

THE EXPERIENCE OF RETURNING FROM A WILDERNESS EXPEDITION

by

Helen Mueller Wedin

A Dissertation Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Nursing

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The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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ABSTRACT

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The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2007
Under the Supervision of Dr. Patricia E. Stevens

The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to explore the experience of women returning from the Arctic territory of Nunavut. Such women transitioned from a secluded, communal, Canadian wilderness journey of approximately 7 weeks duration, to a Western lifestyle of advanced technology, high-paced, individualistic living. Preliminary inquiry of expedition returnees pointed to a significant number of participants detailing moderate or higher levels of anxiety, paralleling similar findings of cross-cultural sojourners who reported experiencing a kind of 'reverse culture shock' upon coming home. Psychological distress related to transition between foreign environments and home cultures, has been associated with potential health concerns. Qualitative research uncovering the experience of reentry following a wilderness expedition is severely limited,

though necessary in this age of increased wilderness and cross-cultural travel. In this qualitative study, unsolicited journal entries of 11 female postexpedition participants currently aged 21–33 years constituted the basis of data combined with confirmatory e-mails further articulating the experience of returning to a home that is no longer home. All women completed at least a 45-day canoe expedition with Y.M.C.A. Camp Manito-wish located in northern Wisconsin during the years 1995–2003. Themes of connection, which served to both facilitate and hinder the return home, peppered the expedition; connection to the land, the journey and the people were universal among participants. Returning from the expedition was a difficult transition period for most participants as they reported wrestling with new self-concepts. Expedition traveling altered their very core selves through a concoction of physical healing, group process, respect for the land, loss and augmented sense of self. Home was newly realized from both environmental and social angles in that the supposed differences clashed so completely with the wilderness lifestyle left behind in the Arctic. Finally, women merged these new selves with the Western culture encircling them through an individual process of changing perspectives. These postexpedition voyagers transitioned through reentry, molding the lessons of trail life onto themselves to fit that culture in which they found themselves. Constantly reflecting, women returning home from wilderness expeditions never completely return, as parts of them remain intertwined in the North forever.

Major Professor

Date

12/10/07

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To my boys

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project emerged years ago on the Barren-grounds during a blustering day. Huddled in my sleeping bag for warmth, with thousands of birds circling nearby in the McConnell Bird Sanctuary, I vowed I would find the meaning to that very experience. I did so but with tremendous help from many people. To my family and friends, thank you for the countless days of assistance, so I could fulfill this dream dawned on Hudson Bay.

I especially thank my mother who has provided me with constant support for nearly 4 decades. Her belief in me exceeds inspiration. Additionally, to my husband, who never—not once—objected to the long hours away from our young family, unbounded gratitude is palpable and endless.

I must specifically extend bounteous appreciation to my major professor, Dr. Patricia Stevens, who managed to provide guidance throughout this doctoral effort. Her encouragement of a topic upriver, so to speak, was unwavering. She never questioned my passion for exploring something unique and new in the eyes of many nurses. The entire doctoral program at UWM and its many professors always remained united in their espousal of my dream. I will forever be both impressed and thankful to them for this.

To the Arctic, may she somehow escape the rampage against her during these warming times of both politics and environment.

Finally, to the women who so bravely voiced their thoughts in the pages of these most exquisite journals and beyond, I extend to them a heartfelt bear hug of thanks. Without their stories, their bitter rampages, and exhilarating triumphs, this dissertation would have been permanently wind-bound.

EPIGRAPH

It is impossible to describe the feeling that was mine on coming out of the wilderness into the open space of the Bay. We sat in our canoes for a long time just looking at the open sea. The Bay was the only thought in my mind. No one spoke as we felt the first tidal swells; we had made it in spite of everything and my dream had been fulfilled. Strangely enough there was a certain emptiness within me, and it was a long time before its full significance dawned. In a sense I matured during that moment of realization. Now I was an old-timer and could say "I've been to the Bay."

Sigurd Olson (1976)

CHAPTER ONE - BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Most people enjoy the outdoors through activities such as walks in the park, visits to the beach, or even hikes through dense forest. Being outside is somehow invigorating and healing, offering peaceful reveries with thrilling vistas and chances for once-in-a-lifetime adventure. Nurses commonly tout the healing power of the outdoors to patients, advocating such measures as outdoor exercise and family outings. They even encourage people to get away from it all and go on some wilderness trek in the middle of nowhere. Recreation is good for bodies, minds, and spirits, and nurses know this, but how? What are the actual outcomes of outdoor recreation related to health? If recommending an outdoor pursuit, are nurses not responsible for educating the patient on the potential health ramifications inherent in that wilderness outing, including the health implications associated with the return home? Nursing is concerned with the well-being of people through all areas of life, and with 94% of Americans enjoying some form of outdoor recreation on an annual basis, there is a consistent and important link between nursing and recreation reflective in people's health, which deserves attention (Driver et al., 1999, p. 5).

Wilderness Usage in the United States

Over 860 million people visited the national forests in 1996, an increase of 300 million residents compared to 1980. With 4,200 campgrounds, 125,000 miles of trails used for hiking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and riding, and over 100,000 heritage sites dedicated to the preservation of years of human history, the national forests employ some 2.5 million people and contribute nearly \$100 billion to the gross domestic

product (Driver et al.). Additionally, nearly three-quarters of a billion Americans recreated in state parks. This rate of usage has increased since 1975 but at a more modest trend when compared to the number of people visiting national forests (Driver et al.). There are some 8,500 day and resident camps in the United States where more than 6 million children and adults participated in a variety of outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, swimming, and horseback riding. The trend in camp participation according to this 1999 assessment was expected to peak in the summer of 2003 and then slowly decline until 2010. Visitation to the aforementioned national forests and state parks however, is expected to continually increase on an annual basis (Driver et al., 1999).

The National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NRSE) conducted in 1994–1995 is the latest in a series of four National Recreation Surveys beginning in 1960. The final summary of reported findings from the NRSE is inclusive in Cordell et al. (1999). According to the NRSE, the four most popular American outdoor activities are walking, viewing a beach or waterside, family gatherings outside, and sightseeing. The NRSE of 1994–1995 reports that nearly 53 million people aged 16 years or older went overnight camping, an increase of about 350 percent when compared to the 1960 NRSE survey.

The Wilderness Experience

These numbers suggest that Americans are accessing the outdoors and doing so at an increased rate. This is not a unique modern phenomenon. Historically, people have enjoyed telling stories of their perceptions of the wilderness and have drawn strength and renewed commitment by experiencing the wilderness (Talbot & Kaplan, 1986). Over the years, researchers have tried to gather the stories of these wilderness adventurers

scientifically for meaningful research, confirming the popular notion that the wilderness heals but with little success (Talbot & Kaplan). The intent of my research is to better describe the experience of returning home from an extended and rigorous encounter. To better understand the return home though, a brief exploration of what happens to people on these outdoors adventures is undertaken.

Obviously, some people work hard traversing natural obstacles such as lakes, rivers, and mountains; they even eat burned food from open fires and deal with bugs, bears, and other pesky critters. This physical rigor delights them. But with regard to mental health, “there have been few conceptual attempts to explain how and why wilderness promotes psychological well being and why individuals change as a consequence of being in that setting” (Scherl, 1989, p.123). It has been recently suggested that a connection to wilderness values ensues exponentially during the course of the wilderness encounter but that many more studies are needed to accurately describe “the dynamic lived experience of wilderness with greater certainty” (Borrie & Roggerbuck, 2001, p. 225).

Exploring the active wilderness experience is a neglected area of inquiry. Borrie and Roggerbuck (2001) concede that knowledge is lacking in terms of how wilderness explorers actually create meaning with regard to their experiences and how they then weave these into the context of everyday lives. McDermott (2004) claims there is a dearth of solid, empirical findings supporting the “empowering benefits” of single-gender wilderness experiences (p. 298). She contends that outfitters commonly tout the comfortable social environment manifested on women-only outdoor trips and points to

the positive outcomes associated with such an enlightening setting but that empirical research backing up these claims is absent.

Consequently, what really happens to people actively experiencing the wilderness is unclear; however, if one views wilderness encounters as multifaceted, in that there is significant interplay between the individual's self, his/her physical world, and his/her social connections, one begins to understand the complexity of the experience (Scherl, 1990). It has been suggested that personal growth in the wilderness setting is attributed to the "self-relevant feedback" so readily found in the outdoors as compared to other recreational activities (Scherl, 1989, p. 132). Borrie and Roggerbuck (2001) advocate that there are distinct phases to outdoor endeavors, each phase offering alternate experiences, which are perhaps dependent on such variables as the physical terrain, group leadership and makeup, or weather encountered on a specific day. People on the same trip who experience the identical terrain, menu, and weather will perceive the overall experience differently. These diverse perceptions translate to alternative meanings of the identical multiphasic wilderness encounter. Such multitudes of meaning consequently compound any simple explanation of what goes on out there.

Further exploring the multidimensional nature of the outdoor experience, McDermott (2000) sought to understand women's experiences with physicality, that "complex interplay of body perception, agency, and self-perception" (p. 331). Expounding a scarcity of research focusing on women's physicality, she contends that certain experiences such as canoe-tripping lent themselves to women's feeling their physicality more than other activities, such as organized aerobics. Any experience that highlights for women "the positive and meaningful experiences of their physicalities

through physical activity” is critical (McDermott, 2000, p. 357). It is common knowledge that many women are bombarded with conflicting images of body appearance, which may warp their own self-perception. Young women and girls are especially vulnerable to these suggestions, which may manifest into assaults upon their physical health such as the development of certain eating disorders. McDermott’s (2004) findings suggest that within an all-female experience of wilderness canoeing, women “increased their own sense of physical confidence, competence, and feeling strong, thereby challenging their own sense of identity” (p. 298). *Self-concept* development through wilderness encounters and the resulting manifestation after the actual outdoors event remain an intriguing and relatively uncharted area of study.

Schwartz (2005) asserts, however, that any exploration into better understanding the identity development of adolescents and *emerging adults*, those people typically between the ages of 18 and 20-something years, ultimately may assist experts in better serving the needs of this population. A more thorough comprehension of this age-group, especially in terms of identity or self-concept, may lead to the reduction of specific health risk behaviors such as substance abuse and unsafe sex practices typically endemic to these developmental groups. It has been “suggested that identity may serve as a protective mechanism against these health risk behaviors” (Schwartz, 2005, p. 301).

If, as Schwartz (2005) argues, research into identity development lends insight into the sometimes reckless behaviors of certain developmental age groups, and if identity is affected by outdoor encounters as McDermott (2004) alludes, shouldn’t nurses advocate for more study exploring this link between the outdoors and self-concept development with regard to more long-term health related outcomes? Do the gains of a

possibly bolstered identity remain after the trip concludes? Do people engage in reckless behaviors after returning home? Most people don't continually recreate in the wild, but eventually they leave the security of their group, location, and/or adventure and go back to their previous lives. Previously, it was articulated that what people experience while in the wilderness and the meaning they derive from that experience is obscure. Sequentially, how this illusive experience and subsequent meaning affects their well-being postwilderness is additionally vague. The question for health care providers remains: what happens to these wilderness travelers or voyagers once the trip ends?

Coming Home

An unpublished survey was completed by 31 men and women, 17–24 years of age (Mueller, 1997). All surveyed had completed a wilderness canoe expedition of approximately 7 weeks and 700 miles in length through the extreme Arctic remoteness of Canada. Participants had finished the trip 1 month to 6 years previously. Upon completing the adventure, most people reported moderate or bad anxiety readjusting to their previous lives. A 17-year-old female stated, “I have basically realized that I don't belong in society. I am just sticking around because I have nowhere else to go” (Mueller). Nearly one third of responders sought or wished they had sought medical or psychological help following the trip though few specified as to why they felt medical intervention would have been helpful. Of those surveyed who had returned 6 years previously, two thirds of the explorers felt as though they were still integrating the experience into their lives.

The results of the survey suggest that there may be some difficulty in returning from a long expedition yet what exactly postexpedition participants are experiencing as

they transition from their outdoor adventure to their everyday lives is unknown. This particular population was bridging adolescence to adulthood, already involved with incorporating many changes into their young lives. Furthermore, health implications may exist in such a population due to the number of people considering or seeking medical intervention. Such implications may be present years after the initial expedition because participants admit to integrating this recreational experience into their lives years after the trip has ended. Some of these participants will consult the health care system either immediately or sometime during the transition for perhaps a seemingly unrelated event.

Nursing has always concerned itself with persons undergoing transition as it is common knowledge that such events can and do affect one's vulnerability (Afaf Ibrahim Meleis, Sawyer, Im, Messias, & Schumaker, 2000). Any new transitional event which may or may not affect health is important to explore. Nurses need to be aware of the phenomenon of postexpedition transition together with possible health implications related to that transition especially in a population known for enduring several transitions at once. If the transition were more accurately described, it might help educate both those future explorers and their friends and family of the potential for return issues.

The participants of the aforementioned survey (Mueller, 1997) completed an expedition of roughly 7 weeks' duration. I defined extended wilderness travel as any expedition of more than 6 weeks' duration to remote areas with little if any contact with the outside, modern world. It is thought that trips lasting longer than 6 weeks are more likely to establish a unique culture within the group based upon the number of days in close, secluded company with so few other people. This concept of group development is elaborated upon in chapter 2. With much of the current wilderness outcomes research

literature showing methodological shortcomings and the relevant studies that provide insight into extended expedition outcomes being scarce, little accurate information concerning benefits or other outcomes is available to the number of people participating on wilderness trips (Borrie & Roggerbuck, 2001; Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Moore & Russell, 2002; Moote & Wodarski, 1997; West & Crompton, 2001; Wilson & Lipsey, 2000). The research concerning returning from a wilderness expedition is lacking, and solid, methodologically sound findings are needed to further understand this phenomenon.

Prevalence of Extended Wilderness Travel

I assumed that as the number of Americans accessing the outdoors increases, so does the number of Americans participating on extended wilderness travel expeditions. The total number of people actually pursuing extended wilderness travel is ambiguous because ascertaining the occurrence of personal expeditions or those trips of more than 42 days in length completed by self-sufficient groups or individuals not connected with any organization is obviously difficult and would be extremely expensive to undertake; however, some idea of the numbers associated with wilderness travel is available by accessing the more public wilderness industry.

In researching the prevalence of wilderness expeditions offered by organizations in the United States, a Web-based review of wilderness programs was conducted with the acquisition of program catalogues secured whenever appropriate. Several organizations report offering extended wilderness travel programs. National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), as listed on their 2005 Web site, provide two courses over 6 weeks in length centered either in the Yukon or Alaska, which seem to fit the criteria for extended

remote travel with little outside interference (National Outdoor Leadership School, 2005). Both Outward Bound and NOLS offer semester length classes centered on wilderness travel, but some contact with the modern world does take place on a regularly scheduled format (National Outdoor Leadership School, 2005; Outward Bound, 2005). The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) has three camps that offer extended trips of over 6 weeks duration. According to the individual Web sites of Camp Widjiwagan YMCA, Camp Manito-wish YMCA, and Camp Menogyn YMCA accessed in August 2005, long trips to the Arctic region of Canada are offered (Camp Manito-wish Y.M.C.A., 2005b; Camp Menogyn Y.M.C.A., ; Camp Widjiwagan Y.M.C.A.). Of the four known American programs offering long adventure travel, only one facility provided data on numbers of participants on extended trips.

Camp Manito-wish YMCA is located in Boulder Junction, WI. According to their summer camp manager Jack Chamberlain (personal communication, July 2, 2003), this YMCA offers three such extended trips to remote regions. Over the past 10 years, 45 participants (leaders not included in numbers), aged 17–24, years ventured on backpacking expedition trips to various areas of Canada. Though remote, these trips are subject to some outside contact due to the nature of resupplying backpacking trips several times during expeditions. Two other expeditions are canoe-centered with participants between the ages of 15 and 25 years paddling remote Arctic regions for at least 6 weeks with one scheduled resupply. This resupply of essential food and equipment usually entails contact with a fishing camp for several hours' duration at about Day 14 of the expedition. According to Chamberlain (personal communication, July 2, 2003), 26 men and 60 women have completed these wilderness canoe trips through Nunavut, Canada

over the last 10 years, which is a marked increase from the previous decade. Since the summer of 2003, all canoe expeditions have been rerouted from Hudson Bay due to the increase of polar bear attacks in that region. These trips now venture inland over roughly 730 miles of tundra, ending their quest in the Inuit community of Baker Lake, Nunavut.

The total number of postexpedition explorers is low. This may serve to decrease the significance of the problem, not having a clear description of what it is like to return from a wilderness expedition, but it should not. The study is relevant to those few people and deserves attention. Additionally, the results may positively affect other related research areas, such as cross-cultural readjustment, emerging adulthood, and transition.

The Expedition

Having led three such expeditions for Camp Manito-wish YMCA in the last 12 years, I can reliably comment on the specifics of these trips. Training for these adventures began at camp for several days of pretrip packing, adventure ropes courses, and map work followed by a drive of many hours to the entry point in Saskatchewan, Canada, usually a governmental uranium mine located on Wollaston Lake.

Trips comprised a single-gendered group of 6 to 9 individuals that began a roughly 730-mile, 7-week expedition to the tiny Inuit town of Arviat though more recent trips now venture to Baker Lake, a community farther inland and away from polar bear domain. The land encountered by expedition participants regardless of the endpoint is initially boreal forest, giving way to taiga, and finally tundra. It is devoid of modern infrastructure except for an abandoned gold mine and two fly-in fishing camps that are hundreds of miles apart. There are no known human residents currently in this area though traces of past inhabitants include the occasional tent circle or abandoned log

cabin. There are, however, numerous forms of wildlife, including thousands of caribou, several species of bear, wolverine, and plenty of fish. It should be emphasized that expeditions are a stressful, dangerous affair with many physical and mental hardships not normally encountered in an average upbringing. Mileage must be 20 or so miles a day regardless of weather conditions or the expedition will fail to finish punctually. Polar bear sightings have increased on Hudson Bay as groups used to negotiate nearly 50 miles of extensive tidal flats. Most importantly, there is no radio, cell phone, or satellite communication available to these travelers in case of emergency.

Following the successful completion of the trip to Arviat, participants usually flew to Winnipeg to be picked up by Camp Manito-wish YMCA staff. Roughly 11 hours of driving to the camp facility in the United States ensued. After about 2 days of cleaning equipment, clothes, and bodies, expeditioners returned to their homes in modern day America. In a sense, they underwent a cultural shift from a secluded, communal, Canadian wilderness journey to a Western lifestyle of advanced technology, high-paced, individualistic living. Solid, specific research into what it must be like to return from such an adventure is scarce. Regardless, these voyageurs must somehow combine the effects of weeks of remote, dangerous wilderness travel with their modern lives. Such a combination may prove challenging to certain people, but thorough descriptions of this process as well as any positive or negative outcomes of expeditions are severely lacking.

If nurses are to continue to advocate for outdoor pursuits, hadn't they better understand what it will be like for those people to return from the very treatment they prescribed? Are nurses not ethically bound to fully appreciate the outdoor experience to the best of their abilities? If there are health issues at stake and preliminary studies

suggest there may be both adverse and beneficial mental health transitions, shouldn't nurses completely understand the experience of returning from wilderness expeditions? It is true that few people will actually complete extended expeditions and their experience coming home may or may not be very different from the average American's experience of leaving a wilderness outing. There is a marked scarcity of research, however, concerning any postwilderness excursion return experience regardless of excursion length. More study is needed to offer insight into this phenomenon.

