our resupply rendezvous point, Kevin, who was leader of the day, showed me a rare act of kindness, offering me his hand in order to help me across the stream. Perhaps Kevin had tuned in to the frustration many of us felt with him; frustration begotten by his continued display of behavior underpinned by self-interest. There were other acts like these, infrequent to be sure, that suggested Kevin was, as his SOI scores would attest, in the early phase of a transition toward the Socializing Mind.

## Cooper

Cooper's developmental score for the pre and post-course SOI was 3/2, representing the third disequilibrium developmental position between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> orders of consciousness. At the 3/2 mindset, both epistemologies (2<sup>nd</sup> order and 3<sup>rd</sup> order of mind) were operating, but the more sophisticated one was leading.

- Stage 3/2
  - Cooper is subject to all of the characteristics of Stage 2 listed above.  
Additionally...
  - As in the prior stage, 2/3
    - Cooper has his point of view and you have yours
    - Cooper can imagine your point of view about him
    - Cooper's sad feelings, in part, originate from his sense that you feel disappointed in his behavior. Cooper's experience is to some degree originated in your experience
  - This stage differs from the earlier stage, stage 2/3 in that Cooper is not only concerned with his thoughts and feelings, or with his experience in this situation, he is also concerned about your thoughts and feelings, or experience in this situation, because how you experience your relationship with him matters to him, and not just in terms of how your experience affects his self-interests. His own point of view/experience is in fact affected by your point of view/experience (Howell & Helsing, 2012; Lahey et al., 2011).

In the excerpt below, Cooper is reflecting on his failure as leader to remain engaged on the day we dropped down into Exshaw Creek, as we neared the end of the course. Cooper is

demonstrating his ability to take the perspective of the other students (disappointment in him as leader, and frustration with him that he is not doing his job) into the self and allow that perspective to influence his own thoughts, feelings, and behavior. And not only was he taking into account the thoughts and feelings of the other students, allowing those thoughts and feelings to affect his own, he was struggling with two inner states as well; his desire to be a good leader and his behavior that was falling short.

COOPER: I guess one of the other ones I wrote was Important to Me. One of the things that was really important to me was to not hold the group back. At times, even though I wasn't in the best mood and I didn't necessarily want to be doing what I was doing, it felt important that I help and make sure everyone else was getting the experience they wanted out of it, and that I wasn't standing in their way.

WHY WAS THAT IMPORTANT TO YOU, COOPER?

COOPER: I'm really not too, too sure. It was something that stuck out to me. I guess I remember, on my second leadership day, when we came over that ridge and we could see Exshaw, and we walked down into that creek bed and there was no water. That was the day where I really held the group back—not in too serious of a sense because Derek stepped up, thankfully, and took over the leader role. I really struggled and really felt bad. Even while I was slacking I was telling myself, 'Hey Cooper, you're the leader—you should be leading, and you shouldn't be slacking and complaining and just letting someone else take over,' but at the same it just didn't feel good.

CURT: It didn't feel good because...

COOPER: I knew I could be a really strong part of the group, and when I wasn't it made me feel like I wasn't living up to the potential that I could be.

CURT: To what degree were you concerned that you were failing to meet your own expectations, and to what degree did you feel that you were failing to meet the expectations of others?

COOPER: There was definitely a fair amount of both. Even still, people were asking me questions, and asking me how long it would be until we found water, asking me for breaks, etc. I was dragging my feet and not doing what I could be doing. It definitely felt like I was almost failing them. At the same time it was just failing myself. Like, "You could be doing a hell of a lot better than this, and you're not. (SOI # 2, pp. 17-18)

In the same vein, Cooper talked of how completing the OB course, a major achievement for him given his history of giving up on hard things, positively affected his father's experience of him. In the next excerpt, and in a classic demonstration of 3ish tendencies, Cooper takes responsibility for his father's feelings. The self (Cooper's) is being defined by the perceptions and expectations of the other (father). Cooper is showing he is able to take his father's perspective into the self and allow his father's experience to shape his own.

CURT: You mentioned for strong stand, finishing the trip and doing well was somewhat surprisingly really important to you. Were there other reasons that finishing the trip mattered, besides showing your dad that you could do something hard, and that you could do something that he couldn't do, were there other reasons why finishing the trip mattered to you as much as it did?

COOPER: Just to finish it. Just to prove to myself, even, that I could really do it, and I could do it well.

CURT: How much of this do you think was to prove to him or to your mom that you could do it and do well, and how much of it would you say was to prove to yourself that you could do it and do well? It sounds like it was a combination of the two.

COOPER: I think it was almost a 50/50 combination of the two. I really wanted to do it for me, but at the same time I wanted to show them I could do it too.

CURT: Now that you have finished the course, and you did it well, how has that affected your relationship with your dad—if at all?

COOPER: He seemed really proud when I got home. He was really happy I got through it. He was happy to hear about it, etc.

CURT: How did that feel?

COOPER: It felt pretty good.

CURT: What was the best part of your dad's pride in your accomplishment?

COOPER: Probably just that he came and said he was proud of me; he came to congratulate me and pat me on the back, and say, 'Good job!' That felt really good. (SOI # 2, pp. 9-10)

Cooper's 3/2 mindset allowed him to be seen and experienced by others as a mostly responsible and sensitive member of the group, concerned with pulling his fair share of the load. He was able to show concern not only for his own thoughts and feelings, or with his own experiences in a given situation, but with the thoughts, feelings and experiences of others. He was able to demonstrate a concern for how others on the course experienced their relationship with him, and not just in terms of how their experiences affected his self-interests. He was able to allow the feelings, thoughts and experiences of others to affect his own. This is the essence of cross-categorical thinking, one of the chief characteristics of the move from the Instrumental to the Socializing mind.

### **Stage 3-4: Socializing to Self-Authoring Mind**

#### **Alec**

Alec's developmental score for the pre-course SOI was 3, planting him firmly, at least at the start of the course, in the Interpersonal Balance/Socializing Mind, or 3<sup>rd</sup> order of consciousness. In this position, he was, developmentally speaking, in complete equilibrium. Upon conclusion of the course, both SOI scorers determined he had moved into the first disequilibrium position beyond the 3<sup>rd</sup> order of mind, or 3(4). In this more advanced position, the 3<sup>rd</sup> order of mind was the only structure organizing his experience, but signs of the more advanced structure (4<sup>th</sup> order of mind) were starting to appear.

- The development between stage 3 and 4 is the story of gradually separating internalized points of view from their original sources in others and making the self a coherent system for their generation and correlation. When that has happened, Alec stops making others responsible for his own feelings, and experiences it as a kind of violation when others make him responsible for theirs.

- **Full stage 3**
  - Alec is able to distinguish his point of view from yours (stage 2), *and* he can make his point of view *and* your point of view, in some way, part of the self. He is, in other words, in some way responsible for your point of view as he also imputes to you a responsibility for his point of view.
  - While he has internalized your point of view, the source and continued generation of that point of view is not internal but still rests in you who must keep making that point of view known to him and remain psychologically present in order for the “self” to feel whole.
  - “He may be separating a little from you physically but he is not separating either himself or you from your internalized point of view as a co-determiner of his own meaning” (Howell & Helsing, 2012; Lahey et al., 2011).
  - “Other stage 3 characteristics include:
    - Self is defined by an abstract sense of identity. Sense of self is defined by opinions and expectations of others
    - Alec feels empathy; feels responsible for other’s feelings; holds others responsible for his own feelings
    - Alec is concerned with abstract psychological consequences
    - Is intolerant of ambiguity. Needs a clear sense of what others expect and want from him
    - Relies on external authority for standards, values, acceptance and belonging

- Capable of abstract thinking, or thinking about thinking
  - Criticism is experienced as destructive to the self
  - Understanding of the Golden Rule deals with issues of mutuality and loyalty and obligation
  - He now has the capacity to bring another's point of view inside the self
  - He is able to subordinate his self-interest in order to preserve a relationship or his membership in the larger community. It is this act of preserving the relationship that reigns supreme (Howell & Helsing, 2012; Lahey et al., 2011).
- **3(4)**
    - Structurally, a subtle change has taken place because there is a slight shift in the distance between the self and its internalized point of view.
    - Alec is starting to consider “deciding for himself” but the structure of this shift is still being *co-constructed* by him *and* you. He is co-constructing a structure within which he can be self-determining. Essentially, he is internalizing your wish that he decide for himself” (Howell & Helsing, 2012; Lahey et al., 2011).

Closely related to the organizing theme of developing independence was Alec's interest in constructing a greater capacity to be the architect of his own life. He was aware that he had a profound tendency to please others, which, he admitted, was done to prop up a persona of the “nice guy,” or a person who gets along well with people by being agreeable and rarely saying no. The desire to be perceived as a “nice guy” remained an image of considerable importance to him

and one that he wished to maintain. But he was also aware of at least some of the limitations of this mindset, especially as it related to meeting his physical needs and more importantly, in meeting his spiritual needs for the fulfillment of the life dreams he had earlier articulated. He expressed-with considerable passion and conviction- the desire to become a folk singer and solo wilderness explorer, but he admitted that the courage required to actually do these things as an adult was beyond him; at least at the moment. He was able to articulate the *desire* to make his own life, a life made according to his own rules and principles of self-fulfillment, but he was aware that he lacked the wherewithal or the courage to actually cut against the grain (of his parent's more conventional life as professionals, home-owners, and urban dwellers) and launch his life into an unconventional trajectory. And he knew, coming from a family of attorneys, that life as a folk musician and wilderness wanderer was unconventional and full of risk. What unfolded in our interviews was a tension between knowing what he wanted to do and having the courage to proceed. He was beginning to recognize the limitations of continually meeting the expectations of others, regardless of whether or not doing so aligned with his own needs, desires and action plans. This is where movement toward a self-authoring mind came into play. He scored 3 on the first SOI and 3(4) on the second SOI. Though one discrimination of change did not constitute significant movement, it did suggest a developmental nudge, or an acknowledgement of some of the limitations of his third order mindset. As suggested in the text below, Alec's ability to hold fast to his dreams and at the same time preserve important relationships, was mostly theoretical. He was aligning himself with the *idea* of going his own way, but was not yet able to execute the kind of limit setting necessary to actually do it.