Purpose of the Dissertation Study

The main purpose of this study was to explore how young women returning from a wilderness expedition describe the return experience. In this dissertation, I explored the retrospective, unsolicited journal entries of young women as they ended a remote expedition of greater than 42 days in length and returned to the lives they left behind. Additionally, Internet discussion between the returnees and me served both to augment the journal entries and to clarify their meanings. Such scrutiny of journal entries and resulting Internet discussion ultimately increased my understanding of the wilderness experience. This exploration additionally bolstered my comprehension of transition as a concept, adding dimension to an already rich construct as professed by the discipline of nursing. This research additionally serves to inform nurses and others of such an event so as to influence their paths in research, education, and practice. It provides an interdisciplinary purpose by interweaving cultural, recreational, nursing, and psychological insights to the experience of coming home.

The research questions for this study included how do young women returning from a wilderness expedition do the following:

- 1) Describe the expedition experience?
- 2) Describe the return experience?
- 3) Express themselves using journals?

There were certain assumptions associated with this study. Some of them derived from my personal experience working with young women on wilderness expeditions, years of association with the YMCA, the extended review of literature, and my experience with cultural reentry issues while returning from overseas. The method of dealing with my thoughts and feelings toward postexpedition transition is further explained in chapter 3, most notably under the 'Bracketing' section. My general assumptions regarding this research are as follows:

- 1) A small group of women experience a return from a remote wilderness journey of greater than 42-days' duration with limited outside contact, which is significant enough to them to warrant further investigation.
- 2) Personal journal writing throughout these expeditions and for some months afterward is a common activity among women on these expeditions.
- 3) Nurses are generally not aware of the experience of returning from a wilderness expedition and, therefore, not aware of any potential issues surrounding the experience.

CHAPTER TWO - REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The goal of this research is to describe the return experience of young women following a wilderness expedition. I could find no specific research on this particular subject except for my thesis completed in 2001, which is described under the last section in this chapter. This topic is, therefore, a new area of inquiry and the supporting literature review is broad, covering diverse topics that I believe are related to this unexplored arena. The following review provides a necessary background to better conceptualize the project. Areas included are emerging adults in small groups, concept analysis of self-concept, and exploration of the concept of transition, cultural studies and certain wilderness components.

Emerging Adults in Small Groups

Women returning from a wilderness expedition complete a life-changing event. These 17–26 year olds spent nearly 8 weeks in the sequestered company of typically 6–8 other female members. The small, intimate groups were usually led by two women leaders. A brief exploration of the developmental stage of the trip participants should clarify general maturation issues most often confronting this age group. I could find no specific research highlighting small group development of postadolescent, preadulthood persons except those writings associated with the psychological therapy group in which the group is formed for medical or therapeutic reasons, such as truancy, teen pregnancies, or incest survival; therefore, therapeutic group development is discussed. These explanations serve to provide some background intrinsic to women returning from wilderness expeditions.

Many of these women are in a unique stage of development most recently termed *emerging adulthood*, which is characterized by a long period of transition similar in some respects to adolescence yet mirroring aspects of young adulthood as well (Arnett, 2000). Young people in this stage possess qualities that can both hinder as well as help small group work. Small group work seems to be an integral part of life, as it is difficult to avoid consulting with one's peers in school, at work, or in recreation. Small group work with people too old to be adolescents yet not old enough to be adults offer both challenges and exciting opportunities to everyone involved.

Adolescence

Every emerging adult has negotiated the typically difficult stage of development termed adolescence. A brief review of this stage of maturity enhances one's understanding of emerging adulthood. Though recent research suggests that adolescence is not inherently a time of *storm and stress*, there is some agreement that these teenage years do contain a degree of conflict especially relevant for the middle-class American majority culture (Arnett, 1999). Such conflict usually surrounds parental relationships, moods, and risk-taking behavior. This strife is noticed more often in adolescence when compared to other stages of development, though by no means is it a universal phenomenon (Arnett, 1999).

Adolescence is a time of great exploration, especially exploration directed inwardly. These young people are constantly trying to figure out who they are. Armed with the new vestiges of abstract thought, they flirt with one image of themselves and then quickly switch to another. Such fluctuating of selves is normal but breeds instability in the mind of an adolescent (Santrock, 2001). Adolescents engage in social comparison

frequently. To better evaluate themselves, they look to their peers, though most often will not admit to this type of behavior. Additionally, their overly self-conscious behavior allows them to better understand themselves by slowly integrating their multiple self-concepts. This corresponds with Erikson's view of adolescence as one of identity versus identity confusion (Santrock, 2001). Erikson (1968) further comments as follows:

We are thus most aware of our identity when we are just about to gain it when we (with that startle which motion pictures call a "double take") are somewhat surprised to make its acquaintance; or, again, when we are just about to enter a crisis and feel the encroachment of identity confusion.
(p. 165)

Erikson marks this as the fifth stage of the human life span, which typically occurs between the supposed security of childhood and the perceived autonomy of adulthood. Such identity development is now viewed as a fairly complex, lengthy process, which may extend into the college years and beyond (Santrock, 2001).

Emerging Adulthood

Arnett (2000) proposes in his seminal paper that "*emerging adulthood* is neither adolescence nor young adulthood but is theoretically and empirically distinct from them both" (p. 469). He reviews the theoretical background of this period by citing Erikson, who writes of a prolonged adolescence inherent in many industrialized countries. It appears to Erikson that young people were offered a kind of *psychosocial moratorium* in which they were freer to explore themselves and their futures (p. 470). Erikson outlines several developmental tasks, which take place between the ages of 10 and 25 years. The typical person encountering these years is actively engaged in developing a sense of

mastery, identity, and intimacy. Eccles, Templeton, Barber, and Stone (2003) have supported the view that such people additionally engage in a sense of autonomy.

Arnett (2000) feels that the period from approximately 18 years of age to sometime in a person's twenties is a unique, distinct period of development. Not the adolescent but not quite the adult is the typical view of this age-group. The goal of emerging adulthood is to do the following:

acquire and consolidate the skills, attitudes, values, and social capital needed to move from dependence on one's family to both self-reliance and the adult forms of interdependence coupled with the kinds of strong social connections needed for both one's own well-being and the parenting of the next generation. (Eccles, Templeton, Barber, & Stone, 2003, p.384)

The basic premise of Arnett's (2000) advocating that this unique stage of development is both demographic and subjective is due to the increasingly elevated median age at which young people are marrying and starting families. There is a kind of transition period occurring in which young people are delaying the typically mature long-term roles of adulthood. The median age of marriage in many industrialized countries has increased, and the number of Americans sampling higher education has nearly quadrupled over the past several decades (Arnett, 2000). As a result of deferring such adult tasks as parenthood and marriage, the dominant American culture has developed a longer period of self-exploration in which these emerging adults are free to venture into the gamut of life possibilities. Arnett (2000) contends the following:

Emerging adulthood is a time of life when many different directions remain possible, when little about the future has been decided for certain, when the scope

of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater for most people.
(p. 469)

Emerging adults do not identify themselves as adolescents, yet they do not often see themselves as adults either. They plead ignorance to which stage of development they are actually in, thereby advocating for an entirely new stage of transition. Nearly two thirds of college students ($n = 346$) consider themselves adult in some respects but not in others (Arnett, 1994). The issue at stake is that adulthood is no longer viewed by many industrialized young people as a series of tangible tasks such as marriage, parenthood, or financial independence but rather the subjective feeling that one is independent, autonomous, and self-sufficient in a number of areas. It is viewed by college students as an individualistic, lengthy process of maturation (Arnett, 1994). Such individuality is prized by Western cultures and, not surprising to researchers, the viewing of one's bridge to adulthood has evolved into an individualistic journey of self-discovery and self-reliance. Of note is a study by Nelson and Barry (2005), which finds those people aged 18–25 years who actually do consider themselves to be adults use the same, more subjective criteria as emerging adults to assess their own self adult status. Additionally, perceived adults at this age reportedly possess a stronger, more intact sense of self, suffer from less depression in their lives, and engage in fewer risk-taking activities than those people who consider themselves to be emerging adults (Nelson & Barry, 2005).

Young people engaged in self-discovery and exploration are on the move. They exhibit the highest rate of residential alteration of any age group in the United States, and they are the most frequent participants of short-term volunteer programs such as AmeriCorps and the Peace Corps (Arnett, 2000). Such exploration can lead to risk-taking

behavior, such as sensation seeking. Out from the watchful eye of parental units, emerging adults are more able to romp and experiment with unusual and perhaps delinquent behaviors than many adolescents (Arnett, 2000).

Support systems of emerging adults rely heavily on the infrastructure of good friends. Who better to travel around the world with than a good buddy? College students were interviewed ($n = 34$) as to what the role of friends was in their lives (Tokuno, 1986). Besides being models of behavior, active agents of change, and reactors, college students view friends as a syngenic association of interactors. In other words, through assisting a friend with some task, the students feel as though they themselves had benefited from this process as well as the friend. Additionally, friends are seen as passive influences, as “someone who is available to listen to self, to understand self, and to accept self without judgment or criticism” (p. 600).

There is general thought that attachment in adolescence may significantly contribute to success in college as seen by better social competence and decreased loneliness. Students who lack sufficient emotional or social support from their families seem to manifest adjustment problems in college (Cretzmeyer, 2003). A child who has not attached well to his or her family may show identical attachment problems later on in college. Of promise is an Israeli study of adolescents, young adults, and late young adults ($n = 169$), which shows that young adults report a more favorable relationship with their parents following the transition from adolescence (Shulman & Ben-Artizi, 2003). These results are echoed by Lefkowitz (2005) who found positive relationship changes between emerging adults and their parents following the transition to college. Just when university students need their families for support to better negotiate their transition to adulthood,

their relationships seem to improve with parents. Interestingly, Shulman and Ben-Artzi (2003) additionally finds that emerging adults seem to possess a higher level of well-being than adolescents yet are still actively involved in identity issues.

Emerging adulthood is a time marked by considerable transition. Much of the quoted research reflects a college population from an industrialized nation. Obviously, most cultures of the world will have an entirely different and unique view of this age-group. Even in the United States, this is a newly recognized term, as only the second conference on Emerging Adulthood, which partnered with the Society for Research on Identity Formation (SRIF), occurred in February 2005 (Tanner & Arnett, 2005). To successfully maneuver the throes of emerging adulthood, it has been suggested that people must first possess the ability to think abstractly, to self-reflect, to consider outside events as they impact their young lives, to process information through efficient discourse, to consider problems in a multi-dimensional manner, and to problem-solve and learn better (Eccles et al., 2001).

Group Development

Groups are an intrinsic part of life, even the individualistic life characteristic of most Western societies. Most people work, play, and often live in groups. There are several perspectives when studying the intricacies of groups (Poole, Hollingshead, McGrath, Moreland, & Rohrbaugh, 2004). A feminist perspective investigates how power and privilege interact with gender, whereas a social identity perspective looks at how members see themselves amongst groups. This perspective highlights the relations between groups as well as the inner workings of group dynamics. The conflict-power-status perspective assesses ways in which power, resources, status, and social

relationships interact through group process. Typically, when studying groups, one looks at the functional perspective, which attempts “to identify the group behaviors and activities that promote effective performance and also those that detract from it” (Poole et al., 2004, p. 7).

Groups form their own culture. Through integral cohesion and specific linguistic patterns develop from close group contact, members develop a distinct set of rituals, myths, stories, and understandings (Ettin, 1992). Small groups “might be defined as the optimum number of members who can interact intimately in one setting” (p. 263). Typically, small groups of adults number approximately 5 to 10 members, whereas children’s groups might contain only 4 to 6 members. Ultimately, groups ride through a series of phases. Much like developmental life stages such as birth, infancy, and adolescence, Ettin (1992) views groups as mirroring these stages. He assigns terms such as *storming* to the adolescent phase of a group, which is characterized by certain periods of doubt, questioning, and frustration.

Initially, in terms of group characteristics, certain qualities of the leader are identified. Such characteristics include openness, honesty, stamina, self-awareness, and personal power (Corey & Corey, 1992). College students have experience with small groups from high school, sports teams, and college academics. They know about working with groups and may even possess more knowledge concerning the group in question than the leader (Gardner, 1973). This can lead to trouble with leadership. “It is not at all unusual in college groups for a particular member ...to express considerable dissatisfaction with the progress of the group, diagnose its difficulty, propose a solution and some new approaches, and offer to put them into motion” (p. 52). Corey and Corey

(1992) suggest that leaders, therefore, be extremely focused upon the task of heading such small groups. They should themselves be physically and psychologically primed for the experience of working with small groups.

In the initial stage of group formation, Corey and Corey (1992) suggest that the group members begin to understand their role in the group. Expectations are outlined, rules are established, and goals are set. This phase can be viewed as a trust versus mistrust phase in which people try to sort out who is on their side and whom they like. Ultimately, they decide how much to reveal to this group.

The transition stage of group development is characterized by a sense of concern over how much group members should disclose to one another (Corey & Corey, 1992). After the initial group building exercises are completed, the realness of the group experience catches up with people. It hits them that they now must actually participate in the group by sharing personal ideas and thoughts. An internal struggle within people may begin between playing it safe and getting involved. They determine just how trustworthy the leader and the rest of the group members are. There may be issues of conflict for power during this stage, as people test the group leader for strength and insight. As previously explored, the intricacies of college students' challenging group leaders may occur at this point.

The working stage of group development as professed by Corey and Corey (1992) includes such qualities as open communication, trust among members, high levels of cohesion, shared leadership, reciprocal feedback, nonjudgmental criticism, and generalized support. Members feel comfortable bringing up topics to the group without

fear of rejection or humiliation. They are hopeful that dialogue is both helpful and healthy.

Bloch and Crouch (1985) provide several factors consistent with therapeutic group workings. The authors attempt to find out the intricacies of group therapy. They endeavor to illicit “those elements of the group process likely to be responsible for its beneficial effects” (p. v). They include such descriptors as insight, interaction, and acceptance, which characterize the inner workings of group work. In understanding the source of personality traits, problems, and symptoms, group members must explore who they are and who they want to be. Another factor the authors espouse is described as vicarious learning (Bloch & Crouch, 1985). Such learning includes insight into oneself through seeing others cope and confront.

The final stage of group development involves the closure of the group (Corey & Corey, 1992). This stage is characterized by a wrap-up of everything that has transpired during the group session. A general review ensues of what people have learned or accomplished, which might have led to certain changes in their lives. The group then focuses on how such changes can continue in life outside the group. Often the group experiences sadness and anxiety as the finality of reality looms. There will be loss associated with group endings. Emerging adults are also involved in transition, their developmental phase between adolescence and adulthood, which combined with the stress of a group ending, might augment the fear and anxiety that normally accompanies a group's disintegration.

The Self

With this particular age group very engaged in self-discovery, it seems imperative to provide a discussion on just what *self* is. After reviewing some of the nursing literature, it was ascertained that the term is obscure. It remains inconsistently defined and generally poorly understood, as there is no published concept analysis of the term in the nursing literature in the last 14 years. A brief concept analysis was, therefore, undertaken to seek illumination of the term and a working definition of the word self-concept. Typically, concept analysis uncovers certain attributes identified with that concept, which consequently leads to clarification of the word (Rodgers, 2000). A deeper understanding of the concept may yield a definition of the term, which results in a more accurate usage of that concept. A well-defined, clarified concept used appropriately helps nurses better describe and characterize phenomena important to them (Rodgers, 2000).

Using the inductive approach advocated by Rodgers (2000), concentration was directed at how the term self-concept is used commonly and currently. First, though, attention was directed at the historical evolution of the word by analyzing some key psychological literature. Next, nursing literature beginning in the mid-1970s was accessed. The literature review was limited to psychology and nursing for length purposes.

Findings - Historical Perspective from Psychological Literature

In the infamous words of Descartes, "I think, therefore I am," lies the first vestiges of an existing conscious self (Burns, 1979). Written in 1637, this self-affirming phrase graces philosophy for just over 250 years before the Harvard psychologist William James writes his explanation of the self. James sites in 1890 that the self isn't just

physical but notes that when a man loses his clothes, he senses loss and feels himself down (James, 1918). Likewise when he does well financially, his self celebrates, and he is happy. He believes self was composed of three distinct parts: the material self, the social self, and the spiritual self.

Very little is written concerning the concept self over the next 50 years. Burns (1979) attributes this to the scientific method's advocating the tangible. Directly observable and measurable psychology is noted to be the preferred topic of inquiry in the early part of the 1900s. There are some exceptions, most notably Cooley and Mead who view self as an object and a subject (Burns, 1979). Their basic premise is that humans respond to an environment based upon the meanings they have about that environment. These meanings are subsequently dependent upon social interaction; therefore, humans behave according to the social picture they have of themselves. Cooley introduces the theory of *the looking-glass self*, reasoning that one's self concept is significantly influenced by what the individual believes others think of him.

It isn't until Raimy writes his doctoral dissertation in 1943 that the term self-concept appeared, defined in the literature according to Combs and Snygg (1959). Raimy suggests that self-concept is a kind of map that people consult to better understand themselves, especially when under stress or when presented with a choice. Combs and Snygg, early phenomenologists, view self as an object and a process. People's behavior according to them is very much dependent upon how they perceive themselves and how they perceive the situation they encounter. "If a man believes he is Napoleon, he will act like Napoleon or, at least, like his concept of Napoleon" (p. 122). A person seeks to

maintain, even enhance, his/her physical self in the midst of a changing world. Such maintenance or altering of this self is perhaps a person's sole task of being, they argued.

Rogers (1961), another phenomenologist, sees a fluidity of self in his clients. He views this enhancement of self as a move of self-direction towards self-actualizing. "It seems to mean that the individual moves toward *being* [italics per Rogers], knowingly and acceptingly, the process which he inwardly and actually *is*" (p. 175). Rogers sees that his clients are not the same people day after day, but that they are involved in a process of realizing who they are. "To be what one is, is to enter fully into being a process" (p. 176). Interestingly, Rogers believes this process of self-actualizing could be applied to groups, organizations, and even nations.

In the field of psychology, the nature of self-concept is complicated by conflictual views of the term. In the early and middle parts of the twentieth century, the symbolic interactionists and phenomenologists offer varying descriptions of self. Beginning in the 1960s, other psychologists not belonging to either of the aforementioned camps begin to voice their opinions on the topic. Coopersmith (1967) applies an attitude towards self. A person's perception of who he/she is can be negative or positive. There is an appraisal of oneself, of one's behaviors, actions, successes, and failures based upon one's values. A person, after such an inwardly directed self-judgmental process, then arrives at a measure of his/her worthiness. This self-assessment, or one's self-esteem, changes based upon age and different areas of experience. For example, a person may view himself/herself as a great nurse but a terrible pianist. These "behaviors revealing the self-esteem of the individual mirror his past experiences" (p. 9). This self-esteem may change but according to Coopersmith (1967), the self, the abstraction a person develops about his/her qualities,

capabilities, and activities “provides a personal continuity over space and time, and is defended against alteration, diminution, and insult” (p. 21).

Erikson (1968) advocates for a changing sense of self. “Self-identity emerges from experiences in which temporarily confused selves are successfully reintegrated in an ensemble of roles, which also secure social recognition” (p. 21). This is an ongoing process of identity that reaches a normative developmental crisis in adolescence. Erikson espouses the necessary interplay of social, historical, psychological, and developmental aspects of identity so much that he believes other approaches, which do not have a foundation in human development at their core, should not be the dominant area of study:

...it would be obviously wrong to let some terms of personology and of social psychology often identified with identity or identity confusion – terms such as self-conception, self-imagery, or self-esteem, on the one hand, and role ambiguity, role conflict, or role loss, on the other – take over the area to be studied,.... (p. 23)

Burns (1979) attempts to provide a sense of order among all of the varying theories of self-concept. He feels both the symbolic interactionists and the phenomenologists had relevant contributions to the study of self. Neither group’s views should be ignored; rather both areas offer solid insight in gaining a complete picture. His own views of self provide a new dimension to the concept, as he feels self-concept takes into account the achievements of the past as well as the image of people hold for the future. Not only does one’s picture of oneself affect behaviors but also expectations. He equates the terms self-concept, self-attitude, and self-esteem as being virtually synonymous and further admits that the field of psychology is completely confused over what self is:

But it is equally apparent that in the field of psychology, which is generally distinguished by the imprecision of its terminology and by an incapacity to even agree on definition, self-referent constructs stand foremost in the ranks of this confusion. (Burns, 1979, p. 50)

Psychology continues its exploration of self, incorporating more and more substance into what each psychologist feels self-concept is. Steffenhagen and Burns (1987) believe one's view of oneself is one's self-esteem. Self-concept is the mental factor, social concept is the social aspect, and self-image is the physical concept of self-esteem. Interlaid among the mental, social, and physical are the components of status, courage, and flexibility. In their model of self-esteem, the authors view these six elements as each forming a point on a six point star. Levin (1992) views self as soul, substance and activity, experience and process, and verbal and cognitive. He feels the self is developmental, emotional, emergent, and conflictual. He even identifies areas in which the self is just emerging, most notably in the field of neuropsychology, cognitive psychology, and cybernetics. He writes, "The self to which we think we are so close eludes definition and, indeed, becomes more elusive as we attempt to grasp it" (Levin, 1992, p. 1).

Interest in the concept of self blossomed in the 1990s within the field of psychology. According to Harter (1999), there are cognitive developmentalists focusing on both normative changes of self as well as developmentalists working on the memory aspects of self. Contemporary attachment theorists contemplate the self influenced by caregivers including care providers not of immediate family. Psychologists advocating the psychodynamic tradition and social/personality theorists focusing on individual

differences of self all contributed to the vast amount of descriptive work on self. In addition, some psychologists focus upon a return to the classics, glean new information and theories out of these aged texts.

Harter (1999) offers insight into the consequences of self, writing that self development offers an organizational function, a mechanism with which to provide expectation, to predict behavior and to interpret life. Self development additionally offers motivational functions by energizing individuals and identifying standards crucial to reaching ideals. Finally, self development serves a protective function by assisting one to maintain a favorable impression of one's own attributes.

Psychologically speaking, the future of self and the changing perspectives of self are closely aligned with the advances of the 21st century (Kashima & Foddy, 2002). These authors describe a "virtual" identity consistent with Internet users in which the user assumes a self removed from physical body image or social image (p. 199). They additionally point out the self of genetics research in which the self-concept is much influenced based upon personal codes of DNA. These new and expanding areas of the world interrupt and change people's view of what self is.

Why the proliferation of selves? According to Gubrium and Holstein (2000), the postmodern world has propagated self options "implicating a dizzying array of possibilities for the self" (p. 95). This postmodern self is a conglomeration of public media induced images, which previously might have been more private, intimate reflections. "Postmodern self is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. It is fleeting and evanescent, a mere shadow of what the self once might have been" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000); however, in this hodgepodge of selves, the authors contend, as this

culture firmly believes, that there still exists the true self. This true self stands up to the flighty onslaught of possible selves, holds fast to the encroaching social self, and is who we are versus who we appear to be. Bombarded by social influences, though, the true self, the understanding of that true self, suffers. Gergen (1991) explains the following:

This fragmentation of self-conceptions corresponds to a multiplicity of incoherent and disconnected relationships. These relationships pull us in myriad directions, inviting us to play such a variety of roles that the very concept of an “authentic self” with knowable characteristics recedes from view. The fully saturated self becomes no self at all. (p. 7)

Surviving in this world of selves might be explained by the amoebic self theory.

This theory postulates that people distinguishing *in* from *out* is analogous to survival (Burris & Rempel, 2004). “Three types of differentiation—self versus not-self, friend versus foe, and mine versus not-mine—correspond to three domains of the self that are subject to threat: the bodily, social, and spatial-symbolic domains, respectively” (p. 23). The self is surrounded by a boundary, similar to an amoeba, which determines what it is and what it isn’t. Encroaching on one of these areas brings stress. For example; throwing away objects one hasn’t used for years, loud persons with mental illness, or even dirt may all impinge on the spatial-symbolic self that implies a threat has occurred to that person’s sense of orderliness about the world. These identity markers, the arbitrary notions people adamantly safeguard, mark the perimeter of their sense of self. When this boundary is perceived endangered, people respond, which lends insight into the very nature of the self itself. “Thus, by focusing on the self-boundary as the container that gives form to the

self-concept, we have perhaps arrived at ground zero with respect to the structure and function of the self" (Burris & Rempel, 2004, p. 25).

Self in the Nursing Literature

Geneticist Dobzhansky (1967) believes the characteristic of self awareness are an evolutionary, fundamental aspect of homo sapiens. In a sense, self analysis, unique to human beings, is what sets people apart from all other life forms. Burns (1979) relates these views to the huge explosion of self studies of the 1970s. He feels that if self awareness sets us apart from animals, then inquiry into self is warranted by an unprecedented number of psychologists. Nurses hear the call according to Bonham and Cheney (1983) and respond with the North American Nursing Diagnosis Associations (NANDA) diagnosis of alteration in self-concept in 1978.

Self-concept is divided into four components according to NANDA that included body image, self-esteem, role, and personal identity. Elaboration on each of these four areas occurs in hopes of exploring what self-concept was (Bonham & Cheney, 1983).

They write the following:

In clinical practice, nursing is frequently confronted with issues related to self-concept, body image, and self-esteem. Nurses are admonished to assess the self-concept and develop nursing diagnoses related to alterations in the self-concept. Yet, in attempting to fulfill this challenge, one is faced with unclear and discrepant definitions of the various aspects of self-concept. (p. 173)

Additionally, after a literature review of "often vague and conflicting literature," they provide a conceptual framework for self-concept to assist nurses in understanding the concept (p. 173).

Another conceptual framework offered by Roy uses self as a key component (Andrews & Roy, 1991). She writes of psychic integrity and the need to know who one is so one can wholly exist. Interference with this knowledge of oneself may interfere with certain aspects of one's health, such as the ability to properly heal. Both of the aforementioned frameworks attempt clarification of self-concept so nurses can better diagnose alteration in self-concept as this is a NANDA diagnosis until 1988. Knowledge of self-concept is, therefore, a tool of diagnosis for nurses in the 1980s.

A most thorough and succinct concept analysis is conducted by LeMone (1991): "Clarification of the phenomenon of self-concept will facilitate increased recognition and understanding of the relationships among the components of self-concept and the human responses that occur when alterations in those components occur" (p. 127). As is relevant at that time, the analysis relies heavily on psychological literature.

Stein (1995a) offers a self-schema model of self-concept. Her schema model provides a more enmeshed, complicated view of self that is meant to clarify earlier nursing models. Her self schema is more of an organizational perspective of self than a concrete idea of self. It is an active and dynamic outline of future/past selves and self in memory. "However, self-schemas are unique in that they integrate and summarize a person's thoughts, feelings, and experiences about the self in a specific behavioral domain" (p. 188).

The schema model not only attempts to clarify nursing models from the 1980s but also is intended to guide nursing research and thereby be used to change nursing practice. Stein (1995b; Stein, Roeser, & Markus, 1998) uses nursing research to support the self-

schema model in that she attempts to explain youths' behavior in light of the organization of their schema of selves.

In exploring wellness, mostly in older adults, it is found that the means to understanding the health dimension of one concept is contingent upon understanding the concept of self (Heidrich, 1994; Heidrich & Ryff, 1996; Ryff, 1991, 1998). In exploring well-being, it becomes necessary for researchers to acquire a more thorough understanding of the attributes leading to well-being, most notably one's relationship with oneself. In this fashion, nurses define and elaborate upon self as a means to explore another concept.

According to several writers (D. Arthur, 1992; Cowin, 2001; Walter, Davis, & Glass, 1999), the self-concept of nurses might influence the way in which nurses practice. Arthur (1992) feels that "for a profession such as nursing to work harmoniously, and with a degree of equality and respect in health care circles, it is important that nurses possess a professional self-concept which is compatible with that of other professionals" (p. 712). He further elaborates that an increased self-concept among nurses does not only improve their professional image among other professionals but also improves the quality of patient care they provide. Walter, Davis, and Glass (1999) apply a feminist perspective to nurses' self-concept and the resulting care provided. They believe that nurses are devalued twice—first as women and then again as nurses—and that this social construction may very well influence nurses' behavior.

Cowin (2001) advocates measuring the self-concept of nurses to better understand the relationship self has to job satisfaction, stress, and retention. She further writes the following:

Despite the potential importance of self-concept research for nurses, as well as the knowledge that self-concept is raised as a critical element in the recruitment/retention dilemma, very few nursing researchers have paid more than a cursory interest into this area of research. (p.314)

This focus upon the self-concept of nurses is an attempt by nurses to improve patient care; thus research into the concept of self is viewed by nurses as a means to change patient care.

A search of the literature completed in 2005 found three concept analyses of the term self-efficacy in the last 5 years but not one of self-concept. Several of the articles purport to have measured self-concept with a scale (Gonzalez & Sellers, 2002; Holroyd, Bond, & Chan, 2002) but do not define it. One study (Venkatesan, 2005) focusing on women who are infertile provides a definition of self-concept as “the individual’s personal judgment of her own worth by analyzing the conformity with self-ideal. Self-concept is threatened during infertility when concepts of self are modified” but includes no philosophical background or discussion of the definition derivation (p. 55). Pasquali (2002) uses an adopted model that views self in relation to one’s view of oneself, in relation to significant others and in relation to societal attitudes. It is a combination of these views that ultimately gives rise to people’s self-concept. Gordon (2004) relies on psychology to define the terms self-image, self-esteem, and the ideal self in her examination of self-concept in the elderly.

Similarly, Eilers and Westercamp (2003) in their model to examine self-concept use a multitude of views of oneself to comprise an overall picture of identity. They define self-concept as “we use the term self-concept as the mental picture we have of ourselves

and how we feel about that picture” (p. 79). The authors propose thinking of self-concept as a house with many rooms. Beginning at the exterior of the house is the garage, which symbolizes people’s ability to interact with the world. It may be detached or inconveniently located or not even available to us if stockpiled with clutter or storage. The authors view each room in the house as a picture of some dimension of identity. For some, the nursery is hope for the future, the office our link to employment, and the bedroom a sexual side of ourselves.

Lay Definitions of Self-Concept

Consistent with Rodgers’ (2000) method of concept analysis, several nurses were asked to submit their own definition of self-concept. Ten nurses, including three males, were asked to answer the question, “what is self-concept?” All but one of the staff nurses gave responses relaying that self-concept was basically a picture of themselves. Staff nurses were given plenty of time to answer the question yet consistently offered short, direct answers. The four non-staff nurses were composed of a nurse manager, admissions coordinator, consultant, and nursing home director. Each one of these responses together with the remaining staff nurses’ replies was nearly a paragraph of articulate, extensive definition. Answers mentioned that self-concept was a relationship with oneself, an ability to integrate the facets of one’s being, a set of values and attitudes a person holds true about him or herself, or a set of internal criteria people place upon themselves to justify their existence.

Attributes of Self-Concept

When reflecting upon the attributes of self-concept, it is interesting to note that much of the nursing literature is based upon the psychological literature when defining

self-concept or characteristics of self-concept. Taking this into account, the identified attributes are, therefore, shared by both psychological and nursing literature as well as the lay nurse definitions.

Self-concept is multidimensional in nature. It is physical, social, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and mental in form. It is how people see themselves at any given moment in any given situation. Self-concept is temporal, having space and importance in past, present, and future selves. People's concept of self is also imagination, existing in the recesses of far-off thought and fantasy, resident in dreams and future images of themselves. It is elusive as there is constant referencing to the difficulty in defining the word or grasping its meaning. It is dynamic as even the vocabulary used to describe the word extends from schemas to self-representations to identities. Through the decades, its meaning has grown existentially as the studies and descriptions to capture it have blossomed.

As shown by the individual nurses' definition of the word, self-concept is highly individualized. Self-concept is pervasive. It is described as explaining, dictating, and predicting behavior. It intrudes upon all aspects of people's thought process from their image as a social being to their view of themselves as a nurse, patient, father, or mother. It is integral: a unique, undeniable fact of people. Finally, self-concept is a process having fluidity from moment to moment, day to day. It provides self-direction as well as self-maintenance. It is active and ongoing.

Antecedents

One must be a human being to have a self-concept. This self-awareness is what may set humans apart from other creatures on this planet. To have a self-concept, one

must additionally be in some manner social for it is in the perception of oneself through others' eyes that bolsters the image of self. Some writers believe a sense of self is contingent upon the ability of people to remember. Much emphasis is placed upon the past self or the self of yesterday. The popular phrase "the child in us all" conjures up images of long ago that still affect people's self-concept today. Finally, a person must possess the ability to imagine, to fully ascertain a sense of self. This imagination provides dreams of achievement and may give one a sense of self-direction.

Consequences

Many nurses believe an intact self-concept implies a healthy state of being. It is assumed that one may handle stress and disease better if one's self is known and liked by both oneself and other people. Components of individuals may bend even break when confronted by certain illnesses or conditions. As humans, people strive to defend their self-concept, to maintain it vigorously. Attacks against their perceived boundary of self are not taken lightly. There are some writers who hypothesize that one of people's main goals as humans is maintenance of the sense of self, at any cost, selfishly and consistently. It may also give some people a sense of supremacy over other animals in that some believe only humans possess a sense of self. The self provides direction as people reach for the ideal, the dream of themselves that they have created for the future.

Definition

After completing this concept analysis of self-concept, I attempt a definition of the term. I believe it means a map of oneself. It is an internal, fixated map yet also externally worn, capable of change and correction. It provides two-, three-, and four-dimensional viewing, taking into account that maps may have a component of time to

them. Additionally, the map is a reference, showing the person which paths have been trodden as well as which ones may lie in the future. It is surrounded by boundaries, which if impinged upon may change the make-up of the self. It is broad at times, encompassing for example the social, spiritual, and mental self but also may be concentrated on just the physical self. There is a core self, the protected lining of the map, which does not change easily. In epidemiological terms, the core self is surrounded by drifting components of social, spiritual, mental, and physical selves. Rarely, this core self will shift. Overall though, it is a sage presence, providing direction to the soul, understanding of behavior and creativity to dream the ideal.

The preceding analysis served to clarify the term self-concept by providing a general idea of the complexity of the concept. Emerging adults are involved in a quest of formulating a self-concept. This period of development, fully examined earlier in this chapter, is wrought with uncertainty as these young people transition into adults. These voyagers though are also involved in returning home from a different culture, in transitioning from a culture formed specifically from their group and their wilderness experience. Discussion of the concept of transition is paramount to understanding the experience of returning from a wilderness expedition.

Transition

Nursing has always concerned itself with transition. It has even been argued that facilitating people undergoing transition is one of the central foci of nursing (Afaf Ibrahim Meleis & Trangenstein, 1994). Olsson and Ek (2002) contend that more research needs to focus upon the nature of “how transitions are experienced” (p. 10). Women

returning from a wilderness expedition are in such a transition. They are wavering between two worlds.

Schlossberg (1981) refers to transitions as “not only obvious life changes such as high school graduation, job entry, marriage, birth of the first child, and bereavement, but also such subtle changes as the loss of one’s career aspirations, and the nonoccurrence of anticipated events...” (p. 5). Transitions occur when people’s assumptions about themselves and the world change, fueling a need to alter behavior and relationships. The outcome of such transitions may be positive or negative though the process of transition, as with any change, most definitely involves stress. Schlossberg (1981) emphasizes that is not so much the transition or change-producing event that matters but the person’s perception of the situation. A person might view marriage as similar to what most people consider a date (especially if the individual has been married multiple times in the past) but become completely unhinged, undergoing a complete transition, when the local supermarket moves out of town. It is in the person’s perception of what constitutes a change significant enough to make a transition that is key according to Schlossberg.

The model for analyzing human adaptation to transition is presented by Schlossberg (1981) as incorporating three indicators of adaptation. First, a person’s perception of the transition such as onset, duration, degree of stress, and source interacts with the second indicator, the characteristics of the pretransition/posttransition environments. Third, characteristics of the individual, such as gender, age, race, state of health, socioeconomic status, and previous experience with a transition of a similar nature, can affect adaptation. These three indicators influence adaptation, which is “assessed in terms of the individual’s resource-deficits balance or in terms of degree of

similarity and difference between the pre-and post transition environment” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 15).

Olsson and Ek (2002) complete a content analysis of the term transition in the nursing literature. The authors find that typically this concept refers to a process, perception, or pattern of change characterized by anxiety or even joy lasting between days and years and resulting in a change of self-esteem or self-perception. “In order to be in a state of transition, the person must, to some extent, be aware of his/her situation” (Olsson & Ek, 2002, p. 5).

A nursing model of transition is presented by Chick and Meleis (1986) that identifies transition as those life passages between relatively stable periods in a person’s life. It can be thought of as “linking change with experience time” (p. 239). Clearly, there is a perceived disruption in a person’s life and a subsequent individual response to this event. Typically, transitions are viewed as positive and are associated with self-redefinition (Chick & Meleis, 1986). In this health-illness model, transition is a process of change. A person experiences a perceived antecedent event such as a developmental, situational, or health/illness change. Depending upon features of the precipitating event, such as degree, suddenness and type, together with features of the environment like social support and degree of stress, the individual experiences disconnectedness. Disconnectedness is defined as a “disruption of the linkages on which the person’s feelings of security depend” (p. 240). The individual neither feels connected to other people nor to the environment around him/her.

Certain mediating factors, such as the response patterns of the individual, the available resources of the environment, and the prevention/intervention nursing

therapeutics, interact to influence the person's transition process. These factors, in turn, encourage a sense of connectedness and stability in the person, leading to four health outcomes that include restoration, maintenance, protection, and promotion (Chick & Meleis, 1986). The authors do not elaborate on the description of these outcomes. The goal of nursing, though, is to intervene at vulnerable peaks during the transition process, thus facilitating these health outcomes.

Selder (1989) introduces the Life Transition Theory, which views transitions as reality restructuring. Transition is a bridge between realities. Basically, people structure their lives around them so as to create meaning. When this "carefully constructed reality is disrupted, a human being becomes disconcerted" (Selder, 1989, p. 438). Most people cannot tolerate the uncertainty that surrounds a disrupted reality, and they will actively seek to restructure their world to be more comfortable in it.