CURT: So, this experience of feeling tension between wanting to please others and wanting to follow your own compass, what does this tell you about yourself?

ALEC: I think it tells me that I am a person who likes to follow the beat of their own drum. I like to do things on my own. I'm an independent person. I like to be by myself. The way I appreciate things most is when I'm on my own, but I wear the mask of pleasing other people and doing things with other people in order to please them. I guess that's the major mask that I wear. (SOI # 2, p. 21)

Alec goes into more detail as he describes the tension between doing what he wants and meeting the expectations of others. As mentioned above, this ongoing internal battle is mostly theoretical as he hasn't been in a position yet to test it. He is talking about his dreams but he hasn't had to buck his parent's wishes to actually pursue them; at least not yet. In the excerpt below, he gives us more insight into how this internal battle is playing out and where he hopes it will lead.

CURT: I was asking you, how much of this desire to be alone and sort things out, to find your own way, is about you finding your own way, as opposed to following the recommendations and suggestions of your family, because it sounds like you hold your family in pretty high esteem.

ALEC: I am definitely influenced by my family. I will listen to their advice, but in the end, when it comes down to my decision, I'll list all the consequences of going and doing whatever and I'll try and figure out what I want to do. But I'll definitely experiment with these dreams because I definitely don't want to rob myself of this life.

CURT: What would you do if you, after a period of solitude in a wild place, came to the conclusion that you wanted to go a particular direction with your life, and you expressed it to your parents or family members and they...

ALEC: Weren't too keen on it?

CURT: Yeah, what would you do with that?

ALEC: That would be really hard. I'd have to make a really difficult decision.

CURT: How would you make that decision? What would be at stake for you?

ALEC: I know I would know that, after I made the decision, my family would still love me. But, I would also be tentative towards that because it would be really difficult for me. I like to make other people happy, but, in the end, it's my life and I can decide what I want to do with it. I think I would definitely listen to what they have to say, and I would probably listen to any advice. I would list consequences of going on my path and what

options are taken from me, and then I would go and list the consequences of trying to see what they want me to do, and I'd balance them and weigh them, and see if the consequences are greater in either end.

CURT: As far as those consequences go, how would you weigh consequences in terms of pursuing your own dream versus disappointing or seemingly letting your family down by going contrary to their point of view?

ALEC: Going contrary to their point of view is difficult, but I think the consequence of not being able to play folk music is pretty high on the list. It might be above or equal to not doing what somebody else wants me to do—especially my family. But, in that case, I would probably do what I want to do because it's really important that I have to do that, in my opinion.

CURT: What does that tell you about yourself, that pursuing your own path is very important?

ALEC: It tells me that I don't like to...I was about to be very redundant there. It tells me that I like to be independent, and it's important for me to do that and be on my own for a bit. As far as my family goes, I guess it would be a bit tricky. (SOI # 1, pp. 8-9)

During the OB course, Alec appeared to move from 3 to 3(4). This fit with his focus on learning to become more the architect of his own life. Structurally, it seemed a slight change was taking place. Alec was starting to put a measure of distance between the self and his internalized point of view. He was beginning to consider “deciding for myself,” but the structure of his shift was still being co-constructed by him and by others (i.e., parents, instructors, other students on the course). He was co-constructing a structure within which he could be self-determining. Essentially, he was internalizing the wish of others (i.e., the OB course instructors) that he decide for himself and set limits to protect those decisions.

There were five course components (two formal and three informal) that likely supported Alec in this transition from Socializing Mind to Self-authoring Mind: instructor meetings (formal), time spent thinking while hiking (informal) and while on solo (formal), conversations with peers (informal), and opportunities for practice saying no (informal). Instructor meetings were designed to provide a check-in with students so that instructors could inquire about their

welfare, discuss problems, and provide feedback. Alec implied these meetings with the instructors, especially his last one, were pivotal. In the text below, Alec is co-constructing his point of view (“I need to say ‘no’ more than I do and start setting limits with others”) with help from the instructors, but his ability to maintain this emerging thinking depends on their continued psychological presence. Additionally, his reliance on external authority comes through unequivocally.

CURT: And you said that you’re wired to be that way: to be nice, to be polite, to not disappoint or let people down, and to always do your best. Is there a price that you pay for doing that or being that way? Does it cost you anything?

ALEC: Yes, it does.

CURT: What does it cost you?

ALEC: It costs me not putting my needs first.

CURT: That’s where the putting yourself first comes to play.

ALEC: Yeah, exactly. As I go, I haven’t had that much experience past this Outward Bound trip that we went on. I haven’t had to make any choices like this. In the weeks since the course, I’ve settled down and haven’t really done anything yet. If I think it’s my responsibility to take care of myself above my responsibility to take care of others. When I have a decision, I have to balance those needs and ask myself which one comes first according to the situation. I think it’s probably something that you can decide, and it depends on the situation.

CURT: Do you think this shift occurred on the course, or do you think this was something that was in the works and you just got a nudge while on the course? What’s your sense of that?

ALEC: Oh no, I knew about this before I went on the course because my dad had talked to me about it. When I was talked to about it, we never really went into depth about it. In the course I brought it out to the instructors and it wasn’t until the last interview I had with them (because we had interviews with the instructors), that they gave me this advice. I’ll put another thing that’s at stake for me with this: when you put other peoples’ needs ahead of yours (when you misjudge that and you do that), instead of putting your needs above other peoples’ (if you do it too often), it’s a recurring theme that you get stepped on. And by ‘stepped on’ I mean other people go away with what they came for. They either don’t say, ‘Thank you,’ or they screw you over because you didn’t look after

yourself. That was one of the things that Mike told me. Don't let other people step on you. By doing that you need to put your needs in front of other peoples' needs. That's definitely something that I need to work on, and I need to think to myself a bit as I progress further on down.

CURT: It sounds like that fact that there are some people whose opinion you respect such as your parents, your mom and dad who apparently talked to you about this, Mike, and Madeleine and Steph, and the other instructors who also brought it up during one of the interviews. It sounds like the opinions of those people, whose advice you respect, it sounds like that had some bearing on your consideration of shifting the way that you do this.

ALEC: Yeah, they were definitely out to look after me; they were definitely there to give the positive advice. I trusted them. (SOI # 2, pp. 13-14)

Alec echoed this sentiment again in the semi-structured interview.

CURT: Alec, of the things you experienced on the course, what do you think you'll carry over to normal life? What do you think will stick with you?

ALEC: I am going to carry the advice of the instructors over to this normal life I have. The advice that was given to me was to know when to say no, and to know when to prioritize yourself over others. That's definitely an important lesson that I have to learn, and one of the things that's going to stick with me. (semi-structured interview, p. 14)

Alec enjoyed his time spent in thought, and the course provided significant opportunity to do just that. Though Alec sometimes engaged in conversation with others while hiking, something he mentioned helped pass the time, he also spent time trailing far enough behind that he could hike in silence. While hiking alone or in silence he found himself thinking a lot about his life and taking in the splendor of the mountain wilderness. But he also viewed the solo as an important opportunity to think deeply about things, something already mentioned in his profile. In short, Alec viewed wilderness travel as, at least for him, an ideal venue in which to sort things out and clarify his purpose and direction. He speaks to this in general terms in the text below.

CURT: Why is this important to you (travelling alone through wilderness?)

ALEC: I think what ends up happening is when you're on your own, you find yourself in a way. You take that time off from school, or whatever you need to be from, and you find yourself.

CURT: What does that mean for you, to find yourself?

ALEC: I think what that means is, you find what you truly want to become. The person you want to be, and from that point on you strive to become that person. So, I think that can only be done through time spent by yourself independently, in an environment that you want to be in. (SOI # 1, p. 7)

Peer conversations also figured into the support Alec mentioned; support that helped move him further down the road toward the self-authoring mind.

CURT: What aspects of the course did you find most supportive and most helpful?

ALEC: I think the parts of the course that were very helpful, apart from the teachers and the instructors, probably, talking to my peers on the course. I had some really good talks with Colby about self-doubt and the balance between not caring what people think of you to the opposite: freaking out about everything you do. I think Colby talked to me a lot about that. It's interesting to see and hear about other peoples' experiences. That was helpful for me. It's more guidance and advice that people can give to you as you go forward down your road.

CURT: Do you mean that the conversations with peers, like the conversations you mentioned with Colby, helped shape your perspective, or reshape your perspective in a helpful way? Is that what you mean?

ALEC: I don't think it would be shaping the perspective; I just call it pieces of advice that would help you go further down the road. That kind of makes sense?

CURT: And some of the conversations you had with your peers were helpful in that sort of way?

ALEC: Yes. (semi-structured interview, pp. 11-12)

Later in the course Alec found opportunities to practice setting limits and these opportunities gave him his first shot at saying no as the instructors had encouraged him to do. Though his resolve to set limits appeared strong, his follow-through proved weak. In spite of the explicit instructions by course instructors to resist his temptation to give his trail food away to

students who had failed to manage their own supply, he succumbed to his entrenched pattern of behavior (meeting the expectations of others in order to win favor and be perceived as the “nice guy”) and gave away most of his trail food immediately following the solo, leading to hunger pangs for the remainder of the course.

## CHAPTER 11: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this case study was to explore, describe, assess, and understand, from a constructive-developmental perspective, the impact a 21-day wilderness backpacking experience had on five participating youth. The researcher believed that a better understanding of how participants in a wilderness backpacking course make sense of their experience through the lens of their constructive-developmental perspective might help inform the theories of change that underpin wilderness experience programs (WEPs), the means by which desired change is facilitated, and the reasons why some youth thrive and others struggle. To shed light on these issues, the following research questions were addressed:

- 1) What constructive-developmental perspective does each participant bring to this wilderness backpacking experience?
- 2) How does each participant make meaning of his experience, and what experiences appear significant in this process?
- 3) How does each participant's constructive-developmental perspective appear to influence the meaning he has made of this wilderness experience?
- 4) What changes, if any, are evident in pre-trip and post-trip applications of the Subject-Object Interview (designed to determine constructive-developmental perspective) for participants completing this experience?