When either a critical event (such as illness) or a determined decision (such as marriage) compromises people's sense of self, their reality has been disrupted, which creates uncertainty (Selder, 1989). This perceived insult is a multidimensional infarct upon the self. The old reality no longer works, but a new one has not been created. The person feels disoriented, not safe, and even threatened. There is a temporal displacement as time seems out of sequence. People are unable to effectively articulate what they are experiencing. They have no language for the disconcerted feeling, which serves to increase their isolation, exacerbating their disorientation (Selder, 1989). Through a series of events, individuals gradually form a new reality consistent with their expectations. They will structure experiences to find meaning as influenced by their expectations.

The process of restructuring entails several key activities (Selder, 1989). A person must confront the circumstances of the disrupting event. He or she meticulously reviews the history of the event, becoming aware of exactly what transpired in the recent past, realizing it is not the present. One's reality has changed, and this needs to be acknowledged before one can relinquish the old self. A person recognizes the permanency of the change followed by normalization, a process of engaging in activities that serve to lessen the uncertainty about this new reality (Selder, 1989). A spinal cord-injured patient might undergo intensive rehabilitative therapy to augment his physical condition. An expedition returnee might switch college majors to outdoor education where she feels more comfortable as opposed to the chemistry lab. Selder (1989) admits the adage taking one day at a time serves to slowly reintegrate a person reformulating a new reality.

More recently, Meleis, Sawyer, Im, Messias, and Schumacher (2000) introduce a middle range theory focusing on transition. It is similar to the model of transition presented by Chick and Meleis (1986), but many years of research have served to augment this newest representation of transition. The focus of the process is that people become vulnerable when involved with transition. The authors neither define nor elaborate on what vulnerability is, but it is presumed that such vulnerability leads to disorders in health. Nursing therapeutics interact anywhere along the continuum of transition to counteract this vulnerability (Meleis et al., 2000).

The nature of transition includes the types of transition involved such as developmental or situational. Additionally, the pattern of transition is important when assessing which kind of transition people may be experiencing (Meleis et al., 2000). Is

this the only change they are undergoing, or are they involved in multiple disruptions?

Finally, the properties of the actual transition are important such as people's awareness of the change, their engaging in the change, and their accepting of the differences the change entails. These are all identified as the specific nature of transition, which influences how well the person actually transitions (Meleis et al., 2000).

Meleis et al. (2000) have identified several transition conditions that either facilitate or inhibit a person undergoing transition. These personal, community, and societal indicators interact with the nature of the transition, consequently dictating the person's pattern of response to the change. A person may have the best community supports and a solid personal arena of socioeconomic status, knowledge, and meaning, but if the society demands that that person diagnosed with Hanson's Disease live in a colony separated from family and friends, the likelihood of a smooth, successful transition is severely hindered.

Patterns of response include two components (Meleis et al., 2000). The first component is termed process indicators that attempt to gauge how well the person is transitioning. This assesses how well the person feels connected and confident. The second component is termed actual outcome indicators such as the mastery of skills and behaviors needed for the new situation or environment and the development of a fluid, integrative self (Meleis et al., 2000).

As previously discussed, transition is a central component in the nursing literature. Returning emerging adult voyagers are not only transitioning from adolescence to adulthood but also are involved in a cultural reentry transition in which they are leaving one culture for that of another. I identified that small groups develop cultures all

on their own. Leaving such a group, especially when that group has simultaneously matured and thrived outside the typical grasp of American culture, lends itself to exploring just what is involved in traveling between cultures. There is a cultural adjustment characteristic of this specific phenomenon that deserves examination.

Cultural Studies

Much of the information concerning cultural studies is strewn between the fields of sociology and psychology though two seminal works were published early in the field of anthropology (Smalley, 1963; Oberg, 1960). Studying the intricacies of intercultural relations is an interdisciplinary effort, encompassing interculturists from but not limited to cross-cultural psychology, race ethnic relations, multicultural literature, international business, sociolinguistics, anthropology, and communication (InterculturalRelations.com, 2001). Many of the more recent articles I acquired were contained in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, a journal “dedicated to advancing knowledge and understanding of theory, practice, and research in intergroup relations” (Landis, 2000, para. 1).

One area of intercultural studies deemed not applicable to this proposal is missionary research. Typically, missionaries travel abroad as a family unit, so travelers are surrounded and often well-supported by a specific family culture (Stringham, 1993). One qualitative study examines the return experience of 3 missionary families with a total of 11 participants. Two families had been abroad 11 years, whereas one had been overseas 16 years (Stringham, 1993). Additionally, missionary families themselves tend to be very cohesive, balancing between their immediate family culture, the host culture, and their home culture. Sometimes termed *third culture kids*, these missionary children

often mature straddling several cultures at once (Huff, 2001). In a study analyzing missionary children ($n = 150$), nearly 80% of these now college-aged students had lived overseas more than 5 years and had made more than six transitions between cultures during their stays abroad. Undergoing multiple reacculturations over extended periods of time within supportive, closely knit family units, I believe conceptually separates this group of people from young women returning from wilderness expeditions. I have not included this body of knowledge within the following discussion.

Additionally, I have not examined the intercultural transitions associated with immigrant or refugee groups. As later defined, sojourners typically stay abroad for finite periods of time, engaging in specific, concrete goals (Weissman & Furnham, 1987). Immigrants tend to realize they may never return to their home culture and have much larger, loftier goals upon arrival into the host culture. They may undergo culture shock but not reentry as they may never travel back home. Some immigrants do flit between several cultures much like the third culture kids reminiscent of missionary children, but I have chosen to not include these in the literature review. Refugees are often forcibly evicted amidst chaos and war, and I believe their plight to be very different from the voluntary excursion overseas of most sojourners.

Finally, I am often asked to parallel returning servicemen and women to my population of interest. Although I believe military veterans do undergo reentry difficulties due to cultural differences and even experience a sense of loss associated with group disintegration, they also may have issues associated with armed conflict, supremacy over the host culture, and death of close comrades that is not related to my research. This body of knowledge has been excluded from the following review.

There are two major constructs in the field of cross-cultural studies. Simply stated, I believe them to be the following: What is it like to go to another culture and what is it like to come home? I will trace the origins of these constructs while emphasizing the return home, explore issues including health concerns of those travelers returning home with regard to readjusting to the home culture, and examine more recent models explaining coming home.

Culture Shock

Leaving one's host country, living in a foreign culture, and then returning to the original culture is fraught with monumental change. It is viewed by some as a continual process of transition. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) propose that in order to understand the phenomenon of returning home following a stay abroad, one must first understand the entire travel adjustment experience. Empirical studies concerning issues surrounding the traveling abroad experience generally begin with Lysgaard (1955).

Lysgaard looked at the *intercultural experience* of Norwegian Fulbrighters while affiliated with the Institute of Social Research in Oslo, Norway (Lysgaard, 1955). He contends that "systematic studies of the effects of international contact on individuals are very recent – a sequel to the expanded postwar government programmes of exchange of persons" (p. 45). His findings are based upon the experiences of 200 Norwegians Fulbrighters to the United States who were each interviewed for approximately 90 minutes upon their return to Norway. These men and women, of all different professions, stayed in the United States for an average of 1 year before re-embarking to Nordic shores before the spring of 1953. Lysgaard concludes that most people's *adjustment* to the United States begins with a period of difficulty, bottoms out somewhere during the time

abroad, and finally emerges as an enlightening, positive experience as their integration into the new culture increases. He proposes that the experiences of his returning travelers reflect a U-shaped curve that mirrors their adjustment as a process over time.

Admittedly, he offers no precise definition of adjustment, confessing though that “the concept is used as a convenient reference to the respondent’s subjective reports on their feelings of satisfaction with different aspects of the stay” (Lysgaard, 1955, p. 46). Furthermore, he capitulates that this adjustment may be a reflection of a *personality* trait in that a respondent might label an adjustment as *good* or *bad* regardless of the actual experience.

Oberg (1960) is generally seen as introducing the term *culture shock* to the world. He feels as though “culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (p.177). When people’s grasp of communicating via gestures, facial expressions and customs eludes them because a foreign culture’s social dialogue is so completely different from their own, Oberg suggests people undergo four stages.

The first stage, a *honeymoon*, is characterized by immense pleasure, fascination, and optimism and can last several days to a few months depending upon when serious interfacing with the new culture takes place. The second stage is associated with hostility towards the new culture and an increased longing to be with other sojourners similar to them. A recovery stage then ensues in which the sojourner has an increased sense of humor and a superior attitude towards the host culture as well as an increased sense of language acquisition. Finally, the traveler undergoes the final stage of acceptance and

respect towards the new culture. Oberg admits that adjustment during this fourth stage is nearly, if not entirely complete (Oberg, 1960).

Smalley (1963) in an essay entitled “Culture shock, language shock, and the shock of self-discovery” describes culture shock as the “emotional disturbance which results from adjustment to new cultural environment” (p. 49) He further proposes that culture shock is made up of several symptoms such as rejection of either the host or home culture, homesickness, atypical nationalistic association with patriotic symbols and the nearly obsessive concern with germs and illness. A *basic ingredient* of culture shock is language shock (Smalley, 1963). There is much difficulty associated with learning a foreign language that just by studying it, a person might be thrown into culture shock. Finally, Smalley alludes to self-discovery being a consequence of culture shock. “The person in culture shock who does not discover himself is less likely to be able to see other things rationally because of his suffering” (p. 55). This is the first mention in scientific literature that the self is affected by cross-cultural travel.

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) extend Lysgaard’s (1955) U-curve hypothesis by claiming that the entire travel experience of leaving, adjusting to a foreign environment, and returning to one’s home culture was more of a W-shaped curve than a U. In this landmark paper based upon interview and questionnaire data from thousands of sojourners (a term first used by the authors), it is proposed that “the sojourner typically finds himself out of phase with his home culture on his return” (p. 39).

The traveler during ‘cross-cultural adjustment,’ another term coined by the researchers, may actually identify strongly with the new culture especially if the experience abroad has been positive. “Particularly for those who had not yet ‘found

themselves' in their own culture, the resolution of their identity conflict abroad often meant they had become zealously converted to new values, and they were reluctant to relinquish the security they had finally achieved" (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963, p. 40). The implications of this statement are paramount when one considers emerging adults developmentally, seeking their own self-concept and who must additionally readjust to their own culture following travel abroad. Initially upon returning home, the authors contend the traveler feels excitement, satisfaction, and comfort and then realizes home is somehow different (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). I could not find any study analyzing or implementing the W-curve after its initial inception description.

P. Adler (1975) believe culture shock is a "set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's own culture, to new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning, and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences" (p. 13). It may be experienced through such feelings as helplessness, irritability, and fears of being contaminated, cheated, or injured. In his view of culture shock, it is a kind of alienation, but it does show that the sojourner is immersing him or herself in the alien culture to better understand it. Additionally, he purports that this cross-cultural experience is a transition of depth, characterized by the multidimensional change of personality. "Significantly, transitional experiences can be essential to a working through of self-concept" (p. 20). He outlines five stages a sojourner undergoes in this immersion process.

In the first stage, called contact, a traveler feels euphoric, noticing all of the similarities between the home and the host culture. The second stage, disintegration, is marked by confusion and disorientation. The individual now views all of the differences

between the host and the home culture and may feel isolated and different. Reintegration is the third phase, which is characterized by a rejection of the host culture including all of the similarities and differences noticed by the sojourner who may now become hostile. The fourth stage, termed autonomy, is marked by a parallel rise in both sensitivity and skill/understanding of the new culture. People may appear relaxed as their communication with the host culture is developing. Finally, a sojourner experiences independence, the last stage. "The individual is fully able to draw nourishment from cultural differences and similarities, is capable of giving as well as illiciting a high degree of trust and sensitivity, and is able to view both him- or herself and others as individual human beings that are influenced by culture and upbringing" (P. S. Adler, 1975, p. 18).

In a state of the science paper entitled "Sojourner Adjustment," Church (1982) views culture shock as a normal adaptation process to the cultural stress of living in a foreign culture. Manifested by such symptoms as anxiety, helplessness, and irritability, the sojourner may experience problems in several areas of his or her life. After reviewing extensive literature on the topic of sojourner adjustment, Church identifies these three potential problem areas: academic, personal, and sociocultural.

Academic issues might be noticed as the sojourner attempts to modify his or her personal learning goals while trying to perfect the host language. Additionally, a foreign student may need to adjust to the new educational system in terms of a new grading system, competitiveness, or professor/student formality/informality. Personal problems may manifest as loneliness, homesickness, depression, or religious problems.

Sociocultural problems are evident as the sojourner attempts to adjust to the social customs and norms of the host culture. These problems may include dating or sexual

difficulties, racial discrimination, or dealing with the political turmoil the host culture may be experiencing (Church, 1982).

The term *sojourner* first dramatically appeared in the cultural literature at this time. Weissman and Furnham (1987) view sojourners as those people who intend to return to their home culture and believe their goals abroad are more specific than other more long-term travelers, such as certain missionaries and refugees/immigrants.

The U-Curve Debate

The U-curve of adjustment formulated by Lysgaard (1955) and previously discussed in this chapter remains in the forefront of cultural studies for nearly 20 years before Church (1982) concludes that evidence supporting the U-curve is “weak, inconclusive and over-generalized” (p. 542). Based upon the examination of multiple studies, he finds that the U-curve does occur but only in a small minority of cases. Unfortunately, these findings have little influence on the field of cross-cultural research as (Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998) ascertain that the U-curve is still assuming a central position in theory and research concerning sojourner adjustment nearly 16 years later.

Ward et al. (Ward et al., 1998) conclude that most of the studies supporting the U-curve are not based upon longitudinal evidence. Clearly, they believe that when dealing with sojourner adjustment, it is more appropriate to explore the transition over time than only on a cross-sectional basis. Simultaneously, they argued that the conceptual definitions and operational measurements of sojourner adjustment were disparate among certain seminal articles formulating the U-curve thus rendering this model inadequate. They did agree with Church (1982) that sometimes in a minority of cases, the U-curve is

an accurate assessment of adjustment abroad but should not continue in popularity in the future.

Alternatives to the U-curve

Ward and Kennedy (1999) assert that “despite four decades of theory and research on ‘culture shock’ there is still limited consensus as to what actually constitutes sojourner adjustment. The construct has been described, interpreted, and measured in varying ways and from numerous perspectives” (p. 659). Nearly a decade previously, a review of the “culture contact and change” literature by Searle and Ward (1990) finds that the construct termed sojourner adjustment really was composed of two domains (p. 449). There is a psychological aspect evidenced by feelings of well-being, safety, and satisfaction, as well as a sociocultural dimension that assesses how well the person coordinates the “interactive aspects of the new culture” (p. 450). Theoretically, the two components needed to be clarified uniquely and consequently measured separately.

There are three dominant theoretical frameworks in the field of cross-cultural studies according to Searle and Ward (1990). These include clinical perspectives, social learning models, and social cognition approaches. Psychological adjustment is best explained with a stress and coping framework while sociocultural adaptation is understood through the social learning model, which emphasizes the “acquisition of culturally appropriate skills and behaviors through contact with hosts, cross-cultural experience, and training” (p. 451). Social learning approaches detail both the interpersonal relationships of sojourners as well as the friendships with host nationals as having key influence in how well the traveler learns the new skills of the culture. This perspective highlights that problems with how well sojourners adjust to the new culture

are related to difficulties managing the ordinary social encounters of daily life. If a sojourner has much positive contact with host nationals, then problems with cross-cultural adjustment may be lessened.

The Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) is developed to measure the operationalized components of sociocultural adaptation. If people's cultural adjustment is contingent upon how well they handle everyday situations, then this scale measures their ability to deal with ordinary life in a foreign environment. The preliminary scale is developed by Searle and Ward (1990), but they admit it is based upon several earlier studies and previous scales prevalent in the field. The initial SCAS contains 16 items but due to the flexibility of the scale in corresponding to the characteristics of the intended sample, potential scale items listed in Ward and Kennedy (1999) number 41 (p. 663).

Ward and Kennedy (1999) analyze 16 cross-sectional samples ($n = 2,036$) obtained from previous quantitative studies of the authors' own research, encompassing an 8-year period. Most of the research conducted thus far using the SCAS has been with sojourners connected in some way to New Zealand or Singapore, and nearly half of the identified studies have used college students as the subjected sample. Adult samples are reported to be a cross-section of employed adults, both educationally and occupationally varied. Sometimes, though, certain groups were specifically targeted and are therefore homogenous in nature, such as the studies completed with Filipina domestics in Singapore (Ward, Chang, & Lopez-Nerney, 1999) and New Zealand civil servants abroad (Ward & Kennedy, 1994). All samples except the aforementioned Filipina domestic servants included both males and females. No studies were found that mentioned

translated forms of the SCAS; it was assumed that all research using the SCAS has been conducted in English.

Each one of these studies has used the SCAS as a measure of sociocultural adjustment difficulties. It is determined from analyzing all studies that adjustment difficulties peaked upon entering the foreign culture (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). These adjustment difficulties are linked to the cultural difference between the two cultures. For example, researchers find it was easier for Chinese students to adapt to Singapore than for Anglo-European students. The analysis finds that as a whole it is easier for sojourners to adjust to a modern or well-developed country than to a lesser-developed country like Nepal. This analysis also suggested some groups are unusually more skilled at adjusting to overseas assignments than other cultural groups. Singaporeans are found to be rather adept at cross-cultural transition when compared to the other ethnic groups in the 16 samples. Finally, the researchers find that people with financial or social means at their disposal adjusted more easily to the foreign lifestyle than those not as financially endowed (Ward & Kennedy, 1999).

Cultural difference, sometimes termed cultural distance, is a concept connected to the adjustment of overseas sojourners. Cultural distance refers to the relative similarity or difference between one's own culture and the host culture (Searle & Ward, 1990).

Cultural distance may exacerbate the problems of living everyday life. "In terms of a social learning model, then, individuals who are more culturally distant are likely to have fewer culturally appropriate skills for negotiating everyday situations" (p. 452). One component of cultural distance is the variability of cultures' individualism-collectivism processes. It is suggested that members of individualistic cultures such as the United

States or Australia are more extroverted, disclosing much through direct communication versus members of collectivistic cultures such as Japan or Singapore that tend towards introversion and more modest, indirect and ambiguous methods of communication (Ward, Leong, & Low, 2004).

Ward et al. (2004) hypothesize that the more introverted a person, the more difficult his or her time abroad is in an individualistic culture, and the more extroverted a person, the more difficult time that person has in a collectivistic culture. In a study based in Australia and Singapore using two research samples and matched controls, researchers measured extroversion/introversion among participants ($n = 1,219$). Additionally, the researchers measured depression symptoms in the two experimental groups ($n = 409$), as they continually adapted to a host culture. It is found in both countries that people manifested fewer symptoms of depression the more extroverted they were. Most surprising, the Australians, who far-outscored the normative sample on extroversion, complained of fewer depressive symptoms the more extroverted they became in that collectivistic society. Cultural distance needs further exploration (Ward et al., 2004).

Reentry

N. Adler (1981) describes *cross-cultural reentry* (her term) as “the transition from a foreign culture back into one’s home culture. It is the experience of facing previously familiar surroundings after living in a different environment for a significant period of time” (p. 343). Although culture shock has been well-reported in the literature, Adler feels as though this “reverse culture shock” has not been adequately explored though it is suspected of being more difficult than the initial transition abroad. Rogers and Ward (1993) argue that N. Adler draws many of her conclusions from qualitative data focusing

upon negative job experiences of sojourners after returning from overseas and does not adequately describe her research methodology, design, or participant population to allow outside assessment of her study. They propose more specifically “that experienced, but not expected, social difficulty was associated with psychological adjustment problems” upon reentry (p. 191). Travelers who therefore experience hardship upon return but have not expected such difficulty have greater psychological adjustment issues than if they expect and perhaps prepare for such trouble.

Many other authors admit that reverse culture shock has been neglected in the cross-cultural research literature (N. Arthur, 2003; Furukawa, 1997; Martin, 1986; Tamura & Furnham, 1993a; Wang, 1997). Martin (1986) believes the empirical studies on reentry or *reaaculturation* (her term) have been largely atheoretical. She additionally suspects researchers of identifying variables associated with reentry troubles but not clearly outlining the relationship among the variables. She feels there is “an urgent need for more empirical data describing the reentry transitions of various sojourner groups” (p. 2).

Reentry and Health

The Peace Corps reports that volunteers who are evacuated due to host country domestic emergencies are more likely to report signs of disorientation and depression upon returning to the United States than control volunteers allowed to finish assignments and prepare for adjustment home (Hirshon, Eng, Brunkow, & Hartzell, 1997). Whether these complaints manifest as actual health concerns is unknown as longitudinal data is lacking. More than 20 years ago, suggestions were made that readjustment problems after time spent in a foreign culture affect the mental health of foreign students (Furnham &

Trezise, 1983). It was admitted at that time that few investigations of the relationship between health and a sojourner's adjustment existed (Church, 1982). Of note is that most of the studies I was able to find researching this link between acculturation/reacculturation and health have been conducted outside the United States.

Furnham and Trezise (1983) suspect that three factors inherent in study abroad lead to difficulties in mental health for international students. It is hypothesized that the stresses of living overseas, the developmental problems faced by most adolescents and young adults, and the academic pressure interact to throw off the balance of students' mental well-being. Though foreign students in this London research note more psychological disturbance than either of the two control groups in the study, no significant differences are found among the groups.

Furukawa (1997), who has published almost exclusively in medical journals, researches sojourner readjustment to the home culture as evidenced by mental health well-being. In a previous study, he finds a significant number of Japanese sojourners reported weight gain while abroad and that a considerable minority of these developed *maladaptive eating patterns* (Furukawa, 1994). Such findings influence his 1997 study in which he uses several known tools to measure the personality traits, coping styles, social support, and emotional distress of returning Japanese students, mostly females, at three points in time. Having operationalized reverse culture shock as changes in mental health, he administers mental health tests to students before leaving for overseas, while abroad, and 6 months postreturn. In his longitudinal data, Furukawa finds that students showed significant emotional distress 6 months postreturn. The researcher attributed the emotional distress of returning students to differences between the sojourners and the

students left in the home culture. Often participants in study abroad programs “have gained experiences, be they positive or negative, that their compatriots remaining home can never have encountered” (Furukawa, 1997, p. 263).

Tamura and Furnham (1993a) assess the readjustment of returning sojourning Japanese children who had lived abroad for 3 to 4 years on average based upon the satisfaction they have with their lives in their home culture. The researchers specifically state that they are concerned with the “reverse culture shock of Japanese children” (p. 1181). A questionnaire is developed from the Minnesota Multi-phasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), which is used to question children about their daily life after living abroad. Results of the study indicate that returnee children aged 6–18 years show more dissatisfaction with their Japanese lives than their counterparts who had not left Japan.

In another study ($n = 96$) originating in the United States but focusing on foreign students’ adjustment home after studying at an American university, it is found that women reported a harder time with reentry than men (Brabant, Palmer, & Gramling, 1990). Researchers write of trouble with family and daily life and cite changes among friends that made readjustment difficult. Overall, the research is void of returnees complaining of severe problems with reacculturation. This actually surprised researchers and left them wondering about bias in the sample and questioning whether cross-cultural adjustment issues are inevitable.

Wang (1997) offers that the recovery from reentry adjustment may take much longer than the actual sojourn abroad if one considers “reverse culture shock as a reaction to the cumulative changes in self and home during the sojourner’s absence” (p. 116). It

may occur that reentry adjustment is never completed as sojourners incorporate life-changing antecedents into their lives forever (Wang, 1997).

Consistent with Brabant, Palmer and Gramling (1990), Brown (1998) suggest that women have a more difficult time with reentry than men. In this study of 17–27 year olds returning from a semester abroad ($n = 181$), women report being more disoriented than men in the initial hours after returning. Similarly, women returnees feel more isolated in the first several days postreturn, reporting high levels of social change in the home culture. Overall these “students tend to describe the reentry experience as more difficult than their experiences abroad” (p. 77).

Shougee (1999) conducts a case study about 14 returnees who had been abroad between 6 to 8 months. He believed more qualitative findings were needed to assess the experience of returning from overseas; he notes people begin to prepare for a return several weeks in advance in of the actual event. His participants report returning home is both stressful and disorienting, with components of mourning a life they once had abroad but will never again live. Overall, returnees have an increased self-awareness, more self-confidence, greater autonomy, better life direction, more enhanced world-view, and a sense of belongingness to their host country and the world as a whole. Stowe (2003), in a narrative analysis of 10 returning Peace Corps workers, reports that the study participants feel a sense of belonging to the host culture overseas but that only half report this same sense of belonging after returning home.

The concept of mourning a culture lost is relevant to Lester (2000). He believes the goal of the return process “is the resolution of the processes of mourning by the returnee forming a new sense of self-identity and reinvesting emotional energy into that

new sense of self and the home culture” (p. 82). Many returnees report a distance from family and friends, which only seems to increase social isolation as this mourning occurs. Such disinterest on the part of family and friends to relate to the returnee is evident in Coschignon’s (2000) descriptive analysis of 20 American adults returning from overseas. As returning sojourners are involved in a self-transformative process, they must shift through the new components of their identity gained abroad, decide which ones to keep, separate from the ones no longer needed, and try to mold this into a new culture. Such a metamorphosis may take a lifetime (Lester, 2000).

Models of Reentry

There are several proposed theoretical approaches or models seeking to explain reentry. The first views reentry as components of psychological health as seen by the W-curve model of Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963). This model is described earlier in this chapter but has not been used in the cultural literature since its origin.

A second theoretical perspective concerns sojourner expectations. Basically, most people underestimate the intensity or difficulty reentry poses. They assume that the more difficult task is the original adjustment into the foreign culture. The problem is that sojourners expect culture shock. They often prepare themselves for some aspects of the travel abroad and know things will be different. They do not expect reverse culture shock and are completely overwhelmed that *home* is no longer *home* (Sussman, 2001).

It has been shown that when the transition from overseas is more difficult than expected, the likelihood of psychological adjustment difficulties increases (J. Rogers & Ward, 1993). Additionally, Sussman (2001) finds among American corporate returnees that the less prepared businessmen are for the reentry process, the more likely they are to

experience reentry distress. Arthur (2003) suggests that “a lack of appreciation for the degree of change that can happen while students study in another country increases the risk of ‘reverse culture shock’” (p. 175). Internal change of the student or external environmental change or stagnation of the home culture may not be fully realized, and consequently ill-prepared for, until the student actually arrives home. Upon returning, the bitter reality of change can be overwhelming and cause some “students to question whether or not they will ever feel at home again” (Arthur, 2003, p. 175).

The cultural identity model proposes that “self-concept disturbances and subsequent shifts in cultural identity throughout the cross-cultural transitions process are the critical mediating factors in explaining and predicting psychological responses to these transitions” (Sussman, 2000), p. 362). As Wang (1997) expounds, sojourners are not the same people they were before going overseas. They have learned to express themselves in new ways, have perhaps adopted new values and insight which may not be consistent with those of the people waiting for them at home. They might mourn the person they once were but are often proud of who they have become. Their waiting families and friends may not be as ecstatic about the transition of the traveler.

Sussman (2000) reports that there is interplay among three fundamental elements of the cultural identity model. The first considers identity salience, suggesting that once abroad, people are more cognizant of their cultural identity than when they are surrounded by that culture at home. The author emphasizes that this thinking mostly applies to members of the dominant culture who travel overseas. Members of a minority group in the home country are more likely to associate their unique culture to their self-concept than the dominant member of society is.

Once overseas, the sojourner adapts to the foreign entities of the new culture by first recognizing the discrepancies between the home culture and the host culture and then changing behaviors and thinking processes to reflect these discrepancies. In other words, their cultural selves unite to form a new identity (Sussman, 2000). This poses problems upon the return as now the new self no longer works in the old culture. The new behaviors, thought patterns, clothes, speech, etc... do not fit with the home country, leaving many returnees with an overwhelmingly negative affective response (Sussman, 2000).

Their reentry process will ultimately depend upon several factors. If people enjoy living overseas, relish the new behaviors needed to adapt there, and do not want to change these new attributes, their reentry is most likely quite difficult because their newfound cultural identity most likely clashes with the home culture (Sussman, 2000). If a person willingly and happily gives up the clothes, language, behaviors, and other manifestations acquired abroad in favor of the old identity, then reentry might be a favorable and easy affair (Sussman, 2000).

The final model incorporates several components of previously examined reentry discussions. This Systems Theory identifies four outcomes of sojourner readaptation, which are psychological health, functional fitness, development of an intercultural identity, and realistic expectations (Martin & Harrell, 2004). Psychological health refers to the affective entities of health. Functional fitness implies successfully navigating ordinary social and professional activities, such as relearning certain cultural values to better interact with the home culture. This also may include changing one's communication style to better match that used in the original culture. Both developing a

cultural identity and having realistic expectations are considered cognitive outcomes. These outcomes are influenced by individual sojourner characteristics such as background and personality, host environment characteristics such as host-home culture difference, and home (reentry) environment characteristics such as the amount of support a returnee obtains upon coming home. Communication through family, friends, and coworkers play an important role in both the host and home culture according to the Systems Theory (Martin & Harrell, 2004).

Ultimately, the return to the home culture is an individual odyssey of transition. But, women returning from wilderness expeditions are not only returning to a home culture after close intimate group work as emerging adults but also after having enmeshed themselves in the outdoors. They are leaving an adventure inherent in wilderness expeditions that I believe is slightly different from just leaving a foreign culture. An exploration of wilderness journeys further outlines what the literature holds with respect to outcomes associated with wilderness travel.

Wilderness

With increasing numbers, Americans are heading to wilderness areas across the United States (Driver et al., 1999). Many people choose the nation's public forest areas as places to recreate; others attend organized wilderness programs for both adventure and therapeutic purposes. A small majority spends a lot of time outside, weeks in fact. There are some people who choose to participate on extended wilderness expeditions of 6 weeks or longer. These individuals come back from remote adventures to modern day American life, yet little is known about what life is like for them upon their return. In reviewing the literature on wilderness program outcomes of many different populations,

it becomes evident that a serious lack of solid empirical studies exists, which can effectively declare the benefits both short- and long-term associated with wilderness usage much less describe the return from extended adventure travel (Hattie, Marsh, Neal & Richards, 1997; Moore & Russell, 2002; Moote & Wodarski, 1997; West & Crompton, 2001; Wilson & Lipsey, 2000). Russell (2006) states the following:

Despite reports of positive benefits and documented growth in the number of wilderness programs serving youths in the past decade, systematic reviews of research emphasize the lack of a theoretical basis in most studies, the poor psychometric properties of instruments used to assess outcome, methodological shortcomings, and a general lack of comparable findings. (p. 189)

Wilderness Programs

Driver et al. (1999) believes people obviously find some sort of benefit from outdoor recreating, or Americans would not invest billions of dollars doing so. "If reasonably sovereign consumers willingly allocate so much of their resources to support that leisure services sector, the benefits they receive must be reasonably commensurate with the expenditures" (p. 9). Millions of people enjoying the outdoors must find some aspect of it that influences their quality of life. Scherl (1989) admits, though, that any conceptual basis explaining the benefits associated with wilderness usage or any change experienced by persons following the recreation is rare.

Organizations devoted to conducting outdoor pursuits among paying customers for purposes of personal growth, education, rehabilitation, therapy, or leadership/organizational development are termed Wilderness Experience Programs (WEPs) (Friese, Hendee, & Kinziger, 1998). These programs capitalize on the supposed

benefits associated with outdoor recreating to potentiate client personal transformation. Friese et al. (1998) finds nearly 700 potential such WEPs through a *snowball sampling* approach. This number does not include Boy Scout and Girl Scout Troops, camps, community or church recreation programs, adventure travel businesses, or commercial outfitters and guides. Included are well known programs such as Outward Bound, the National Outdoor Leadership School, Wilderness Inquiry and the Wilderness Education Association.

The identified proposed WEPs were contacted to complete a short survey. It was found that of the 329 programs that agreed to participate nearly 40% offer fewer than 10 trips per year; however, one third of the respondents reported offering more than 31 trips or programs annually. One third of the WEPs each served more than 500 clients every year, whereas 40.6% of those surveyed reported interfacing with fewer than 100 participants per year (Friese et al., 1998).

Friese et al. (1998) attributes the known high turnover of WEPs to the relatively low client participation rate of a majority of programs. They cite problems with financial success when accessing such low numbers of people. Additionally, any accurate number of WEP participants is difficult to ascertain because of the programs that spring up and evaporate from the industry on a continual basis. They conclude, however, that growth in the WEP industry is apparent. Americans are accessing the outdoors for purposes of personal change in ever-increasing numbers.

Included in WEPS are so-called wilderness therapy or adventure therapy programs. Recently, the field of experiential education sought to better clarify the many terms implied in outdoor therapy courses. Keith C. Russell, leader of the Outdoor

Behavioral Healthcare Research Cooperative at the University of Idaho Wilderness Research Center and assistant professor in Resource Recreation and Tourism at the University of Idaho, authors an article (Russell, 2000) that lists some of the many interchangeable terms used for wilderness therapy, such as therapeutic wilderness camping, adventure therapy, and wilderness adventure therapy. He continues (Russell, 2001) to identify other synonymous phrases such as “challenge courses,” “adventure-based therapy,” and “wilderness experience programs” (p. 70).

In his essay entitled “What is Wilderness Therapy?” he bemoans the increase of so-called wilderness therapy programs because no consistent or accepted definition of wilderness therapy exists (Russell, 2001). Wilderness therapy offers the participant “hands-on learning of personal and social responsibility, with modeling and practice of appropriate social skills and cooperative behaviors, all reinforced by logical and natural consequences from the wilderness conditions” (p. 75). Bottom line, it is therapy as opposed to being just therapeutic.

Dr. Christian Itin, MSW, seeks to clarify the therapy/therapeutic dilemma in an essay concerning adventure therapy (Itin, 2001). Having used adventure therapy for nearly 20 years with many clients in many contexts, he believes adventure therapy uses specific activities, together with a philosophy embracing the challenge of the unknown, to facilitate individual success and/or group togetherness. Just like wilderness therapy, it is considered therapy as opposed to therapeutic adventure, which uses nature in a simply generic, healing manner. Most notably, therapeutics does not involve therapy in the professional sense.

In an article by Frandzel (1997), Itin relates that “adventure therapy is based in doing, not talking, which is at the heart of most traditional types of therapy” (p. 77). The article continues with comments from Dr. Dene Berman, a leader in adventure therapy. She believes the point of a wilderness or unfamiliar setting in adventure therapy is to get the participant away from an environment that may encourage dysfunctional behavior. Adventure therapy is an intense experience with constant exposure to challenges promoting communication among participants and individual self-reliant behaviors. Additionally, such immediate feedback between behavior and consequence inherent in the wilderness is rarely available in an office setting. Dr. Berman cites that “the more quickly a tent goes up in the face of an impending storm, the better the chances of staying warm and dry. Thus, participants are immediately rewarded for cooperating with tentmates and for following staff instructions” (Frandzel, 1997, p. 78).

Outcomes of Wilderness Usage

Russell (2003) contends that the outcomes of wilderness therapy or outdoor behavioral healthcare (OBH) have not been empirically supported. “The extant studies on the effectiveness of OBH and wilderness therapy reveal consistent lack of theoretical basis, methodological shortcomings and results that are difficult to replicate” (p. 355). As previously acknowledged, Americans are accessing the wilderness for individual growth in huge, blossoming numbers, but what are they actually gaining from all this time outside?

Actually, the literature is bloated with essays, opinion pieces, and studies touting the effectiveness of outdoor therapy and therapeutic courses or programs but solid, rigorously tested research findings truly expounding on the benefits of such courses are,

as previously suggested, rare. Moore and Russell (2002) completed an annotated bibliography of 247 citations related to using the wilderness for personal growth, therapy, education, and leadership development. In categorizing Moore and Russell's bibliography further, I was able to count 95 studies or articles about programs in which people were actually outdoors for personal change. Interestingly, 53 of those citations were related to Outward Bound, whereas seven concerned the National Outdoor Leadership School. Nearly 55 of the 95 annotations that had to do with outdoor programs related to so-called "at-risk" populations.

Moore and Wodarski (1997) identify that at-risk populations are those people who have difficulties with school, such as delinquency or low grades; with community, such as trouble with the law or being a gang member; with family such as abuse survivors, low income households, or single-family homes; and with self, such as poor self-esteem, low aspirations, or health problems. The literature appears to support the use of wilderness counseling programs for eliciting positive outcomes among certain at-risk populations.

Russell's (2003) findings parallel this. In an outcomes assessment of seven outdoor behavioral healthcare (OBH) programs, both pretreatment and posttreatment (discharge) data are collected on 523 clients, both males and females, aged 13–19 years through self-report, and 372 completed parental/guardian survey assessments. Both clients and parents/guardians are asked to complete two questionnaires that assessed the adolescents' well-being at the beginning of treatment, the end of treatment, and 1 year following treatment. Initial scores on these self-report questionnaires for the OBH participants are similar to inpatient findings. The author concedes there is no control group, but the results of a random sampling of participants ($n = 144$ parents, $n = 99$

clients) 12 months following OBH treatment show, on average, gains in adolescent well-being, as solicited from the two questionnaires, are maintained or have increased from discharge scores.

Kelley, Coursey, and Selby (1997) find significant increases in self-efficacy and self-esteem among persons suffering from persistent mental illness who have completed a 9-week daily outdoor adventure course when compared to a control group of persons with persistent mental illness who have not completed the outdoor course. More recently a long-term mental health facility finds an increased level of purpose and inter-group communication among members who regularly access the outdoors for planned outings (Surridge, 2004).

Persons with hearing impairments have a significant positive effect on their internal locus of control following a 10-day outdoor adventure education course with gains still maintained 2 months later when compared to a control group (Luckner, 1989). There are other positive results from outdoor exploits with adults with traumatic brain injuries (Fines & Nichols, 1994), even a study of participants with mild traumatic brain injuries who still showed positive changes in self-esteem 1 year later following a 3-day Outward Bound course (Lemmon, La Tourrette, & Hauver, 1996).