These questions provided the impetus to begin and continue this research project so I might more adequately understand the wilderness experience through the lens of a youth's constructive-developmental perspective. So, what did this research teach me in light of the questions that gave it life in the first place?

First, this 21-day expedition to the Ghost River Wilderness did not provoke significant changes (two or more discriminations of change as measured by the SOI) to constructive-developmental perspectives among any of the five research participants. I was disappointed but not entirely surprised by this outcome. This finding suggests that WEPs, on their own and similar to the one serving as the venue for this study, are unlikely to facilitate significant changes to one's constructive-developmental perspective.

Secondly, I learned that Kegan's constructive-developmental theory (1982, 1994), the immunity to change technology (Kegan & Lahey, 2009), and the Subject-Object Interview (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, and Felix, 2011) demonstrated considerable explanatory power in understanding research participant experience on this WEP. If WEP designers and practitioners were to develop a more sophisticated mindset by incorporating principles from constructive-developmental theory and its related literature into the WEP, the enhanced holding environment that incubates growth and development might be improved, potentially leading to a better student experience and improved course outcomes.

In this chapter, I discuss possible explanations for the lack of significant changes to constructive-developmental perspective. I also discuss the ways in which an understanding and application of constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994), the immunity to change technology (Kegan & Lahey, 2009) and the SOI (Lahey et al., 2011) helped interpret research participant experience and how these ideas and tools, if implemented in WEP practice, might provide a better holding environment for students. I then present what may have been the course's most significant component –the Black Rock Mountain hike. I conclude with recommendations for enhancing WEPs, further research, and reflections from the researcher.

**Understanding the Lack of Significant Changes to Constructive-Developmental Perspective as well as the Explanatory Power of Kegan’s Constructive-Developmental Theory, the Immunity to Change Technology, and the Subject-Object Interview Course Curriculum**

One reason this OB course did not provoke substantive changes to the meaning-making system among research participants is because that was never a goal of the expedition in the first place. There is no WEP, as far as I know, that refers to itself as an applied constructive-developmental program, the term used to describe experiences that seek *intentionally* to support “shifts in the expansiveness and complexity of our mindsets,” what I have referred to throughout this dissertation as changes to constructive-developmental perspective (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. x). Of course, holding environments of many types may inadvertently, unintentionally, or accidentally facilitate the growth of its members, especially if those environments manage to create that “ingenious blend of support and challenge,” which Kegan (1994) refers to as the summary of “my reading of centuries of wise reflection on what is required of an environment for it to facilitate the growth of its members” (p. 42).

Authors Kegan and Lahey (2001) recall something their beloved Harvard University colleague, the late William Perry, once said to them; an idea that resonated and strengthened the belief their own research was moving in the right direction: “‘Whenever someone comes to me for help,’ he used to say, ‘I listen very hard and ask myself, ‘what does this person really want—and what will they do to keep from getting it?’” (p. 1). Kegan and Lahey (2001) sought to lay out their understanding of the barriers to change that prevent people from growing up:

If we want a deeper understanding of the prospect of change, we must pay closer attention to our own powerful inclinations *not* to change. This attention may help us

discover within ourselves the force and beauty of a hidden immune system, the dynamic process by which we tend to prevent change, by which we manufacture continuously the antigens of change. If we can unlock this system, we release new energies on behalf of new ways of seeing and being. (p. 1)

An example of this resistance to, or immunity to change from this study, was Alec's difficulty setting limits with peers. In spite of his own admission that setting limits with others was among the most important changes he needed to make, and notwithstanding the significant measure of encouragement from the OB instructors to do this very thing, Alec struggled with his "experiment" of keeping his trail mix food (gorp) for himself. He had been encouraged by course instructors to allow natural consequences to help teach those peers who failed to adequately ration their food intake. Though initially successful at warding off the solicitations of his comrades, he finally gave in and gave away all his trail mix, a decision he later regretted. I suspect had we looked carefully at his decision we would have uncovered the phenomenon Kegan and Lahey (2009) refer to as *the immunity to change*, "a heretofore hidden dynamic that actively (and brilliantly) prevents us from changing because of its devotion to preserving our existing way of making meaning" (p. x). I suspect Alec felt afraid his limit setting might precipitate an indictment by his peers—one he conceived of as nearly unbearable—that he was a selfish person, the utter antithesis to the persona he had spent a lifetime constructing.

Kegan and Lahey (2009) laid out a road map of sorts for advancing changes to mental complexity rather than leaving those advances to chance. It included the detective work that was explained in detail in their earlier book (Kegan & Lahey, 2001), wherein people are encouraged to uncover the "hidden motivations and beliefs that prevent them from making the very changes they know they should make and very much want to make" (their immunities to change) but it

went further, explicating a way for people to actually transcend the limitations of their current mindset (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p xi). Realizing that greater insight, on its own, was insufficient to bring about changes in meaning-making, or shifts in a person's constructive-developmental perspective, Kegan and Lahey (2009) developed a technology that went beyond insight and understanding. The technology outlined in Kegan and Lahey (2009) combined the insight gained through self-examination and reflection (the diagnostic process) with the activity of behavioral experimentation, a process of pushing back against the current mindset by acting contrary to the fear-based beliefs driving entrenched negative behavior. This process allowed for the accumulation, over time, of data that could be used to debunk the current mindset, eventually bringing about a change to the person's subject-object relationship, and provoking a move along the constructive-developmental continuum. The intervention as explicated in Kegan and Lahey (2009) is summarized below, using Alec as an example. Though I did not (nor did the OB instructors on this course) facilitate with Alec the creation of his immunity map, it is informed by the interviews and observations conducted during this research study. This review of Kegan and Lahey's (2009) immunity to change will be cursory, as a full exposition of their technology is beyond the scope of this thesis. There are two primary steps in this simplified summary: creating the immunity map and designing, running and interpreting tests of the person's big assumption.

The immunity map is created by working with four columns of information. In the first column, Alec identifies his improvement goal, ("to set limits with others in order to preserve my dreams and goals"). In column two he identifies what he is doing or not doing to undermine that goal ("saying yes to requests that compromise my ability to do something I want to do"). In column three he identifies competing commitments ("to not appear selfish"). In column four he uncovers and makes explicit his "big assumption" ("I assume if I say no to someone important to

me they won't like or respect me anymore, and I will be seen as selfish and irresponsible"). His hypothetical "immunity map" is below.

Table 6

*Hypothetical Immunity Map for Alec*

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
Commitment (improvement goal)	Doing/not doing instead	Hidden competing commitments	Big assumption
"to set limits with others in order to preserve my dreams and goals"	"saying yes to requests that compromise my ability to do something I want to do".	"to not appear selfish"	"I assume if I say no to someone important to me they won't like or respect me anymore, and I will be seen as selfish and irresponsible"

The next step is what Kegan and Lahey (2009) refer to as the "heart of the process," which is designing, running and interpreting tests of the big assumption (p. 256).

The purpose of each test you run is to see what happens when you intentionally alter your usual conduct and then reflect upon the meaning of the results for your big assumption.

The purpose of a test is not to try immediately to improve or get better. Rather it is to get information—a very particular kind of information: "What does this say about my big assumption?" (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 256).

By running tests that challenge his big assumption, Alec gradually collects a data set that starts to undermine the force and sway of his big assumption. As the authors suggest:

It is the cumulative weight of several tests that, in most cases, begins to overturn the person's immunity to change—the whole purpose, let us not forget, of these exercises.

Once the big assumption no longer has its force, the self-protective third-column

commitment is no longer necessary, and we stop needing to generate the obstructive second-column behaviors. (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 269)

### **Instructor Approach**

The approach to growth and developmental, practiced by the instructors on this OB course, unwittingly engaged certain aspects of the immunity to change process. The instructors, at the very least, acknowledged Alec's column one improvement goal ("to set limits with others in order to preserve my dreams and goals"), and called attention to his second column behavior ("saying yes to requests that compromise my ability to do something I want to do"). I am unsure how much, if any, of the information in Alec's third and fourth columns came out in his discussions with the OB instructors, as I did not sit in on his formal or informal conversations with them. If they did, we could say with some confidence that the OB instructors, with no knowledge of Kegan and Lahey's immunity to change technology (2009), were able to help Alec articulate a simple, albeit crude version of his immunity map.

Additionally, course instructors encouraged Alec to experiment with new behavior by keeping his trail mix for himself. This new action, however short-lived, was experimental in that Alec was trying out a way of acting toward others that was as new to him as it was difficult. For a couple of days, at least, Alec held fast and said no to those to whom, he, in the past would have gladly obliged by giving away much of his food. The instructors likely provided Alec with a sort of scaffolding to lean against (from, presumably, their own more advanced constructive-developmental perspective) as he "tried on" a new mindset and way of behaving. This appeared to be a key element in Alec's success--however limited in duration it may have been—at experiencing a novel approach to protecting his resources.

Research conducted to date is, at best, mixed in terms of the correlation between WEP instructors and positive student outcomes. The mental complexity of course leaders almost certainly has a bearing, for better or worse, on observed performance (Helsing & Howell, 2014). Course instructors appear to play a key role in developing a positive social climate and modeling pro-social behavior (Mirkin & Middleton, 2013). Relationships with field staff may be among the most helpful aspects of the WEP (Russell & Phillips-Miller, 2002). Personalities of course instructors and expectations they levy onto students can be related to negative course outcomes (McKenzie, 2003), or simply may not matter at all relative to long-term student outcomes (Gassner & Russell, 2008; Takano, 2010). In light of a research literature that appears inconclusive as to the relevance and importance of WEP instructors to positive student outcomes, Alec's experience suggests that course instructors can and do play a key role in a student's positive experience.

### **Duration of Expedition**

Kegan's research has shown never more than two discriminations of change (the minimum needed for changes to constructive-developmental perspective to be considered significant) over the course of an entire year (Kegan, 1994, p. 188), no matter how robust the holding environment, something I refer to as Kegan's "one year rule." In light of the complete lack of research in the WEP corpus questioning Kegan's "one year rule" my committee and I decided it was worth administering a post-expedition SOI to see if significant changes to research participants constructive-developmental perspective could be established and Kegan's one year rule challenged. Of course, no significant changes were noted during this 21-day expedition, the length of which constituted a fraction of the time Kegan suggests is necessary for significant changes to constructive-developmental perspective to occur. Might a WEP of

considerably longer duration demonstrate a different outcome, with significant changes to constructive-developmental perspective? Perhaps. I remain curious about this untested possibility for the following reasons.

First, as mentioned above, until now no one, so far as I know, has conducted a pre-post SOI on a WEP of any type. Second, the wilderness experience as holding environment is unique, offering opportunities for challenge and support unlike any other venue (Gillis et al., 2016; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983). And since this study appears to be the first to use a wilderness expedition as holding environment to examine changes to constructive-developmental perspective, how a longer expedition might affect one's level of mental complexity remains unknown.

Third, the research literature includes provocative findings related to the impacts of relatively short duration wilderness experiences on human psychological processes, processes that are related closely to changes in meaning-making (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983). The most promising is how conducive the wilderness experience is to fostering and maintaining the time, space, and quiet mind necessary for intensive self-reflection and examination of matters of personal importance (Greenway, 1995; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983). Identifying the barriers to our own development (explicated by the immunity map in Kegan & Lahey, 2009) constitutes the first crucial step in advancing mental complexity, and self-examination is the means by which that first step is taken. By looking through journals of the 166 participants in their extensive wilderness experience study, Kaplan and Talbot (1983) learned that participants were discovering "unsuspected qualities within themselves" and were learning "new ways of thinking about their place in the world and about the compelling relationship that can exist between that world and each individual" (p. 176). In fact, "the strongest connection between the wilderness

experience and individuals' feelings about themselves is seen in the final cluster, "Perceptual Changes" (psychological dimensions of the wilderness experience). Included in that final cluster are "self-insights" described as "learning about my thoughts and emotions and feeling many different things I've never felt before" (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983, pp. 179-180).

Kaplan and Talbot (1983) were also surprised by how quickly these perceptual changes take place. They learned that by day seven of the 14-day wilderness experience participants found:

a surprising sense of revelation, as both the environment and the self are newly perceived and seem newly wondrous. Individuals feel better acquainted with their own thoughts and feelings, and they feel 'different' in some way—calmer, at peace with themselves, 'more beautiful on the inside and unstifled.' They appreciate the slow pace of things, and they appreciate their privacy and the chance to attend to their own thoughts rather than being concerned with others' activities. (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983, p. 178)

Self-examination and personal reflection are important to the process of changing one's meaning-making system because uncovering or identifying the resistance to change, what Kegan and Lahey (2009) refer to as our immunity to change, requires mental and emotional detective work. Identifying the myriad ways we sabotage our most coveted changes to behavior and the assumptions that underpin that self-sabotage, require cognitive and emotional effort which is hard to do when distracted. Wilderness provides time and space to think and feel deeply, free of the things that so easily sidetrack us in ordinary living. It could very well be the case that the more time afforded to this hard to engage aspect of the human information processing system, the better.

Finally, a longer expedition would provide more time to engage in the other critical element in advancing mental complexity; behavioral experimentation. A longer wilderness expedition would allow more time to design, run and interpret tests of the big assumption (Kegan & Lahey, 2009), allowing students to generate significant buckets of data that could be used to challenge the veracity and usefulness of an underlying and powerful big assumption, a necessary task if one is to overturn the immunity to change and become more mentally complex.

### **Balance of Challenge and Support**

The study I conducted underscored the explanatory power of Kegan's theory of human development (1982, 1994) and helped me better understand what was going on with each of the five research participants and why they experienced the course as they did. Brant's social rejection made sense when I looked at that rejection as a consequence of his inability to think cross-categorically. Alec's struggle with limit-setting was understandable when I realized he was still embedded in his relationships with others, a hallmark characteristic of the Socializing Mind, while his experiment with saying no represented the first hint at the undoing of that self-limiting mindset. Kegan's theory (1982, 1994) helped me more adequately understand the important distinction between *what* we think and *how* we think what we think. The *content* of our thinking is one thing (e.g., files of information) but the *way* we organize our thinking (e.g., the computer operating system) is something else. As Kegan puts it, adding files of information can expand our repertoire and make us more versatile, but upgrading the operating system itself is where the most significant changes to our effectiveness will be realized. And the limitations to our operating system—rather than to the files of information we have at our fingertips—are what more adequately explain how it is and why it is people struggle so with the challenges that leave them feeling “in over their heads” (Kegan, 1994).

The orders of consciousness, or ways of making meaning, among the five research participants in this study spanned seven developmental positions, from Brant, who was of the 2<sup>nd</sup> order of mind to Alec, who, upon completion of the expedition scored one discrimination beyond the 3<sup>rd</sup> order of mind. Though close in age, these two research participants were relatively far apart developmentally, and, consequently, made sense of their experience in quite different ways. This highlights one of the difficulties faced by those who design and run WEPs: given the likelihood that course participants, even those close in age, may vary widely in their constructive-developmental perspective, how might course designers configure WEPs to optimize the balance of support and challenge? Kegan (1994) reminds us why this balance is important:

If I were asked to stand on one leg, like Hillel, and summarize my reading of centuries of wise reflection on what is required of an environment for it to facilitate the growth of its members, I would say this: people grow best where they continuously experience an ingenious blend of support and challenge; the rest is commentary. Environments that are weighted too heavily in the direction of challenge without adequate support are toxic; they promote defensiveness and constriction. Those weighted too heavily toward support without adequate challenge are ultimately boring; they promote devitalization. Both kinds of imbalance lead to withdrawal or dissociation from the context. (p. 42)

It might help to first define what is meant by support, by challenge, and by the kind of holding environment that helps foster changes to consciousness. According to Kegan (1994), support refers to the acknowledgement and acceptance of a person's current constructive-developmental position with, at one and the same time, the "sympathetic coaching appropriate to the gradual outgrowing of a way of knowing the world" (p. 43). He goes on to say that "the experience of

challenge without support is painful” and “can generate feelings of anger, helplessness, futility, or dissociation”; feelings which may lead to the overwhelmed person’s withdrawal and disengagement from the challenging experience (Kegan, 1994, p. 43).

Challenge is any experience that creates “a mismatch between external epistemological demand and internal epistemological capacity” or the experience of having the “mental demands of one’s environment” outstrip “the present state of one’s mental equipment” (Kegan, 1994, pp. 41-42). Holding environments that are conducive to developmental progress are places that provide:

both welcoming acknowledgement to exactly who the person is right now as he or she is, and fosters the person’s psychological evolution. As such, a holding environment is a tricky transitional culture, an evolutionary bridge, a context for crossing over. It fosters developmental transformation, or the process by which the whole (‘how I am’) becomes gradually a part (‘how I was’) of a new whole (‘how I am now’). (Kegan, 1994, p. 43)

Effective holding environments are contexts that are “at once immediately meaningful to, and ultimately disruptive of” the person’s current subject-object balance (Kegan, 1994, p. 45). They are places that both recognize and welcome the young person’s current way(s) of meaning-making and “then quite deliberately create the circumstances for its productive undoing” (Kegan, 1994, p. 46).

When you have youth of varying levels of development participating in a WEP, as was the case for this OB course, creating a balance of challenge and support is difficult because youth at varying levels of mental complexity view challenge and support differently. Challenging for one may be supportive for another, and, as Kegan (1982, 1994) and others have noted, failure to

provide course participants a sufficiently challenging experience can lead to poor outcomes (McKenzie, 2003; Orren & Werner, 2007).

Brant experienced the course's social environment as mostly challenge, with very little perceived support, while Cooper viewed the course's social environment as largely supportive, so much so that without it he believes he likely would have failed to complete the expedition. I was impressed how well OB designed this course, in terms of striking that clever balance between challenge and support, even though they did so with only a cursory knowledge of Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental theory (gleaned from my introduction to the research study), without knowing or understanding the meaning of the individual SOI scores of the five research participants, and without an explicit mandate to design the course in order bring about changes to mental complexity.

Each of the five research participants found the course physically and mentally challenging and mentioned that the difficulties encountered during the expedition were critically important to their learning. It is worth noting, however, that the degree of difficulty perceived by each research participant varied significantly as did the things they found challenging. Derek stated the course could have been a lot harder than it was, at least physically, while Cooper reported the expedition, in both its mental and physical aspects to be the hardest thing he had ever done, keeping him in his "yellow zone" for most of his time spent afield. Brant cited how hard it was to carry a heavy pack, day after day, in the mountains for 2.5 weeks and noted the psychological tenacity that was required of him to do so. And though he didn't admit it, he struggled significantly with social relations for the duration of the course. Derek noted the psychological challenges of maintaining a positive attitude even when cold, hungry, tired and dehydrated. Kevin and Cooper reported climbing Black Rock Mountain as the toughest thing

they had ever done. Alec cited the ongoing conflict among group members and attempts at limit-setting with peers as the most provocative trials of the expedition.

Elements that research participants cited as supportive clustered largely around three aspects of the OB course including the social experience with peers and instructors, the beauty of and simple living made possible in the wilderness environment, and the power of the wilderness environment—coupled with the absence of distractions—to facilitate self-reflection.