Several leading Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) rehabilitation centers in North America use the outdoors in the therapy programs of SCI clients (Beringer, 2004). After completing a literature review specifically focusing on SCI and outdoor programming, the author concluded that there is “some evidence that ‘nature’ experiences and outdoor pursuits can have positive outcomes on quality of life following SCI and other forms of mobility impairments/acquired physical disability” (p. 14). He emphasizes, though, that

further research is needed to document these results “in more depth and breadth” (p. 14). Furthermore, he strongly supports using qualitative measures to better record the experience of the SCI client.

Rutledge and Raymon (2001) “indicate that women increased their physical, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being following a weekend rehabilitation retreat experience emphasizing experiential learning and coping with cancer” (p. 89). The cancer participants of this retreat are shown to have elevated levels of well-being up to 6 to 7 months after the retreat compared to their scores prior to the intervention. This program emphasizes experiential learning through nature hikes, ropes courses (group and individual sets of challenges set upon ropes and wooden towers often many feet above ground), journaling, and group talks.

After a meta-analysis of outcome evaluations from 28 research studies concerning wilderness challenge programs for adolescents with delinquency problems, Wilson and Lipsey (2000) determine that such wilderness programs seem to reduce antisocial and delinquent behavior; however, they believe their analysis reveals that there is much to be learned before any direct conclusions concerning the positive outcomes of wilderness programs was possible.

Such a view is similar to West and Crompton’s (2001) who completed a review of 16 studies concerning recidivism and outdoor programming. They note that the definition of *recidivism* is not consistent between studies; some researchers hold that any conviction of another offense with or without incarceration means a slide back into crime, whereas others contend that only incarceration connects to another offense denotes recidivism. Twelve of the populations studied are identified as adolescent-aged, and eleven of these

are listed as juvenile delinquents, underachieving, or problem/troubled youth. West and Crompton (2001) conclude that the results of outdoor courses are mostly positive but that “an analysis of the individual studies’ design indicated that the internal validity of many of them was suspect” (p. 113). They cite a study from 1968, which remained among the strongest methodologically but is today almost 40 years old.

A third review of the literature analyzes 19 studies of at risk populations that find positive changes in self-esteem/self-concept after some sort of outdoor programming (Moote & Wodarski, 1997). They conclude that no two adventure programs are alike with programs using different tools, varying lengths of stay, flexible formats of curriculum implementation, and unclear levels of instructor education or certification. Furthermore, they surmise that solid empirical research focusing on adventure based counseling programs is rare.

Hattie, Marsh, Neill, and Richards (1997) completed a meta-analysis of 96 studies on adventure program outcomes with mostly college or adult aged individuals not specified as at risk. They find that some works blatantly report the positive findings of that particular study while ignoring additional negative evidence. They additionally suggest that research on adventure programs needed much improvement.

Returning to the work of Moore and Russell (2000), it was ascertained that of the 247 citations related to wilderness use for personal change of at risk and not at risk populations, much of the literature was reported in non-peer reviewed sources. A lack of rigor is “noted in the sources of data on which the findings are based heavy to surveys and the principle research methods used few experiments or comparative studies” (p. 144). There are few good empirical studies focusing on wilderness experience

outcomes, even fewer of which might illuminate the experience of long-term wilderness travelers.

One notable exception is a study by Norris and Weinman (1996), who use the wilderness of the open seas to find significant positive changes in participants' self-esteem and significant lower levels of psychological distress in 43 trainees aged 18–24 years old. These men and women volunteers participate in a 3-month-long sail training voyage from the United Kingdom to the Caribbean and completed questionnaires immediately prevoyage and directly postvoyage. They are closely matched for sex and age with 33 controls that simultaneously completed the assigned questionnaires. The voyage is arduous with the longest port to port distance of 26 days; trainees are expected to complete many physical tasks at any time of day. Using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale, trainees show a significant increase in self-esteem as compared to the controls. A similar finding is noted with self-efficacy and satisfaction with life. Analysis of differences between men and women trainees shows men with an overall starting point of more self-esteem and less psychological distress. Over time, females report an increase in self-esteem and a large reduction in psychological distress. Whether these changes in self are maintained is unclear as long-term analysis is lacking.

An expedition into the highlands of Kashmir, India is studied by Watts, Webster, Morley, and Cohen (1992). This is a demanding 6-week adventure of British male and female volunteers of the British Schools Exploring Society, aged 17–20 years. Of these explorers, 65 successfully complete all the required testing both before and after the expedition. Women account for 27 of the expeditioners. The travelers are asked to complete the Gordon Personal Profile Inventory (GPP-1), which provides assessments of

leadership, responsibility, emotional-stability, sociability, cautiousness, intellectual curiosity, personal relations, and vigor. There were significant positive changes in leadership, emotional stability, sociability, responsibility, and cautiousness. Females tend to improve on the personal relations and vigor scales, yet males deteriorate on both of these components. Overall, they conclude that females excel at benefiting from expedition travel; however, the authors are skeptical concerning the results considering the lack of a control group.

Watts, Apps, and East (1993), involved with the British Schools Exploring Society for a second time, study 21 expeditioners into the Arctic. Male and female volunteers aged 18–21 years spend 14 weeks in Svalbard. They were only 4 females involved in this expedition. They are asked to identify a friend much like them to serve as a control in the study. Again the GPP-1 was used to assess pre and post levels of leadership, responsibility, emotional stability, sociability, cautiousness, original thinking, personal relations, and vigor both in the Arctic adventurers and the control population. Significance was noted in the increased scores of self-esteem (this is the score of the first four scales on the GPP-1 summed) and grand total (all scales summed) of participants to the Arctic when compared to the control group. Due to the limited number of females, it is unclear if women score higher than men following this expedition as they had in some aspects of the Watts et al. (1992) study.

Wedin (2001), using Parse's research methodology of dialogical engagement, extraction-synthesis, and heuristic interpretation, finds several themes consistent with female returnees aged 20–27 years. In this unpublished masters' thesis of a relatively small sample size of 6 women, such returnees all survive canoeing 7 weeks, nearly 700

miles through the Arctic with one resupply point. A resupply station is a base from which to access supplies necessary for the latter part of the journey. They complete their expeditions, all through similar if not identical terrain during the summer months between 4, 5, or 6 years previous to the research. Upon returning from the wilderness, these women report an increased sense of self-worth, which they perceive as a feeling of greater independence. Additionally, they report augmented communication skills, which they attribute to the need for constant and excellent verbal articulation during the stress of the wilderness trip itself.

Furthermore, participants of the expeditions view the trips as endangered entities. "Something almost held as sacred, the women seemed to safeguard its meaning. This valued ownership of experience created a need for validation. The returnees found it difficult to relate with people not realizing or confirming the magnitude of this adventure" (Wedin, 2001). They also report unusually intense feelings of loss towards the disintegration of the group. Feelings of disconnection arise over both environmental and social group disparities between expedition and home community.

In another qualitative study by Pohl, Borrie, and Patterson (2000), a feminist framework is used to capture four transferable outcomes between wilderness/wilderness recreation and everyday life. Using in-depth interviews and two content organizing systems for data analysis, 24 women of varying backgrounds aged 21 to 78 years who are determined to have a moderate to a great amount of wilderness experience are questioned concerning their wilderness experiences. Moderate wilderness experience is defined as having at least 1 year of outdoor participation though to what extent (days, weeks, or months) or to which location (remote or rural) is not mentioned. Interviews are then

transcribed followed by the identification of themes using the software NUD.IST as well as manual systems.

Nine of the 24 women had experienced both co-ed and all-female groups in the wilderness setting. Comparing the experiences between the differently gendered groups, these women perceive that “women were more egalitarian with each other, more willing to show emotion, and less willing to take over” (Pohl et al., 2000). The article does not mention what the other 15 women think about all-women trips. The study continues by identifying four transferable outcomes of wilderness/wilderness recreation as self-sufficiency, change in perspective, connection to others, and mental clarity. For each transferable outcome, its effect on life is listed as well as contributing and characterizing elements associated with it in wilderness/wilderness recreation. For example, some identify characteristics of wilderness/wilderness recreation as found by the researchers, include solitude, being free from distraction, time, and simplicity as evidenced by freedom of mind, absorption, quiet, slowing down, and seeing more, which are related to the transferable outcome: mental clarity. Mental clarity affects life after the wilderness/wilderness recreation through problem solving, self-reflection, being grounded, peace, seeking more solitude, self-worth, and purpose.

Riordan (2002), in an unpublished doctoral dissertation, studies the transformative aspects of adventure as integrated into everyday life. Though these transformative aspects are not phrased as outcomes, her study uses both men and women participants to provide some insight into life after the wilderness episode. Using an online questionnaire, which was distributed via adventure/education electronic list services, 16 qualified participants aged 18–62 are identified. Participants are asked to write their stories of adventure. All of

the participants had been on wilderness excursions though of what length or to which location is not clear. Grounded theory methodology is elicited to uncover three core categories, which were thought to exemplify a successful integration of transformative aspects of wilderness travel into everyday life: creating a foundation of the transformed self, nurturing this foundation, and strengthening this foundation.

Riordan (2002) defines transformation as “a world-changing revisioning of the self; it promotes an expansion of one’s consciousness in the realms of heart, body and soul” (p. 6). It is the transformative aspects that a sojourner successfully integrates into life following the adventure that ushers in life changes. Riordan’s findings identify three core categories, which relate to this successful integration thereby offering a theory of incorporating the wilderness adventure. First, the voyageur creates a foundation for the transformed self in everyday life. This is achieved through consciously or subconsciously, actively or passively, shifting one’s world view, and changing perspective to one’s true sense of self. Next a person nurtures the foundation by relying upon it to map one’s behavior. For example, a person may choose to live in a green community following a deeply transformative experience to be surrounded by those things more consistent with one’s foundation. Finally, one strengthens this foundation through devotion to it in ways such as daily walks or annual wilderness trips.

Summary

In summary, this literature review suggests young women returning from wilderness expeditions might be undergoing several transitions simultaneously. Not only are these women developmentally flirting with emerging adulthood, but geographically they are returning from the wilderness, socially parting from a close group of comrades,

culturally leaving an entirely unique culture, and traveling back to one that may or may not be familiar to them. Nurses instinctively know that typically such multiple experiences in a person's life make that person more vulnerable to health changes than he or she might normally be, but nursing research in this area suggesting any sort of maladaptive alteration is absent. Any true description in any body of literature of the transitional event of what this return might entail for young women is lacking. As previously stated, however, this is a new area of research.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODS

Due to the novelty of this topic, describing the experience of young women returning from a wilderness expedition, I ascertained that an exploratory-descriptive approach was the most appropriate choice of research methodology. I did not want to be presumptuous by prematurely interpreting results of such a preliminary investigation. I therefore chose a research method that allowed me to focus upon the description of the event in question: to concentrate on the detailed telling of the experience. The phenomenological method, as explained in the next section, offered me this opportunity; however, after a sound depiction of the topic was uncovered, natural progression of analysis supported a brief, tentative interpretation of results presented in the final chapter though this interpretation is not the focus of the study. The main purpose of this study is to explore how young women returning from a wilderness expedition describe the return experience. Long-term implications of such research include informing nurses and others of such an event as to influence their paths in research, education, and practice. I believe knowledge lies in the description of experience.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is first initiated by Husserl early in the last century (Giorgi, 2005). Counter to the majority empiricist thinking of the time, Husserl suggests that the soul of philosophy lies in consciousness awareness. The critical difference in the two philosophies, empiricism and phenomenology, is “a shift of focus away from the thing and nature toward human beings and their worlds” (Giorgi, 2005). Phenomenology strives to understand the nature of knowing. Husserl (1965) struggles with the accepted view of natural science finding little worth in experience. The focus of empirical science

is on the tangible, the concrete, not in the uncovering of the lived story of something.

Husserl (1965) on the contrary, believes it is in the:

connection of experiences, in the interplay of experience and thought, which has its rigid logical laws, that valid experience is distinguished from invalid, that each experience is accorded its level of validity, and that objectively valid knowledge as such, knowledge of nature is worked out. (p. 87)

Phenomenology worships the experience of being. It is a science of consciousness, “a phenomenology of consciousness as opposed to a natural science about consciousness” (Husserl, 1965). It is in perception of the image that the essence of the experience is uncovered. These essences provide the realness of the experience, a taste in time of the actual event. “Phenomenology is the study of essences” is articulated by a well-known French phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. vii).

One key component concerning the Husserlian tradition lies in the concept of this perception of essence. People view material objects through a bias lens of profiles (Giorgi, 2005). No matter how hard people concentrate on their reflection in a mirror, that same vision, the identical picture of themselves, does not immediately change. “One can perhaps reflect numerous times on the same part of the conscious stream and see new details or observe something different, but the part of the stream under observation comes back in the same way” (Giorgi, 2005, p. 76). Phenomenology seeks to explicate the experience of perceiving the third dimension when all people see is two-faced dimensions (Kelly, 2005).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) elaborates on what he terms “sense experience” (p. 52). A perceived object is not just a two-dimensional and concrete object. He cites the example

of a child who first is attracted to a glowing candle shining brightly, and then to the same child viewing the same candle after being burned once curiosity prevailed. The child now perceives the candle much differently from the initial experience. Perception is experienced awareness. The term *lived experience* often used currently when describing phenomenology, describes the focus of uncovering the human sensation of awareness (Boyd, 2001).

Husserl considers phenomenology to be not only a philosophy but also a method (Ray, 1994). Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggests that phenomenology is only truly accessible through a phenomenological method. The phenomenological method offers an approach for the conceptualization of *universal* experience and consequently provides the basis of all knowledge. Capturing this knowledge entails being free of all presuppositions. Initially, these were interpreted as “referring to existence and to thought” (Farber, 1966), p. 20). Putting aside previous bias allows the researcher to more fully grasp the experience. Zahavi (2003) clarifies the idea further:

We do not effect it in order to deny, doubt, neglect, abandon, or exclude reality from our research, but simply in order to suspend or neutralize a certain dogmatic *attitude* toward reality, that is, in order to be able to focus more narrowly and directly on the phenomenological given—the objects just as they appear. (p. 45)

Most recently, Gearing (2004) contends that the philosophical idea of bracketing or reducing presuppositions has always been vague with conceptual inconsistency. Phenomenologists mold the practice to fit their individual method of inquiry. This evolution of bracketing attributed to its overall dissonance within phenomenological

research. Gearing (2004) attempts to clarify bracketing as comprising three distinct phases: abstract formulation, research praxis, and reintegration.

Abstract formulation contains “the researcher’s orientation and theoretical approach” (Gearing, 2004, p. 1433). Research praxis, the core process of bracketing, seeks to clarify the breadth and depth of reducing. The researcher decides which substance of the entire research process is held in abeyance and the time period involved. It is further determined which notion of the phenomenon is suspended, which portion of one’s own personal bias is set aside, and how strong the actual bracket is. Some researchers employ more porous or rigid brackets depending upon the study. Finally, during the reintegration phase, the researcher *folds* the bracketed information back into the analysis (Gearing, 2004, p. 1434). Additionally, Gearing relates that there are six types of bracketing, each a variation of the distinct phases.

Existential bracketing, a method of bracketing composed of several divergent phenomenological views, supports the idea of existential phenomenology (Gearing, 2004). The researcher reduces presuppositions in a realistic manner. “The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xiv). Contrary to Husserl’s view of conducting research in a presuppositionless world, existential bracketing entails holding in abeyance some theories or research propositions but not the larger world environment. It means certain aspects of one’s personal consciousness and assumptions are not able to be reduced. One’s personal experience with the world cannot be wholly bracketed; there is no usage of a detached consciousness in existential bracketing (Gearing, 2004).

A key point of difference between Husserlian or eidetic phenomenology and the hermeneutic-phenomenologic or interpretive traditions lies in the concept of bracketing. Interpretive phenomenology is aimed at addressing the ontological philosophical underpinnings of *being* (Mackey, 2005). Heidegger, a pupil and later critic of Husserl, verbalizes that not suspending presuppositions allows the researcher “to constitute the possibility of intelligibility or meaning” (Ray, 1994, p. 120). Heidegger’s quest is to comprehend being itself (Mackey, 2005). The resulting research methodology evolves from Heidegger’s philosophy is an interpretive tradition much different from the Husserlian descriptive approach, which solely clarifies phenomena (Giorgi, 2005).

Methods

This study was designed to explore the experience of returning from a wilderness expedition through the journal/Internet entries of young women who had completed at least a 42-day remote, isolated excursion to the Canadian north. Using a descriptive phenomenological approach, the written entries of postexpedition women provided the means to not only describe the expedition as they recorded it but also what it was like to return from such an extended, life-changing event in the wilderness. Furthermore, the manner in which the women expressed themselves using journals was explored.

Setting and Sample

Several inclusion criteria existed for this research study. All participants engaged in a wilderness expedition of greater than 42 days in length to a remote region of Canada with the YMCA facility Camp Manito-wish between the years 1990–2005. Female explorers must have been between the ages of 16 and 29 years when they completed their expedition. Initially, the included years were set from between 1995–2005, but due to

difficulty enlisting participants, the years were expanded to include the expedition members from 1990. There were no female canoe expeditions with this facility during the years 1991, 1992, 1993, or 1994. Additionally, because of the initial low return of canoe voyagers, all female expeditioners from these years with Camp Manito-wish YMCA including backpackers were mailed a research invitation though I did not use any journal entries or e-mails from backpackers in the data analysis. This is further explained in the Data Collection section.

A total of four mailings took place between April 2006 and October 2006 with 105 invitations sent to postexpedition women. I received an unfortunate e-mail from one father explaining that his daughter, an expedition canoeist, had recently died, but that he would gladly share her journal as he believed she would have wanted this. I respectfully declined. I also received 5 invitations back in the mail from inaccurate addresses. It is impossible to know how many of the invitations were delivered to the addressee listed on the envelope.

Wilderness

For the purposes of this research, *wilderness* is operationalized as a currently unpopulated parcel of land with no or extremely minimal components of infrastructure capable of allowing non-motorized travel within its borders for at least 42 days with no or extremely minimal outside human or machine contact. Such tracts of land meeting these criteria and being capable of sustaining canoe exploration typically do not occur within the lower 48 United States. The closest location of this kind of remote country is available in northern Canada or Alaska.

One of the assumptions of this study is that a small group of women experience a return from a remote wilderness journey of greater than 42-days' duration with limited outside contact, which is significant enough to them to warrant further investigation. For the return to warrant further investigation, the event itself, from which participants returned, needs to be quite fantastic. A description of this specific event by the participants is critical to understanding the experience from which they are returning to better comprehend the return itself. Many awesome wilderness events exist in the world, and the return experience from them is probably worthy of study as well; however, for convenience of sampling, an Arctic expedition was chosen as the event in question.

The Arctic

Camp Manitowish YMCA in northern Wisconsin offers Canadian Arctic wilderness canoe trips of greater than 42-days' length nearly every summer as well as expedition length, greater than 42 days, backpacking trips to Alaska. Over the last 10 years, this organization has sent at least 50 women aged 16 years or older on expedition length canoe encounters to Nunavut in northern Canada. (For some reason, women have far outnumbered men on completing these expeditions.) I personally co-lead three of these canoe expeditions in the mid-1990s and have been knowledgeable concerning who has been *hitting the trail* ever since. Two of my expeditions were classified as staff instructor courses and one was made up of campers. The difference in these trips is highlighted in The Camp section in this chapter. Typically, these trips have between 6 and 9 participants per group. Some summers witness one, two, or even three female groups simultaneously completing canoe expeditions in Nunavut during the course of June, July, and August.