Social relationships and the dialogue that ensued helped research participants manage the demands they faced, easing the strain that novel, physical, and mental difficulties presented. This surprised me since Kaplan and Talbot (1983), in their review of the research literature leading up to their own study of the wilderness experience, noted that “one finding that is consistently reported in these studies is that social concerns are of minor importance in wilderness experiences” (p. 165). The one notable exception to the impact of social support, however, was Brant. As far as I could tell, he didn’t make a single close friend on the course. You may remember his complaints about the end of the course, and how sad he was to hike out with the younger group, knowing the older youth would remain three more days in the field. He felt frustrated leaving early because doing so, in his mind, prevented him from getting contact information from the older students; students he wished to remain in touch with after the trip. I think it is more likely that his peers, especially the older ones, didn’t want to stay in touch with him, viewing him as annoying, irresponsible, and immature. Brant’s experience of being snubbed brings us back to the issue of balancing challenge with support. I think it is possible that Brant’s inability to connect with others, his withdrawal from peer relationships, his disengagement from some of the course activities, and his consequent social isolation may have been exacerbated by

an expedition that failed to offer him adequate levels of support and understanding, and failed to accept him at his present developmental level.

Kegan (1994) raises the question about how we understand youth who consistently fail to meet expectations. His answer is relevant and compelling:

The answer to this will depend on the answer to the first question in the last chapter:

What sort of thing is it that adults expect of youth? If we think of these expectations as primarily about *behavior*, then the youth who cannot meet them will be seen as misbehaving or incompetent, someone who will not or cannot do what he or she should.

If we think of these expectations as primarily about *feelings*, then the youth who cannot meet them will be seen as disturbed or emotionally ill. The problem with both of these ways of thinking is that unwittingly, they project onto the adolescent a way of knowing that is just like that of a youth who is meeting the expectations, except that the disappointing youth is somehow running this mind incompetently or the mind is somehow disturbed. As a result, the disappointing youth is seen as a loser, an incompetent person, and one who, by reason of stubbornness, inability, or illness, is unable to come through for us, evoking our pity or hostility. But there may be something wrong and even dangerous in this way of thinking. What we see as the disappointing adolescent's 'misbehavior' or 'illness' might reflect more on our erroneous attribution to that adolescent of this third order, cross-categorical way of knowing. If the adolescent does not yet construct this way of knowing, the difficulty might be more a matter of not understanding the rules of the game than one of an unwillingness to play, a refusal to play, or an inability to play a game he or she nonetheless does understand. These disappointing adolescents may be in over their heads, and their situation is all the more

dangerous for being misunderstood by those adults whose expectations they are disappointing (Kegan, 1994, pp. 37-38).

I think course leaders and participants, including those who took part in this research study, expected something of Brant that he was, at the time, incapable of delivering; i.e., a cross-categorical way of knowing the world, or at the very least his admission that a cross-categorical way of knowing the world was desirable, if as yet still beyond him. As the only research participant fully embedded in the Instrumental Mind, or 2<sup>nd</sup> order mindset, Brant was the only one of the five research participants who was unable to allow the thoughts and feelings of others to impact his own. Though he was able to construct his point of view and recognize that others were constructing their points of view as separate from his own, an achievement Kegan refers to as durable categories, Brant was, at one and the same time constrained by his inability to coordinate those points of view in any sort of meaningful way. Brant was able to take others into account to the extent of providing the sense they were being understood (durable categories), but his intent had mostly, if not entirely to do with pursuing his own goals and purposes. "If other people are expecting otherwise, they will see this behavior as selfish, callous, manipulative, deceptive, or even dishonest" (Kegan, 1994, p. 39). What is most puzzling to me about this is that Brant, though firmly entrenched both before and after the course in the Instrumental Mind, or 2<sup>nd</sup> order mindset, was only one epistemological position behind a much older Derek, who was significantly more popular with his peers than Brant. Even Kevin--whom you may remember grated on my nerves and who was much closer to Brant's age than Derek-- got along much better with his peers than Brant, even though he, like Derek, began the expedition just one epistemological position ahead of Brant. Brant's social experience on this course raises many questions including how very different one transitional step along the continuum between the 2<sup>nd</sup>

and 3<sup>rd</sup> orders of mind can be in terms of a person's success or failure meeting expectations on a WEP such as the one that was the subject of this study. Additionally, if course instructors had been trained in constructive-developmental theory and had Brant's constructive-developmental perspective been known (from the administration of the SOI), planned for ahead of time, and taken into account during the course, might Brant's experience of the course been different enough to justify the additional effort by OB course designers and staff? I think so. Kegan (1994) reminds us that: "We all feel much less sympathetic toward people we think have let us down because they choose to than toward people we think have let us down because they are unable to do otherwise" (p. 38).

In Alec's case, it was his difficulty setting limits with others, saying no to requests for favors, and putting his own needs first that figured prominently in his struggle during the course. Always inclined to say yes to whatever was asked of him, as a way of maintaining the persona of the "really nice guy", he recognized an opportunity on this course to practice standing up for himself and holding on to what mattered most; his own dreams and vision for the future. By practicing limit setting in the little things (not giving his food to other students who had not rationed their food properly) he was preparing himself for the time when saying no really mattered. He knew that at some point his dreams of playing folk music and travelling solo through the Yukon wilderness would require an ability to hold his relationship with his parents as object, so that he could say no to their anticipated request that he lead a more conventional, and presumably safer life. The OB course was a good opportunity for him to test-drive his emerging resolve to become the architect of his own life, a chief characteristic of Kegan's fourth order of mind (Kegan, 1982,1994). With support from the OB instructors who coached him around limit-setting, and by saying no to hungry comrades who attempted to talk him out of his

food ration, Alec practiced putting distance between himself and others while, at one and the same time, continuing to nurture and maintain those relationships. Alec borrowed the instructors advanced mental complexity to experiment with a way of making sense that was still beyond his current capacity, providing him the opportunity to experiment with and test the assumptions underpinning a mindset he knew to be self-limiting.

Kevin talked at length about how his observations of Alec's helpful behavior impacted his own ideas about the scope of change he believed was possible. Alec's positive attitude and supportive behavior allowed Kevin to see in himself a greater capacity than what he had earlier imagined, demonstrating, in yet another way, the power of the social experience to support the transition to greater mental complexity.

Additionally, all research participants but Cooper remarked how much they enjoyed the wilderness environment, stating the beauty of the mountain environment, as well as the simple, rhythmic cadence of wilderness travel and living, made strong positive impressions on them and helped temper the more trying moments. The arduous task of climbing Black Rock Mountain figured prominently in accounts by every research participant, and seemed to be among the most significant aspects of the OB experience. This course component will be addressed below.

The space and time for self-reflection built into the course, by long days some participants spent hiking in silence with only one's thoughts for company (though some of the youth talked nearly the entire time while hiking), the 36-hour solo, and the prohibition of all electronic devices and gadgets appeared significant to all research participants-- with the exception of Brant--to their experience of the course. This is consistent with the research literature that suggests these elements of the wilderness experience are critically important to positive changes noted across the variety of studies completed to date. These experiences tend to

facilitate self-discovery (Hollenhorst, Frank & Watson, 1994), learning (Martin & Leberman, 2005), recognition of core issues (Russell & Phillips-Miller, 2002), increases in personal effectiveness (Greffath, Meyer, Styrdom, & Ellis, 2011), and are conducive to feeling alive (Hinds, 2011).

The absence of distractions and the time and space to reflect led, at least in some cases, to a significantly enhanced awareness of self and of one's relationship to everything else. Each research participant but Brant commented about the importance of being away from distractions (i.e., friends, cell phones, computers, television, etc.) in order to think of the things that matter most. Cooper made "major life decisions" including the resolve to try harder in all things upon his return to home. He credited these decisions to solitude and the lack of distractions in an intense and unique environment. Kevin noted that the lack of distractions was a novel experience. Alec stated that the solitude helped to solidify his life goals and provided time to think about the changes he wanted to make. Derek commented how the lack of distractions and time spent alone on solo provided time to think more deeply about his life, something he had rarely experienced at home. Only Brant failed to note solitude, the solo, and space for self-reflection as significant experiences on the course. I suspect this was because Brant, being firmly entrenched in the 2<sup>nd</sup> order mindset, did not yet have the capacity to reflect on competing views within or outside the self. In short, he was still unable to engage in cross-categorical thinking. For this reason, self-examination was likely a non-starter.

### **Black Rock Mountain: Perhaps the Most Significant Experience of the Course**

My second research question focused on understanding how each research participant made sense of his experience and the experiences that seemed significant. As I read and reread the data, I was struck repeatedly by the power of a single course event: the hike to and from the

summit of Black Rock Mountain. Though the data suggested this hike was especially potent in its effects on research participants, I hesitated to address it because of concerns my biases toward hiking, skiing, and climbing, activities that are central to my own identity, might undermine my attempts to remain neutral. I have done my best to bracket my own love of mountaineering in order to speak to this experience objectively .

To be clear, reaching the Black Rock Mountain summit did not entail any actual climbing; it was a hike. But it was a summit, and the commanding view from its flat and rocky peak was impressive. We were able to see our starting point some ten days earlier, and retrace much of our route from Waiparous Creek to our camp along the Ghost River. The summit afforded views of the Ghost River Valley, Mounts Costigan, Aylmer, and Devil's Head, and the transition from Rocky Mountain Front Range to Alberta prairie. It was even clear enough to see the Calgary city skyline, some 90 km distant. Everyone completed the hike and it took us 7.5 hours to do so. Our party gained nearly 900 meters to reach the top, and hiked through terrain that was often steep and with the loose footing characteristic of scree slopes.

### **Brant**

Hiking to and from the summit of Black Rock Mountain was, as far as Brant was concerned, one of his two most significant achievements of the course. It, in addition to actually completing the course, helped him feel confident in his ability to do hard things, and gave him hope that others would be sufficiently impressed to take him seriously and offer him respect.

CURT: Help me understand what those two events meant to you.

BRANT: Black Rock because that's the first mountain I've ever climbed in my life. To say that I've been able to climb a mountain at 13, now 14, is pretty awesome because not a lot of 14-year-olds can say that. (Brant, SOI # 2, pp. 3-4)

**Derek**

When I asked Derek what aspects of the OB course were most transformative and powerful, he, without hesitation, mentioned the hike to and from the summit of Black Rock Mountain. His reasons were twofold. First, he believed the hike was hard and felt proud of his ability to complete it.

DEREK: Ok, Success. Summiting Black Rock, that was pretty cool.

CURT: And that was cool because...

DEREK: It was just a crazy accomplishment. We were sitting down at the camp, and you could look up at this massive mountain, and it was like, 'Oh, we climbed that yesterday.'

CURT: It was pretty big, wasn't it?

DEREK: It was pretty big. (SOI # 2, p. 5)

The other reason this summit was so important to him had to do with the view from the summit. He was gobsmacked by it.

DEREK: Yeah, definitely. I didn't really enjoy hiking before, but it's definitely something I'd do again.

CURT: And you'd do it again because...

DEREK: It's pretty satisfying to get to the top of a mountain or a summit. You get some pretty incredible views.

CURT: What is it about the incredible views that stir you so? Why are they important to you?

DEREK: It's really cool to see nature at its finest. A lot of people live in cities their whole lives, and never get to see that. (SOI # 2, p. 13)

**Kevin**

Kevin understood his successful completion of the Black Rock Mountain hike as the basis for his chief learning experience: that he is capable of far more than he thought possible. But beyond that, the experience was important because it provided him with a view unlike anything he had ever seen before. Furthermore, it was novel, it was hard and constituted his “biggest achievement” on the course, it turned out to be the “best part” and “high point” of the trip, and it was the one experience, more than anything else that boosted his self-confidence.

CURT: I’m curious, what was the best part of summiting Black Rock for you?

KEVIN: I think it was the view, and knowing that I have accomplished something huge.

CURT: And ‘accomplishing something huge,’ as you put it, that was important to you because...

KEVIN: It was important because I’ve never climbed a mountain before, and climbing a mountain that’s 2.5 km high for your first mountain is, I think, a pretty good accomplishment. I felt very good about myself after summiting Black Rock, and knowing that hard things that happen back at home are not as hard as things that you could probably be doing.

CURT: Do you think that it was a way of telling yourself that, even if things are really difficult, you can still do them?

KEVIN: Yeah.

CURT: And that if you just hang in there, you’ll get through it?

KEVIN: Yeah.

CURT: Wow. And that’s an important lesson for you because...

KEVIN: It’s an important lesson because it tells me that I can accomplish more. Don’t limit yourself; try new things. I think you shouldn’t be limiting yourself and you should believe in yourself, that you can do more than what you think. That’s what I think. (SOI # 2, p. 11)

## Cooper

Cooper's experience with Black Rock Mountain started out well enough but going down terrified him. Though he liked roller coasters and didn't think he was afraid of heights, the perceived exposure once facing away from the mountain as is required for the descent "freaked him out". He referred to the hike to and from the summit of Black Rock Mountain as the high point of the course.

CURT: What was the high point of the course for you?

COOPER: Probably getting to the top of Black Rock.

CURT: And that was a high point because...

COOPER: It was something that I'd never really ever experienced, in any sense of the word: never done something that difficult, never been that high up before, never climbed a mountain before. It was a lot of firsts. It really struck me when I got up there, as one of these 'wow, you did it!' moments. (semi-structured interview, p. 11)

He also mentioned feeling disoriented, "though in a good way," challenged to the extreme, and anxious. He talked about Black Rock Mountain as a novel experience that forced him to work through his fear in order to avoid shutting down. Pushing through hardship was an experiment of sorts, something quite different than what he was accustomed to doing when at home.

CURT: Any other reason Black Rock was a high point for you, besides what you've already mentioned?

COOPER: At least going down, it really forced me to face things head-on. Normally, when I feel anxiety like that, my main source of coping is to distract myself and escape it. When there was no escaping it, you just had to man-up and deal with it, it forced me to face things head-on. (semi-structured interview, p. 11)

## **Alec**

Alec loved natural beauty, and the mountain wilderness of the Canadian Rockies was especially important to him. He came to Alberta to see and experience this slice of Canadian wilderness because he wanted to “explore the beauty of the world,” and he knew that this mountain region was extraordinary. But because the expedition took place almost entirely below tree line, he felt largely disappointed in the aesthetic of the trip. He had expected to spend most of his days hiking in the alpine in full view of the surrounding peaks. Since this was not the case his hike to the summit of Black Rock Mountain proved all the more important to him, as it provided one of only two days with unobstructed views of the surrounding Ghost River Wilderness.

CURT: Help me understand that. Why were the Rockies so important?

ALEC: It definitely relates to my big goal of travelling and seeking the beauties of the world. I think they are one of the beauties of the world. It was quite spectacular when we got up there (summit of Black Rock Mountain), when you get above the tree line and you can definitely see them. And they go on as far as you can see. They're really cool. You're taken aback by the Rockies, and you look at them in awe, and you wish that you could stay there forever. It's an amazing feeling, that wishing to stay there forever and look at them for as long as you can. (semi-structured interview, pp. 9-10)

## **The Allure of Going Higher**

Each of the five research participants had their own reasons for understanding the day we spent hiking to and from the summit of Black Rock Mountain as the most important, or at least among the most important experiences on the course. I am not surprised by this. I have been to enough summits to know something of the deep and abiding satisfaction that comes from overcoming struggle. I end this part of the discussion with an excerpt from one of my luminaries.

Steve House was called the best high-altitude climber of his day by the legendary Italian mountaineer, Reinhold Messner. Putting up some of the hardest and most beautiful lines on

numerous great peaks in Alaska and the Himalaya, House cemented his reputation as one of the world's great alpinists by climbing simply and with an ethic few could match. In his book on training for alpine climbing, written with fellow climber, World Cup Nordic skier, and coach, Scott Johnston, the authors conclude:

It is not our natural tendency to value struggle over success, a worldview that climbing sternly enforces. Embracing struggle for its own sake is an important step on your path. Incremental vacillations in your self—your physical and mental selves—are exquisitely revealed in practicing ascent. There is no end to your progress or your process. For the two of us the pursuit of climbing mountains has been among the most powerful personal experiences we have known. Nothing else has come close to the blunt power of climbing to inform us about ourselves. (House & Johnston, 2014, p. 21)

### **Recommendations**

#### **Enhancing the WEP**

Because, so far as I know, this is the first study of its kind, there is a lot of exploratory work to do in order to better understand how Kegan's constructive-developmental theory (1982, 1994), Kegan and Lahey's immunity to change (2009), and Lahey et al., and the Subject-Object Interview (2011) might benefit the WEP field.

Schooling WEP course instructors in Kegan's constructive-developmental theory (1982, 1994) might provide them with a more sophisticated means of assessing student performance. It could help them better understand why some students thrive and others struggle, enabling more empathy for students who are "in over their heads" (Kegan, 1994), and a better understanding how to challenge and support students at different levels of mental complexity.

The immunity to change technology developed by Kegan and Lahey (2009) shows promise in helping accelerate changes to mental complexity, and interjecting that technology into the WEP course curriculum would fit well with what many WEP course instructors are already doing. As I pointed out, the OB instructors on this course performed intuitively at least some of the work prescribed in Kegan and Lahey (2009). With proper training and practice, WEP instructors could formally introduce immunity to change concepts to students and actively engage those who express interest, turning an accidental application of immunity to change principles into something intentional, and potentially more effective.

Administering the SOI at the beginning and end of each WEP might help course planners and practitioners better design course experiences. Knowing where a person is in his or her developmental journey could assist in creating optimal balances of challenge and support. Furthermore, testing each student using the SOI at the beginning and end of the WEP would indicate if program enhancements have led to significant changes to the constructive-developmental perspective of participating students.

By lengthening course duration, increasing the time spent on solo, and prescribing periods of silence during parts of each hiking day, all course participants would be compelled to be alone with their thoughts for a greater length of time than what was afforded on this particular course. The longer course, solo, and prescribed periods of hiking in silence could further enhance the space for reflection and self-examination, aspects of the immunity to change process that are critical for identifying barriers to change and for evaluating data from behavioral experiments. One caveat is that there may be some for whom time spent alone with their thoughts proves a cruel experience, as their thoughts may be largely unhappy and negative. Precautions or

exceptions might be necessary for preventing those prone to dark ruminations from using the time to further exacerbate an underlying depressed or anxious mood.

Geography permitting, incorporating peak bagging as a regular component of the curriculum, with successively harder ascents throughout the course, could provide opportunities for challenge and support that significantly underscore the need for more complex ways of making sense of the world.

In summary, the following recommendations are suggested in order to enhance WEPs and improve the student experience.

First, help WEP developers and practitioners develop some understanding of constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994), the subject-object interview (Lahey et al., 2011), and the immunity to change, (Kegan & Lahey, 2009) in order to:

- develop a broader understanding of what constitutes desired change on a WEP course. This broader understanding could include “growing up” or changes to one’s constructive-developmental perspective as an explicit outcome goal for WEPs.
- develop a deeper understanding of why students behave as they do, and more nearly understand why some youth struggle and others thrive.
- provide a better balance of support and challenge to more adequately empower the process of growing up.
- Better equip course instructors to provide more insightful coaching to students who are attempting to better understand their own limitations and improve their efforts to overcome those limitations.

Second, build into WEP curriculum periods for silence and self-reflection that may help bolster the self-reflective process; one that appears critical to the process of changes to one's constructive-developmental perspective. This can be facilitated by:

- Instituting a solo that constitutes approximately 10% of total expedition time.
- Instituting mandated (or strongly suggested) periods of silence during each day on course.

Third, lengthen the course duration in order to provide more time for the myriad of experiences that seem potentially conducive to changes to constructive-developmental perspective, experiences that are unique to the wilderness environment.