Data Collection

Invitations to participate in this research were sent to a selected group of persons included in a public, annually published list of returning wilderness canoe and backpacker expedition adventurers from Camp Manito-wish YMCA. This public list of names and home addresses is included in a publication put out by the facility every year. In obtaining the publication, the "Astonisher," a clear list of potential participants was obtained (Camp Manito-wish Y.M.C.A., 2003). It became necessary to conduct many Internet searches to obtain the most up-to-date addresses for these women, as some of the early calendars of the mid-1990s contained addresses over 10 years old.

A total of four mailings took place between April 2006 and October 2006. Invitations were sent to 105 perspective research participants. After one recorded mortality and five returned invitations, it is possible that 99 postexpedition women were solicited for this research project, but the true number cannot ever be fully realized as confirmed delivery of invitations was not tracked through the postal system. Some of those women had completed both the canoeing and the backpacking expedition during the appropriate years, but only one invitation was sent to each perspective participant.

Women were asked to send me their entire journals. I deemed it too difficult for women to review their journals and decide personally which information I might like or not like. In securing the entire journal, I was more easily able to ascertain exactly when that particular woman began processing her experience of returning home. Women who completed the expedition most recently (years 2005, 2004, 2003, and 2002) were contacted first. No follow-up postcard was sent to these potential study participants in an oversight on my part. Next, I sent out invitations to the canoe expeditions of 2000 and

2001 with reminders sent 2 weeks following the initial correspondence. I then sent out invitations to all canoeing expeditionary trips in the 1990s with subsequent reminder postcards. Finally, invitations were sent to expeditionary backpackers from the years 2002–2005. No backpacking expeditions meeting study criteria existed in the 1990s for Camp Manito-wish YMCA.

Each woman meeting expeditionary criteria status on the public record of expedition returnees was sent three pieces of paper and an addressed/stamped return envelope. The words “Forward please if necessary” appeared on the back of the packet with my return home address. I realized early in the mailings that a significant number of these women had moved or were still away at college. An Internet search was conducted on each woman and her respective address to try to find the most recent address available. Two of the pieces of paper received by the perspective participant in the initial mailing were the identical outline of the informed consent document (see Appendix). The potential participant was asked to read over the informed consent letter, to sign both copies, and to return one of the forms in the accompanying envelope. Receipt of the consent form by me was necessary for that woman’s enrollment in the study. At that time, a pseudonym and ID number were assigned to each woman. Participation was strictly voluntary with no ties, promises, or relationship occurring with Camp Manito-wish YMCA itself. The third piece of paper was a letter of introduction outlining the details of the study, including information about the compensatory \$50 to assist with mailing expenses, intent/aim of the research, approximate amount of time needed to complete participation, and some specifics/background about me (see Appendix).

I received a total of 18 informed consents in the mail, which constituted 18 enrolled participants in the study. All of these women were sent a \$50 money order made out to them personally as well as further information concerning the study. In the future, I would not use money orders as they appear much like personal checks, which people can easily tear up erroneously thinking if the check isn't cashed, the money isn't transferred. Additional paperwork contained in the second mailing outlined the specifics for the enrolled participant such that the entire journal was to be forwarded to me and that the participant was free to place whatever request concerning the document she had at that time (see Appendix).

I received 13 journals from the enrolled participants. I never heard back, even with two reminder postcards, from 4 enrolled participants (two canoe and two backpacker adventurers), and 1 enrolled participant returned her money order citing she was unable to find her journal. Of the 13 journals I received, 11 documents were from canoe voyagers and two were from backpackers. Because of the low number of backpackers, I decided to concentrate the data analysis only upon the postexpedition canoe adventurers. Additionally, I am not as well-versed on the current backpacking expedition offered by Camp Manito-wish YMCA, as I have never led nor participated on that adventure. I think having actually lived through several canoe expeditions gave me an advantage when reading through the journals, which I did not have when reviewing the two backpacker expedition accounts.

Upon receiving the invitation to participate in this study, it was up to the explorer herself to ascertain if she had written enough concerning the postexpedition return so as to provide me with a description of what the experience was like for her. Participants

were asked to please not add to journal entries directly but that forthcoming information would be exchanged during the Internet phase of data collection. As data collection ensued, I received approximately 15 e-mails from women who had received invitations to participate in the research in the mail at this time asking for more details concerning the study. I answered these professionally and promptly.

As previously mentioned, I received 13 journals in the mail, two of these were copies of journals and the rest were the actual journals themselves. I quickly read over the journals to see that they were legible and then copied them twice at a public copy machine. All journal entries were labeled only with the voyager's ID and pseudonym. The informed consent document outlined for participants that at any time they could drop out of the study for any reason without retribution. Participants were additionally told that there was the potential for feelings of nostalgia, which may or may not be pleasant to them, as they reviewed journals and further communicated with me during the course of the study. Additionally, a demographic page was included in this mailing to retrieve more specifics about the participants. This sheet was kept entirely separate from any other research material so as to better provide confidentiality.

Once I had copied the journal entries, I e-mailed participants to both inform them that I had received the materials they sent as well as to clarify any points of concern in particular journals. Giorgi suggests using "the diaries as the basis for follow-up data" (A. Giorgi, personal communication, May 25, 2005). At this time, in the data collection procedure, elaboration of the wilderness return was solicited through e-mail so as to better describe the experience of returning from a wilderness expedition. I thanked the participant for either the copy of her journal or the actual journal itself, assured her I was

treating this collection of intimate feelings, poems, flowers and so much else with the utmost respect, and asked if she had any further details to add about what it was like to return from a wilderness expedition. After sending the initial e-mail, I then carefully placed the journal in a waterproof, padded mailer and posted it using registered mail to the provided address.

Written description in the form of e-mails conducted over the Internet allowed me to be consistent in obtaining the participant's written word in this study and further illuminated the phenomenon under review. Only the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee student e-mail account was used for this e-mailing process, as this was a secure system requiring a password to access the potentially delicate information. No participant ever called me over the phone. All e-mails were printed, labeled with the participant's ID and pseudonym, and kept with the journal entries in a confidential manner. "Simply ask them to say more about their experiences" (A. Giorgi, personal communication, May 25, 2005). The point was to obtain a description of what it was like to return from a wilderness expedition. Once I had sufficiently machine-duplicated the original journal entries, clarified their content, addressed all questions or concerns of the voyager, and become entirely satisfied that the return from a wilderness expedition was thoroughly conveyed by that particular woman, I respectfully yet officially ended her formal participation with the study through a professionally worded e-mail. I then deleted all record of this contact on the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee server to the best of my ability.

Before any contact began with any potential participant, all study procedures were approved in spring 2006 by the Institutional Review Boards of the University of

Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Northern Michigan University, my place of employment.

Modification of the original proposal to increase potential research participants ensued in fall 2006, and finally annual renewal of the study protocol occurred in spring 2007.

The Participants

Due to the natural progression through the YMCA program at Camp Manitowish, campers advance to expedition-length trips of approximately 48–52 days at roughly 16–19 years of age. Leaders of these trips are usually more seasoned staff in their middle twenties. Because of the number of days of expedition travel, financial commitment (these trips typically cost greater than \$4,000 per individual), and overall mental and physical prowess needed to survive the endeavor, these women must dedicate their entire summers to such an event. In this culture where earning a living is often a full-time, year-round project, typically only young people aged approximately 16–29 years are able to engage in such expeditions.

This was the age of the participants when they captured the experience of returning home from a wilderness expedition in their journals; therefore, for the purposes of this research, female emerging adults was operationalized as women between the ages of 16–29 years old; however, I believe only legal adults were capable of truly comprehending the ramifications of voluntarily sharing personal journal contents. The emerging adult women aged 16 and 17 years who may have returned from a wilderness expedition and journaled about the return experience were required to wait until they turned 18 years before voluntarily enrolling in the study. I did receive an e-mail to this effect from a young woman who was not 18 years of age. I thanked her for her interest but said that she would need to contact me further after her eighteenth birthday. Some of

the women invited to participate in the study were emerging adults when they journaled about their return experience from a wilderness expedition. All have aged to adulthood over the past 15 years.

The Expedition

Each woman completed at least a 42-day canoe expedition to a remote region of Canada. I set the 42-day expedition minimum as criterion for two reasons. First, according to group theory, it takes time to negotiate through the different phases of group development. One does not just jump through group development in a matter of days (Corey & Corey, 1992). Second, I have noticed on my longer trips that after roughly 42 days, group expedition culture becomes absorbed with the retelling of events that occurred earlier on that specific trip. Previous to 42 days, trip participants devote themselves, understandably to sharing events and issues concerning family and friends at home. But around Day 42, trip members seem to uniquely bond over telling of past trip events found over the previous 6 weeks. Explorers even begin to relate dreams void of family life but rife with images of the present experience. I think at this point in the expedition, the group's culture is really solidified. I could find no specific research supporting this notion but maintained this expedition length as a necessary component to being included in the study.

Voyagers completed one of several routes of approximately 700 miles over roughly 7 weeks. All canoe routes from 1990 to 2003 offered for this expedition by Camp Manito-wish YMCA were similar in terrain, difficulty, and length. The expedition members of 2005 were included in the first mailing of study participation but not one woman actively enrolled. This 2005 trip covered a new more inland route to hopefully

avoid contact with polar bears that had ravaged the 2003 expedition. Rare if any contact with the outside world occurred on any trip. A total of 11 women were selected to participate in this study. A. Giorgi (personal communication, May 25, 2005) related that “phenomenological studies fall into the category of ‘depth studies’ so you do not need many subjects.”

Additionally, women were eligible for participation in the study if they had not gone overseas or on another expedition within 8 weeks of returning home. I believe someone may not entirely transition through the return period of postexpedition if he/she immediately continues upon another adventure. For example, a person may not entirely grieve through the death of a loved one if immediately confronted with another traumatic event. The transition process, I believe, can become interrupted if a person is immediately thrust into another critical event and, therefore, such a trip member’s account may not be relevant for this particular study. If a woman completed several expeditions over this time period, only the initial journal was used for this study. I did not want to compound women’s depictions of the experience by having them compare one year’s return to the next. Such data may be relevant at a future point in my research career but would only confuse my description of the experience at present.

The Journal

Journal entries have been used in previous research, but the reviewed studies only used purposeful entries in that the writers were asked to record thoughts, suggestions, and feelings for a specific intent (Callister, Matsumura, Bond, & Mangum, 2004; Henrichs, 1999; Kanzaki, Makimota, Takemura, & Ashida, 2004; Lewis, 1995; Ritchie, 2003; Wilborn, 2000). These are pointedly solicited entries as opposed to the journal entries I

received from returning expeditioners, which were written as the women underwent the experience themselves over a period of days and weeks. These expedition journal entries, I believe, provided a raw account, unsolicited, and as unbiased as possible with which to explore the experience of returning from a wilderness expedition. These female explorers recorded the event for that particular woman at that particular time. "There is always, in phenomenological description, then, the layer of the experience in time, the study of the experience that has just passed" (Boyd, 2001, p. 99). This experience and the voyager's written telling of it vary depending upon the woman, but since it is captured at her particular relevant point in time, I believe it was not subject to a strong historical effect.

I know from personal history that most if not all women journal on these remote endeavors. It was hoped that women selected for this research would have continued the journaling process for at least 4 weeks upon their return home; however, this was found to severely limit the number of eligible women and was subsequently dropped from study inclusion criteria. Most of the e-mails I did receive from perspective enrollees were concerning this criterion. Women typed that they just had not journaled that long after the expedition, though they believed their stories were still pertinent. After several such e-mails, I decided to alter the study criteria and allow journals from women who personally felt they had recorded the return experience adequately in their writings. I also knew that during the Internet exchange of e-mails, I would be able to further their description of the return experience if necessary.

Perspective women were informed in the invitation packet that this research had to do specifically with the return phase of their expedition journey, and they personally decided if they had enough information concerning this or not. I did not want to stifle

potential entries by stating a page number maximum or limitation, as this might have deterred women who perhaps illustrated much of their feelings or placed their experience in the lines of poems. Female expedition journals were often full of poems, lists, pictures, maps, pressed flowers, and bugs; all of which were carefully copied and included in the data analysis were relevant. Further description of the journals themselves is included in chapter 4.

The Camp

These expeditions were overseen by the YMCA umbrella of safety and philosophy, meaning that each trip shared nearly identical resources such as equipment, foodstuff, and training, but also their core values and goals for each expedition were conceptually equivalent. My aim in seeking participants from one particular organization was that the expedition from which the women were returning, that event from which the phenomenon initiated, was as standard as possible.

Camp Manito-wish YMCA was formed in 1919 in northern Wisconsin. It was originally intended to provide urban boys a place to experience the beauty and challenge of the outdoors. Girls were admitted in 1941. The current facility mission, based on a verse from Luke (2:52), is as follows:

to provide fun, life-enriching experiences for our campers. We will work to see that all those who are associated with us have a “Manito-wish Experience” where each participant grows in wisdom, in stature, in favor with God and in favor with one another. (Camp Manito-wish Y.M.C.A., 2005a, para 5)

The camp believes that extended expeditionary trips are for those who “seek extensive skill development and a collaborative leadership experience in remote and possibly extreme conditions” (Camp Manito-wish Y.M.C.A., 2005b, para 1).

In conjunction with the overall organization’s mission, expedition leaders know to advance the skill level of their group to meet the challenges of the Arctic environment as well as to promote group expedition behavior of communal trust and support. It behooved trip leaders to improve their groups’ skills and camaraderie as much as possible or survival might have become an issue. Relevant training began at camp in the form of such teaching sessions as whitewater technique, canoe rescue maneuvers, healthy menu-selection, map-reading with triangulation, and advanced first-aid. All potential trip members completed a similar series of training sessions prior to any expedition.

Participants on these expeditions were categorized by Camp Manito-wish YMCA into two kinds of women. The traditional camper had proceeded through the ranks of lesser canoe trips that the camp offers such as a 14-day canoe trip to Quetico Provincial Park in Ontario and an approximately 34-day Saskatchewan canoe adventure. These campers were traditionally still in high school when asked to go on an expeditionary canoe adventure, but they usually had exceptional trail skills such as fire-building, introductory whitewater, navigation, and weather forecasting. The other kind of participant was the slightly older woman who was college-aged and who had worked for the camp for 1 or 2 years. She was asked to go on the expedition to increase her leadership as well as tripping skills. These expeditions are labeled Staff Instructor Courses (SICs), as some time was spent in the field teaching one another small classes concerning but not limited to first aid, expedition behavior, flora, fauna, and leadership.

Participants were additionally provided with hands-on leadership experience. Although presumably more mature than the traditional camper when completing an expedition, these participants may have been less versed in terms of trail behaviors than the camper simply because many of them had not been on the other canoe trips offered by the camp. Both kinds of participants enrolled in the study.

I know from being affiliated with Camp Manito-wish YMCA for over 25 years that trips were accomplished with safety being the utmost concern for every group member. Leaders were thoroughly versed in the perils of expedition travel and were required to be certified as Wilderness First Responders by Wilderness Medical Associates. Additionally, all equipment was inspected regularly by support staff and was treated with respect by group members both in-camp and on-the-trail, as trip leaders are solely, financially responsible for the safe return of all items checked out for their particular adventure. These expeditions were usually the culmination of years of Manito-wish tripping by group members and were considered to be rather prestigious, as a personal invitation by camp administration is necessary for participation.

Bracketing

My interest in the topic of postexpedition transition started many years ago after living overseas as a teenager. Having spent 12 months in Sweden, I traveled back to the United States to discover that my *home* was no longer the same. I felt detached but did not know why. This occurred again after living in Nepal and finally after residing in Sri Lanka. I always physically returned home but did not feel at home for several months. A similar phenomenon happened when I completed my first major wilderness expedition of 46 days to the Arctic Ocean. After completing this very intensive canoe trip with four

other women, two of whom departed after 17 days, I returned from the tundra with an amazing sense of accomplishment yet that same feeling of detachment or disconnectedness. This feeling arrived after three subsequent Arctic expeditions, and I began to notice this difficulty in some of the other returning trip members as well.

Exploration of this feeling encouraged me to focus upon this topic for my master's thesis and again for my dissertation. Expedition experience provided me the unique label of having *insider status*, of actually living both the adventure as well as the return phenomenon four times. Such experience may have persuaded potential participants to more easily share their journals with me, as I was seen as one who really knew what the *expo* was all about. Several e-mails I received actually included the phrase, "Well, you know how it is on an expo..." quite freely. I visualized and reminisced with participants about the beauty of the tundra, the challenge of dangerous whitewater, and the agony of black flies, all of which these women left behind when returning to the United States.

Having lived through the event, I honestly am biased over what may transpire for women undergoing this transition. Personally, I completed the journey four times, and academically I devoted years of scholarly inquiry to this specific event. I conjectured and theorized about the phenomenon under review for a long time. Husserl (1982) argues that researchers are to "keep theories—strictly at a distance" (p. 56) when reducing presuppositions during research using a phenomenological approach. It was my intent, however, to adopt a more porous view of reduction consistent with the existential bracketing approach where the greater world is not entirely set aside (Gearing, 2004).

This study demanded that I partake in existential bracketing to better focus on the essences at hand; however, the ability to do this is subjective. I believed it entirely impossible for me to completely bracket out all previous notions or ideas concerning this topic. It has become too much of who I am to realistically put all aside. I attempted to find out just how researchers really do operationalize this critical component but could find no mention in the literature of how people actually bracket their own ideas concerning their specific research when very personally involved with that research. After much thought, I, therefore, created my own personal plan for existential bracketing.

I first considered all that should be bracketed by recording thoughts in a small journal. In spring 2006 I wrote, "I'm trying to center my thoughts and also focus. Focus away from bias, away from thinking I may know what this phenomenon is. I think a lot about putting aside previous ideas, encapsulate them but it is difficult." I proceeded to list my presuppositions by categorizing the actual words that came to mind when I thought about returning from a wilderness expedition. I then recorded this list and just pictured what these words meant as a whole.

This outpouring coincided with the actual data collection of journals, which was great timing in that data collection was strung over 9 months, much longer than I had anticipated. This extended time allowed me to think and understand several key components about returning from a wilderness expedition. As I waited, I chronicled that "not everyone is as passionate about this as I. Not everyone is as affected by this as I. Not everyone views this event as I do. Not everyone began to consider this event as I do." Because if they were as passionate about this as I, they would have sent me their journals overnight express or so I figured.

Simultaneously, I read and reread all of my postexpedition journals and even my postoverseas journals to be sure that my postexpo list, outlining descriptors pertinent to returning from a wilderness adventure, was as inclusive as I could get it. By July 2006, I noted that even my views relative to each reentry event in my life seemed to differ dramatically, which led to my recording the following:

It is impossible to hold a view that all people return a certain way when obviously even among my own stories the view changes....Not only do I sequester/bracket my story I also clear space for others, like willing your brain to be a sponge. To be open and aware and new.”

As data trickled in, I noted how different each woman’s expedition experience was from each other, which completely conveyed to me how unique each person was. In thinking more about this, it occurred to me how as nurses “bracket” out preconceptions about diagnoses, people, and illnesses constantly. As an experienced physical rehabilitation nurse, my bracketing journal recounted the bracketing I did on the floor. I wrote, “....each complaint is treated differently, sometimes they are related, sometimes not. Just because you see 10 TBIs, doesn’t mean the 11th will act anything like the 10 previous so, in sense, we bracket/sequester in our lives.”