Finally, if the geography allows for it, integrate mountain hiking and peak bagging into the curriculum in order to provide opportunities for novel, difficult, and confidence-building experiences. By scheduling multiple peak ascents over the course of the expedition, with each ascent increasing in difficulty, opportunities for growth and development may be increased.

### **Future Research**

As is the case with so many learning experiences, this study raised more questions than it answered.

My first question is this: could a WEP, of longer duration and with a more intentional focus on facilitating changes to constructive-developmental perspective, bring about significant changes to participant's constructive-developmental perspective? Until an expedition that is substantively different from the one that served as the venue for this research study is launched and studied, the answer to this question remains unknown.

If a WEP was shown to help promote significant changes to constructive-developmental perspective, my next question would have to do with the "black box"; an ongoing challenge in

our field. It might be helpful to conduct research using changes to constructive-developmental perspective as the dependent variable. Independent variables could be introduced one at a time in order to see if correlations can be established between advancements to mental complexity and particular aspects of the WEP. Independent variables might include duration of expedition, type of wilderness setting, course instructors schooled in constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994), the use of immunity to change (Kegan & Lahey, 2009) as part of curriculum, various configurations of challenge and support, and different types of expedition activity such as sea kayaking, wilderness mountaineering, ski mountaineering, mountain backpacking, etc. By having one dependent variable across studies (changes to constructive-developmental perspective) and introducing changes to key aspects of the WEP one element at a time, course elements or characteristics leading to changes in mental complexity might be better understood.

A third research area of interest has to do with the constructive-developmental levels of outdoor professionals. The WEP that was the venue for this research study did not provoke significant changes to the constructive-developmental perspective of any of the five research participants. But is it possible that repeated exposure to the wilderness experience might do so? Since none of the five research participants had significant exposure to the wilderness experience, they can't inform this particular question. But what about outdoor professionals; those men and women who spend months at a time leading expeditions into remote and wild places? Might they possess a more complex mindset than the general public? And if they do, how do they understand that? A useful research sample might include National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) instructors, Outward Bound (OB) instructors, and professional mountain guides affiliated with the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides, American Mountain Guides Association, or International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations. I

would be interested in knowing what each guide's constructive- developmental level is using the SOI, how their constructive-developmental level compares to adults generally, and how they understand the wilderness experience, using some form of semi-structured interview.

Fourth, this research study focused on youth in wilderness, and all but one of the five research participants made meaning in between the second and third orders of consciousness. How might a group of youth or young adults who are making meaning in between the third and fourth orders of mind respond to a WEP?

Finally, though not by design, the entire research sample for this study identified as male. How might the understanding of the wilderness experience have been different if the research sample had included females or those who self-identify as gender fluid or trans-gender?

### **Reflections of the Researcher**

While engaged in this research, I attempted to learn how young people, immersed in wild nature, understand the wilderness experience through the lens of their constructive-developmental perspective. I sought to better understand the degree to which the experience of wild nature provokes a reconstitution of the subject-object balance. I searched for clues as to which facets of the wilderness experience abet the process of developing one's epistemology and expanding one's mental complexity. I asked myself if a more comprehensive understanding and theoretical construction of the wilderness experience could be achieved, especially in terms of its relationship to human development, and the continued unfolding of increased orders of consciousness?

These and other issues related to WEPs warrant our continued attention if we are to more adequately understand the power of the wilderness experience to transform those who venture forth into the few wild, uninhabited (by humans), and remote places that remain.

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**APPENDIX A**

**Subject-Object Interview Certificate of Reliability for Curtis J. Pollock**



**APPENDIX B**

**Subject-Object Interview Certificate of Reliability for Dr. Jennifer A. Jones**



**APPENDIX C**



# Outward Bound CANADA

RESEARCH SUPPORT LETTER  
**Outward Bound Canada & Curtis Pollock**

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April 7, 2015

To whom it may concern,

Outward Bound Canada (OBC) has reviewed and approved the research proposal submitted by Curt Pollock which is to be undertaken at our Rocky Mountain School in the summer of 2015.

Curt can proceed in implementing his agenda of research in collaboration with OBC program staff and its directors. Curt will have an obligation to communicate and respond to questions prior to, during, and following his study up until the time of its defense. This communication will be between Curt and the Manager of the Rocky Mountain Programs.

As National Research Coordinator, I, Nevin Harper, will remove myself from direct involvement in the research to reduce conflict of interest as I also sit on Curt's PhD Committee. OBC recognizes Curt will need to be in compliance with UVic Research Ethics approval as well as to maintain his research agenda as approved by OBC's Research Advisory Committee.

We look forward to working with Curt and are excited about this opportunity.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nevin Harper".

Nevin J. Harper, PhD

National Research Coordinator  
Outward Bound Canada

**APPENDIX D**

## **Outward Bound Canada Invitation to Participate**

June 23, 2015

Dear Course Registrant and Parent/Guardian:

As the Rocky Mountain Program Director for Outward Bound Canada (OBC), I am pleased to invite you to consider participating in an exciting research study that will be taking place on your Rocky Mountain Discovery Course. Curt Pollock, a PhD candidate at the University of Victoria, will be joining the expedition to explore, assess, and understand, the impact a wilderness backpacking experience has on participating youth. This research is potentially important because it might influence how we think about, prepare, deliver, and evaluate wilderness courses, and may lead to improvements in the student experience.

The additional activities you will be asked to participate in, should you choose to volunteer for this research study, will include an interview while in the field, and two additional interviews once the course has been completed. Each interview will take approximately 75-90 minutes to complete. Besides interviewing participants, the researcher will be conducting field observations with a particular interest in how research participants manage difficulty and how they experience varying levels of support. In acknowledgement of your full participation in the study, a fifty dollar Visa card will be provided upon conclusion of the third and final interview.

If you do decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time before, during or after the course. Your decision to withdraw from the study will in no way negatively impact how you are treated by Outward Bound Canada generally, or by your course instructors or the researcher in particular. For students who elect not to participate in this research study, their course experience will be different only insofar as they will not experience the three interviews and they may not experience the insight that comes (at least potentially) from participating in the interview process.

Outward Bound has a long history of producing leading research in the fields of outdoor education, adventure education, environmental education, experiential learning, adventure therapy, and sustainable recreation using a wide range of methodological approaches and research traditions. This particular study has been approved by the Outward Bound Canada Research Advisory Committee and has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria. The role of OBC in this research project is to: 1) review the research study proposal (completed and approved); 2) offer, administer and execute the Rocky Mountain Discovery Course; 3) facilitate the principal investigator's participation in the course; 4) send the "OBC Cover Letter" and "Invitation to Participate" to course registrants, and; 5) to telephone each course registrant and each course registrant's parent/guardian prior to the course start to see if they have any questions about the course or registration materials and review the nature of the research study and ask if the family has any questions. If they do, OBC will seek permission from them for the researcher to contact them directly and OBC will schedule a time for this phone call to take place. Signed consent from you and from your parent(s)/guardian(s) will be necessary for you to participate in this research.

Once you have received this letter and the other course registration materials, I will telephone you and your parent/guardian prior to the course start to see if you (and your parent/guardian) have any questions about the course or registration materials and review the nature of the research study and ask if you (and your parent/guardian) have any questions. If you

do, I will seek permission from you and your parent/guardian for the researcher to contact you and your parent/guardian directly. If you and your parent/guardian agree, I will schedule a time for this phone call to take place.

I hope you will consider participating in this study in order to be a part of the development of new knowledge and the long tradition of research through Outward Bound Canada.

Sincerely,

Lenka Staffl  
Rocky Mountain Program Director  
Outward Bound Canada  
Canmore, AB, Canada

**APPENDIX E**

## Researcher Invitation to Participate



June 23, 2015

Dear Course Registrant and Parent/Guardian,

My name is Curt Pollock, and I am a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Human and Social Development at the University of Victoria. You are invited to consider participating in a study entitled “Meaning-Making and the Wilderness Experience.” You are receiving this invitation because you have registered for the Outward Bound Canada Rocky Mountain Discovery Course. As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as a part of the requirements for the doctor of philosophy degree (PhD). This study is being conducted under the supervision of Professor James Anglin. You may reach him at his office at 250-721-8550.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore, assess, and understand the impact a wilderness backpacking experience has on participating youth.

### **Importance of this Research**

This research is important because it may help to: 1) understand if a wilderness backpacking experience may affect participants; 2) develop a deeper understanding of how adolescents on this kind of course make sense of the experience, and; 3) provide insight into how an adolescent’s stage of development relates to the way he or she makes sense of the wilderness experience. Such knowledge could positively influence how such wilderness programs are offered in the future, the setting of program goals, the development and delivery of activities, and the measurement of program outcomes.

### **Participant Selection**

You have received this Invitation to Participate because you have registered as an adolescent participant on the Outward Bound Canada Rocky Mountain Discovery Backpacking Course, summer 2015. Your registration on this course makes you eligible to participate in this research study.

### **What is involved?**

If you volunteer to participate in this research, you will be asked to engage in some activities related specifically to this research study, over and above the activities of the Outward Bound Course for which you have registered. Research related activities will include a formal interview at the beginning of the course while in the field and two interviews upon conclusion of the course after you have returned home. In my role as researcher, I will be participating alongside you in all facets of the course in order to better understand how participation in such trips affects participant learning, development, and leadership. My field observations will focus on how you manage difficult and challenging situations and how you experience varying levels of support.

Engaging in interviews at the beginning and conclusion of the course will require extra time (75-90 minutes per interview). It may also elicit some uncomfortable feelings due to the potentially private or personal nature of the experiences you choose to share. However, you need only share what you wish to share.

The first interview will take place during the course while we are in the field. I plan to conduct that first interview under a tarp so that we are protected from the elements. While course mates may be aware of our interview session, we will be far enough away to ensure the confidentiality of our discussion. If you feel uncomfortable during the interview conducted in the field, or during either of the two interviews conducted once you have returned home, you may move to a different topic or stop the interview to take a break.

In recognition of your participation, I will offer participants who fully complete this research study a fifty dollar Visa card.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the research related activities at any time without explanation. Your decision to participate, or to decline to participate will not affect or limit your full participation in the Outward Bound course experience. If you do decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study before, during or after the course. Your decision to withdraw from the study will in no way negatively impact how you are treated by Outward Bound Canada generally, or by your course instructors or the researcher in particular.

For students who elect not to participate in this research study, their course experience will be different only insofar as they: 1) will not be observed by the researcher in the same way as the research participants, 2) will not experience the three interviews, 3) may not experience the insight that comes (at least potentially) from participating in the interview process. Being a part of the discovery of new knowledge can be an exciting adventure in its own right. If you decide to participate, you will play a key role in helping me better understand the relationship between the wilderness experience and human development, which could have positive implications for the field of wilderness education in the future.

### **Next Steps**

Once you have received this letter, Lenka Stafil, the Rocky Mountain Program Director for Outward Bound Canada, will telephone you and your parent/guardian, and ask if you are interested in participating in this research study or if you have additional concerns or questions. If you and your parent/guardian agree to participate in the study or if you have further questions or concerns about potential involvement in the research, Lenka will ask you and your parent/guardian if it is acceptable for me to contact you directly. If you and your parent/guardian agree, Lenka will arrange a day and time for me to contact you. I will telephone you and your parent/guardian to answer any questions or address any concerns you may have and, if you decide to participate, review the necessary consent forms in order to secure the required signatures.

I hope you will consider participating in this study in order to be a part of the development of new knowledge and to continue the long tradition of research through Outward Bound Canada. Sincerely,

Curt Pollock, PhD Candidate

University of Victoria  
Victoria, BC, Canada

**APPENDIX F**

## Participant Informed Consent Form



SCHOOL OF CHILD AND YOUTH CARE  
 FACULTY OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL  
 DEVELOPMENT  
 UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

**Participant Informed Consent Form**

### MEANING-MAKING AND THE WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE

I agree to participate in a research study entitled “Meaning-Making and the Wilderness Experience.” This study is being conducted by Curt Pollock, a PhD Candidate in the school of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. If at any time you have questions or comments, I can be contacted by emailing me at [pollockc@uvic.ca](mailto:pollockc@uvic.ca).

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for my degree which is being conducted under the supervision of Professor James Anglin, PhD. You may contact Dr. Anglin at his university office at 250-721-8550.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore, assess, and understand the impact a wilderness backpacking experience has on participating youth.

#### **Importance of this Research**

This research is important because it will help to: 1) understand if a wilderness backpacking experience may affect participants; 2) develop a deeper understanding of how adolescents on this kind of course make sense of the experience, and; 3) provide insight into how an adolescent’s stage of development relates to the way he or she makes sense of the wilderness experience. Such knowledge could positively influence how such wilderness programs are offered in the future, the setting of program goals, the development, and delivery of activities, and the measurement of program outcomes.

#### **Role of Outward Bound Canada (OBC)**

The role of OBC in this research project is to: 1) review the research study proposal (completed and approved); 2) offer, administer and execute the Rocky Mountain Discovery Course; 3) facilitate the principal investigator’s participation in the course; 4) send the “OBC Cover Letter” and “Invitation to Participate” to course registrants; and, 5) for Lenka Stafel to telephone each course registrant and each course registrant’s parent/guardian prior to the course start to see if they have any questions about the course or registration materials and review the nature of the research study and ask if the family has any questions. If they do, she will seek permission from them for the researcher to contact them directly and she will schedule a time for this phone call to take place.

### **Participant Selection**

You have received this Participant Informed Consent Form because you have registered on the Outward Bound Canada Rocky Mountain Discovery Backpacking Course, summer 2015 and you have expressed an interest in participating in this research study.

### **What is Involved**

If you volunteer to participate in this research, you will be asked to engage in some activities related specifically to this research study, over and above the activities of the Outward Bound Course for which you have registered. Research related activities will include participating in an interview while in the field at the beginning of the course and two interviews upon conclusion of the course after you have returned home.

Engaging in interviews at the beginning and conclusion of the course will require extra time (75-90 minutes per interview). It may also elicit some uncomfortable feelings due to the potentially private or personal nature of the experiences you choose to share. However, you need only share what you wish to share.

The first interview will take place during the course while we are in the field. I plan to conduct that first interview under a tarp so that we are protected from the elements. While course mates may be aware of our interview session, we will be far enough away to ensure the confidentiality of our discussion. If you feel uncomfortable during the interview conducted in the field, or during either of the two interviews conducted once you have returned home, you may move to a different topic or stop the interview to take a break.

I will be participating in the trip to better understand how participation in such trips affects participant learning, development, and leadership. My field observations will focus on how you manage difficult and challenging situations and how you experience varying levels of support. There are a couple of things I will do to help make your participation in this study as comfortable as possible. First, before commencing the SOI, I will clarify with you that you may choose any of the ten topics to discuss, and, if at any time you feel uncomfortable sharing your experience of a particular topic, you can pick a different topic. Second, I am a skilled interviewer with 20 years' experience working as a psychotherapist. I will inquire, at first sight of emotional discomfort, if you wish to continue, pick a different topic, or simply stop the interview. If you choose to stop the interview, you will have the opportunity to resume the interview at a later time or cease your participation in this research study all together.

In recognition of your participation I will offer participants who complete all aspects of this research study a fifty dollar Visa card.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the research related activities at any time without explanation. Your decision to participate, or to decline to participate will not affect or limit your full participation in the Outward Bound course experience. Two of the three interviews conducted as a part of the study will take place via telephone or Skype after your Outward Bound Canada course concludes and you have returned home. In light of this, I will, upon conclusion of the course, ask you if you are willing to continue your involvement in the study before scheduling and completing the final SOI and the semi-structured interview.

### **Researcher's Relationship with Participants**

As a participant in the research study, I will have a dual relationship with you that is constituted by a researcher/participant relationship. In order to prevent this dual relationship from influencing your decision to participate, you will be free to discontinue your participation in the research-related activities of the study at any time. Your decision to withdraw from the study will not limit or negatively impact the quality of your Outward Bound experience.

### **Anonymity**

Though I will not disclose to other members of the group that you are participating in this research study, it may become obvious that you are when I conduct the in-field interview with you. I will use a coding process that protects your anonymity on all collected data and in all reports that are generated from this research.

### **Confidentiality**

*In the Field:* Interviews will be held far enough away from the group to help ensure your privacy. Furthermore, interviews will be digitally recorded and downloaded to my USB Flash Drive and tablet, and then erased from the recording device. Field notes will be typed onto my password protected tablet and saved to the tablet hard drive and my own USB Flash Drive. Both items shall remain in my possession at all times, with the USB flash drive securely stored in a locked hard shell case.

*Back in Town:* All electronic and paper files will be kept by the researcher in a locked metal file cabinet at the researcher's home or place of work.

*Dissemination of Results:* It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways. First, I will utilize the results of this study to complete my doctoral dissertation. Second, I intend to publish the results in book form or in academic and/or professional journals. Third, I intend to share the results of this study in presentations at scholarly and wilderness industry-related meetings. Fourth, I will produce a summary report to share with participants, their families, and Outward Bound Canada. Your confidentiality will be protected in all presentations and publications.

*Disposal of Data:* all original data, with identifiers, collected for this research study will be kept in a secure location for seven years from the time I successfully complete my PhD. At that point, electronic data will be erased and paper data will be shredded.

Limitations to confidentiality: this Outward Bound Canada course is, like other OBC wilderness courses, small in size. The anonymized data you and other research participants provide could be enough that other course participants or course instructors figure out to whom the pseudonyms belong.

### **Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include the principal investigator, Curt Pollock (email address is [pollockc@uvic.ca](mailto:pollockc@uvic.ca)). Academic Supervisor, James Anglin (email address is [janglin@uvic.ca](mailto:janglin@uvic.ca) and phone number is 250-721-8550).

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

_____	_____	_____
<i>Name of Student</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	_____
<i>Name of Parent/Guardian of Student</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>

***A copy of this consent will be left with you and with your parent/guardian and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

**APPENDIX G**

### Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

This interview has been adapted from the Minnesota Outward Bound Post-Course Interview found in Patton (1990), p. 365-366.

1. To what extent was the course what you expected it to be?
  - a. How was it different from what you expected?
  - b. To what extent did the things you were concerned about before the course come true?
    - i. b-1. Which things came true?
    - ii. b-2. Which things didn't come true?
2. How did the course affect you personally?
  - a. What changes in yourself do you see or feel as a result of the course?
  - b. What would you say you got out of the experience?
3. During the past 21 days, you have been with the same group of people in a very intense experience. What feelings and thoughts do you have about having been a part of the same group for that time?
  - a. What feelings and thoughts do you have about the group?
  - b. What role did you play in the group?
  - c. How was your experience with this group different from your experiences with other groups?
  - d. How did the group affect you?
  - e. How did you affect the group?
4. What is it about the course that makes it have the effects it has? What happens on the course that makes a difference?
  - a. What do you see as the important parts of the course that make it a transformative experience?
  - b. What was the high point of the course for you?
  - c. What was the low point?
  - d. What aspects of the course were supportive and helpful?
  - e. What aspects of the course were challenging and disorienting?
  - f. What aspects of the course were not helpful or frustrating?
5. How do you think this course will affect you when you return to your home?
  - a. Of the things you experienced this summer, what will carry over to your normal life?
  - b. What plans do you have to change anything or do anything differently as a result of this course?
6. During the past 21 days you have faced a variety of new situations. How would you describe yourself in terms of how you approached these new experiences?
  - a. How was this different from the way you usually approach things?
  - b. How do you think this experience will affect how you approach new situations in the future?

7. Suppose you were being asked by a government agency whether or not it should sponsor a course like this? What would you say?
  - a. What arguments would you make to support your position?
8. You have been very helpful. I'd be interested in any other feelings and thoughts you would like to share with me to help me understand your experience of the course and how it affected you and why it affected you as it did?