By September 2006, I finished with the retelling of what the experience of returning from a wilderness expedition was to me. I had read everything I had previously recorded on the topic and was ready to move forward. After clumping this all as a picture (being a visual thinker, this worked for me) of color, shapes, and feeling, I noted this in my bracketing journal:

It's easier boxing it up and storing it once you know what IT is. Defining it helps sequester it, sequestering it entails blocking it off/sending it on its way to better analyze other's experience.holding at bay my story, to truly realize the strength and richness, individuality and essence of others' stories.

This spring 2007, I made several additional entries into my bracketing journal before I started to really immerse myself in the collected data. I reminded myself about storing away my experience. Simultaneously, I wrote about the necessity to "capture that fresh outlook and open face of when one reads something anew." I concentrated on finding that focus, that outlook, and getting there before physically opening the journals. I chronicled a plan for myself before each session of reviewing data, one that entailed "relaxing, separating, being curious, and listening openly." After weeks of reading journals, I noted the need to continually practice bracketing, to constantly see the new stories as if I were reading a novel for the first time. I recorded the following:

The poignancy and clarity of their stories lends them to be so distinct, so separate from anything I encountered. Their use of language, description, focus and perception are all unique and worthy of discriminate analyses and respect but also difficult not to do that.

As the previous paragraph alluded to, bracketing was not a solitary event. It took dedication and perseverance to maintain a sufficient level of bracketing, which I felt was necessary to properly review the data. I found time to journal about bracketing which was difficult and I periodically needed to revisit the picture of my own postexpedition construct. This helped hold it at bay. By sometimes thinking about my own postexpedition stories, I allowed myself the human element of fanciful nostalgia before I

sequestered them away again. I think letting my stories “come out and play once in awhile” made them easier to bracket. Overall, it was an advantage to experience a slower than anticipated data collection, as this made me scrutinize what bracketing was and how to do it. Additionally, the richness of the data being so distinct and, therefore, relevant reconfirmed my reason for the bracketing process. The data did not fail me. Through bracketing, I believe I channeled away as much personal bias as was possible to better uncover what it is like to return from a wilderness expedition.

Data Analysis

All data was kept in a locked compartment within my home. Confidentiality was strictly observed. Only I and my major professor, by request, had access to the copied journal/Internet entries. A descriptive phenomenological research method advocated by Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) was followed for data analysis. The research questions for this study include how do young women returning from a wilderness expedition do the following:

- 1) Describe the expedition experience?
- 2) Describe the return experience?
- 3) Express themselves using journals?

The assumptions of this study include the following:

- 1) A small group of women experience a return from a remote wilderness journey of greater than 42-days' duration with limited outside contact, which is significant enough to them to warrant further investigation.
- 2) Personal journal writing throughout these expeditions and for some months afterward is a common activity among women on these expeditions.

- 3) Nurses are generally not aware of the experience of returning from a wilderness expedition and, therefore, not aware of any potential issues surrounding the experience.

It was important to bear the assumptions in mind throughout the entire study. I may have been in error with the second assumption in that women did not continue to journal in their expedition journal after the trip to the extent I had originally assumed. Whether they journaled elsewhere, keeping that text separate, I do not know. Many replied to my invitation to participate in this study, reporting that they had not written in their trip journal for 3 or 4 weeks following the ending of the trip as was originally recommended for study inclusion. This may imply they did not journal at all during this postexpedition period following a trip, but it remains unclear.

My bracketing of previous experience with this phenomenon is described under the Bracketing section of this chapter. I was always aware of my bias as the language of the journal entries and to some extent the Internet messages were decidedly *camp-like*, full of phrases and procedures unique to Camp Manitowish YMCA. It was impossible to read the entries and not use this knowledge to decipher the text to some point, but I do believe the bracketing process I used was successful in keeping my bias at bay.

In the course of data collection, I was very aware that many of the participant invitations were sent to people I knew personally. Some of them I had with me on canoe expeditions in the 1990s; others I worked with at camp during this century. Some people, I am sure, knew of my reputation as a wilderness leader and now as one of the camp nurses, though I never specifically knew them. I did not coerce or use this previous relationship in any way to entice people to become enrolled in the study. I don't feel as

though anyone were pressured to participate. I do think my presence or influence may have encouraged women to enroll themselves, as often their e-mails mentioned something to the effect that they were thrilled someone was looking into this topic. They may have believed that because I am an accomplished canoe expedition guide, I can also conduct research effectively on a similar topic. It may be that my role as a nurse additionally enhanced my integrity.

Regardless, I was always respectful of the participants, especially their journals, as these are prized books of profound memories, detailing one of the most incredible experiences of their lives. Most were written for their authors' eyes only. I responded to all preliminary e-mail inquiries promptly, followed through with all research postal mailings quickly, using the services each woman recommended I use in mailing her journal, and handled all study Internet conversations professionally and confidentially. I believe I established a rapport with study participants, which allowed them to share their most intimate thoughts with me both in the form of journal entries and Internet inquiries. Allowing someone to read a personal diary took much courage and trust on their part as well. The relationship between participants and me was not one-sided and to this the data speaks.

The analysis is a phenomenological research method based on the philosophical phenomenological writings explored in the early portion of this chapter. Many notable nursing studies have used the research methodology attributed to Giorgi (Ashworth & Hagan, 1993; Ekstedt & Fagerberg, 2005; Erickson & Henderson, 1992; King, 1993). I personally chose this method because I believed it offered the best option in obtaining a comprehensive description of the event. To me it was logical, yet realistic in that it

followed a series of steps but admitted that bias and temporal persuasion exist logically within the analysis.

Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) advocate that the researcher begin with a description of the experience under review: “adequate descriptions are those that are capable of yielding distinctive structures of the phenomenon...” (p. 248). It was assumed that the journal/Internet entries that I received were capable of providing much insight into the exploration of what it is like to return from a wilderness expedition. They were written reflections of others’ consciousness. The research question to be answered by this study is specifically, “How do young women returning from a wilderness expedition describe the return experience?”

Once the journal entries were received, they were, in accordance to Giorgi’s research methodology, read in their entirety without further scrutiny: “One cannot begin an analysis of a description without knowing how it ends” (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2003, p. 252). This was consistent with Stage 1 of Giorgi’s research methodology. Concurrent with his previously stated personal suggestions, follow-up e-mail descriptions further illuminating the experience were obtained and printed to have an additional written record of each participant’s view. These were read holistically as well.

Poetry was another form of expression sometimes used by journaling expeditioners. “For those who write poetry, the verse becomes a written reflection of the lived experience” (Hunter, 2003, p.45). A midwife, Hunter (2003), phenomenologically analyzes poems written by women associated with childbirth to uncover the meaning of being with women during birth. After thoroughly reviewing her methodology, I believe her research method was consistent with phenomenological prose analysis even though

she exclusively scrutinizes poetry. Poetic entries contained within the data in the form of lyrics and actual poems were analyzed in the identical manner as other written text.

After a holistic reading of journal entries and Internet discussions was completed, all of the data was reread from a descriptive phenomenological perspective. Using existential bracketing, a technique described previously in this chapter and reportedly consistent with Giorgi's research methodology, the journal/Internet entries were analyzed (Gearing, 2004). Anywhere a *shift of meaning* occurred in the text, I underlined the words (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 252). I read all text in a quiet setting, marking where needed, using massive colored highlighters to better organize the possible grouping of each siphoned written unit. Text was vast, numbering over 1,500 pages of individual entries. This process, Stage 2, is consistent with uncovering the "meaning discriminations" of the data (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 252).

Computer software was not used to assist in the categorization of this data. I believe that if I had transcribed the written, illustrated journal entries into the computer, something of the penmanship and accompanied pictures may have been lost. A woman battling her mind over rampaging mosquitoes wrote in a particularly passionate manner that would have been lost had the words been typed onto a computer screen. Rereading such a hand-scrolled entry made her pain all the more palpable, which I believe enabled my description of her experience to become more authentic.

These handwritten entries were contained in weathered journals, treasured books of a deeply personal nature. For me, they were better read, analyzed, and appreciated in the outdoors or in my log home versus on a computer screen. I found it helpful to feel the natural environment in which they were conceived, basically the outdoors, to better grasp

the overall experience. I understand that modern devices may offer unique categorizing that the human brain may not be capable of emulating; however, the qualitative computer software packages are only as good as their users and for this project, I admit that the keyboard was more of a hindrance for me than a help for purposes of analysis.

Next, the marked expressions were changed or “twisted” into relevant, descriptive, professional wording (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 253). This was Step 3 of the research process, subsequent analysis of which is found in chapters five, six, and seven of this dissertation. The critical element of this entire method lies in what is now referred to as “imaginative variation,” which Giorgi & Giorgi (2003) describe as a procedure that:

begins by varying specific dimensions of the given object and one seeks the effect on the object of the removal or variation of the key dimension. If the object “collapses” as a consequence of the removal of the key dimension, then one would have to say that the dimension so varied is essential for the object to appear as whole. (p. 246)

The sequestered units of meaning, highlighted in color, were huddled together on large tables. The colors, nine in all, identified the text as to possible groupings such that all pink text had to do with participant writing on the topic of comparison of the current expedition to past wilderness trips, and green text marked out possible tension, conflict, or group mental activity and so forth. It was necessary to regroup these units, as my original ordering system did not always allow for every specific meaning differential. These groupings seemed to appear when grasping all of the data at once. To me, there were the natural conceptual divisions of the text. Once I was satisfied that I had accumulated all data under one preimposed concept, I began the process of Step 3, the

writing of the text into professional language. As noted, this re-wording into qualified prose is found in the chapters on findings in this dissertation.

Finally, after the essential meanings of the experience were isolated and identified, a holistic, descriptive account of the phenomenon is presented. This account is naturally subject to certain assumptions ingrained in the phenomenological method. Just by asking participants about a “return” they experienced implies that their expedition-end was actually a discrete phase. It might have caused them to rethink this time of their lives and adjust their written Internet entries to this line of thinking. Additionally, their experiences detailed a specific point in the past: the time at which they ended their expedition. The resulting account of what it is like to return from a wilderness expedition will be temporally based as is all phenomenological research (Boyd, 2001).

In an effort to manage the immense amount of data obtained in such a study, several authors adapt the Giorgi method slightly by collecting certain meanings under a subheading, which in turn represented a component of an overall theme (Ashworth & Hagan, 1993). These authors attempt to uncover the meaning of incontinence in 28 young or middle-aged women and consequently find three overall themes associated with this condition yet further identify 13 subheadings to these themes. A written, holistic description of the meaning of incontinence is then conveyed using these themes and subheadings as an organizational matrix. I did incorporate such a matrix when analyzing the data, as I believed it further clarified the phenomenon under review.

Data analysis example

This section is an example of the data analysis used in this dissertation. It is meant to assist the reader in understanding at a minute level just how the phenomenological

analysis occurred. I believe it might be difficult for the reader to grasp over 1,500 pages of data, cut into colored portions of text, grouped in seemingly random, ever-changing combinations; therefore, I have included this small analysis to reflect what was employed on a grand scale for the broader dissertation.

The following is a portion of a written journal entry from 1994. It is used with permission and was transcribed as fastidiously as possible into this paper. It details a woman's description of the events roughly 24 hours postexpedition in which she and a comrade had just completed a nearly 700 mile summertime journey lasting 7 weeks via canoe from Great Slave Lake in Canada's Northwest Territories (NWT) to the Arctic Ocean. Upon entering the Arctic Ocean, the women sought shelter at a nearby village, spent the night in a house of an elderly Inuit couple, and hitchhiked a ride on a float plane the following day. After flying to Yellowknife, NWT from the Inuit village, then named Coppermine, the two women packed their gear in a car and headed back to the United States.

A bit of shopping during the afternoon...a lot of shock at suddenly being back in a city...and we were off on the dirt/gravel road heading South by 6:30 pm.

Camped at a nice falls campground about 45 min North of Enterprise – right beside rushing water. So comfortable to be back in the tent. The huge shocker today was the fact that daylight ended Yikes!!!

My intent was to analyze this text, working through each concrete step of the phenomenological process as an example of how I plan to analyze data for the proposed research. Of note is that this text comes from a group journal of the aforementioned expedition in which group members rotated entries among themselves, detailing in a

book the unique flavor of one particular trip. Only half of the group members of this particular expedition actually finished the route. This was not a personal journal, though this entry was written by one person. To muster “a sense of the whole,” I reread the entire group journal twice and then concentrated on the last 10 days of the journey, reading this portion of the text many times (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p.251). I obtained a sense of the end of the journey as described in this journal consistent with Step 1 of the phenomenological research process. This reading took several hours, as I wanted to grasp the holistic aura of the journeys completion based solely upon the writers’ descriptions.

Trying to bracket out any presuppositions of my own with regard to returning from an expedition, I next concentrated only on the text chosen for analysis. I read the text wanting to grasp what it was like for this woman to return from a wilderness expedition. I perseverated upon it, sorting through it line by line, meticulously marking each grouping of text by content as specified in Step 2 of the research process. Each delineation of meaning and every solitary batch of thought were highlighted in which I felt the woman’s description of the experience of coming home was palpable. The following are those “meaning discriminations” (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 252):

- 1) a bit of shopping during the afternoon
- 2) a lot of shock at suddenly being back in a city
- 3) We were off on the dirt/gravel road heading South by 6:30 pm.
- 4) Camped at a nice falls campground – right beside rushing water. So comfortable to be back in the tent.
- 5) The huge shocker today was the fact that daylight ended. Yikes!!! We hardly knew what to do when night began to set in.

Step 3 in the methodology entails rewording the identified content groupings into short phrases in which the central meaning of the groupings becomes clearer using more of a psychological language. This step was completed while blocking out any preconceived ideas or thoughts concerning postexpedition return. I included relevant notes under Step 3 to assist the reader who has not had the advantage of a holistic approach to this journal as I have had. In reading all of the journal entries, certain components concerning the Arctic and the actual expedition stood out, which became pertinent when writing Step 3.

Table 1

Data Analysis Example

Example Data Analysis of Giorgi Methodology Steps Two and Three	
Step two	Step three
A bit of shopping in the afternoon	Within minutes of returning to a large urban center, participant engaged in a normal, ordinary activity. She made a point of time reference to this activity. Note: Participants did not wear watches on the expedition and daylight is not easily discernible into morning, afternoon or evening increments in the high Arctic during summer months.

Step two	Step three
a lot of shock at suddenly being back in a city	Participant reports feeling hugely disconcerted at suddenly being in an urban center once again. She relates that there is a component of change which occurred over a short amount of time.
we were off on a dirt/gravel road heading south by 6:30 pm.	Within a brief time span of arriving in the urban center, participant reports she was traveling on a specific kind of road giving both direction of travel and time of departure. Driving is considered an ordinary activity. Time referenced. (Note: There are no roads in the portion of the Arctic the participant traveled in the preceding seven weeks.)
Camped at a nice falls campground - right beside rushing water. So comfortable to be back in the tent.	Participant reports camping at a campground which is described positively. Location of campground noted being in near proximity to moving water. She is psychologically comforted at being able to sleep/rest under a tent. (Note: Participant had slept under a roof the previous night and in a tent much of the preceding expedition)

Step two	Step three
The huge shocker today was the fact that daylight <u>ended</u> . Yikes!! We hardly knew what to do when night began to set in.	Much psychological stress noted when daylight ceased. Event described as a particular point in time. Acknowledges that this was the largest event of the day with the participant not really aware of what to do, feeling disconcerted without 24 hour sunlight.

Note. The high Arctic receives non-stop sunlight 24 hours a day with the participant presumably not having witnessed encompassing darkness for a period of approximately 2 months.

Writing Steps 2 and 3 was difficult and time-consuming, as it was challenging not to lose the flavor and intent of the participant's words yet to elaborate on the psychological meanings those words conveyed. I strove to be accurate yet descriptive.

As the final step in the Giorgi methodology and based on the findings of Step 3, a brief descriptive narrative is offered of the experience of returning from a wilderness expedition. Be aware that this description reflects one person's experience of this event. The actual data analysis does not attempt such a summative narrative description from one person's input but rather from 11 individuals' more lengthy journal entries and Internet discussions. Bracketing of presuppositions and previous expedition reentry experience was maintained.

Returning from a wilderness expedition entails a return to ordinary activities such as shopping and driving. Disconcerted feelings are roused by the seemingly non-particular such as the falling of darkness and the navigating of an urban center.

Reference to points in time is a common activity for someone returning from a wilderness expedition. Comfort may be obtained from exposure to those elements normally associated with a wilderness expedition such as sleeping near running water, camping in a tent and resting at a campground near a falls.

There was too little data to arrange content into subheadings or themes.

Methodological Rigor

Rigor was maintained to legitimize the qualitative research process (Tobin & Begley, 2004). There are several descriptive methods outlining traditions of upholding rigor in qualitative research (Hall & Stevens, 1991; Leininger, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tobin & Begley, 2004). Bailey (1997), however, admits gleaning a true understanding from the literature of just how to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research is difficult. This is especially professed by those who may not entirely understand qualitative inquiry (Tobin & Begley, 2004). I have attempted to establish trustworthiness in this study by incorporating two sources of data collection into the data analysis. The shared content of both sources serves to increase the believability of that data by cross-referencing it.

My study followed the criteria presented in Hall and Stevens (1991) in which dependability and adequacy are used to substantiate the quality of the research. Dependability is maintained through a strict adherence to documenting, explaining, and analyzing a researcher's path through the methodological maze of collecting, sorting, pondering, coding, evaluating, and describing data (Hall & Stevens, 1991). It was met by several online discussions or phone calls with my major professor over the course of the dissertation research.

Adequacy was met using the criteria outlined by Hall and Stevens (1991): reflexivity, rapport, coherence, complexity, consensus, relevance, honesty, mutuality, naming, and relationality. Overall, “adequacy of inquiry implies that research processes and outcomes are well grounded, cogent, justifiable, relevant, and meaningful” (p. 20).

Reflexivity concerns being aware of one’s own biases and assumptions and how these are woven into the research process. Existential bracketing, examined in the previous section, was an example of one of the ways I was especially cognizant of my own attitudes concerning this research. Credibility implies describing participants’ experiences such that all members of the community believe the explanations. I believe this legitimizing protocol was most applicable to the latter steps of Giorgi’s research process, the transitioning of data into professional language and the “imaginative variation” he professes (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Rapport “is a criterion of adequacy reflecting how well participants’ reality is accessed” (Hall & Stevens, 1991, p. 22). Having completed and experienced the phenomenon under review personally several times, I have already lived the event, which I believe assisted me in truly understanding the women’s experience of returning from a wilderness expedition.

Coherence additionally authenticates the adequacy of the study. It was maintained by assuring that research results are logically evolved from raw data. The research conclusions should be reflections of the participants’ experiences. There is debate in the literature over using audit trails, the external review of the flow of inquiry by an ‘expert’ (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004; Sandelowski, 1999). This study was continuously reviewed by my major professor. Pursuing a phenomenological course of study, I hoped to

accurately describe the experience of returning from a wilderness expedition as written by returning women voyagers.

Complexity as related by Hall and Stevens (1991) entails capturing the wholeness of women's experiences. I adhered to this principle by examining the entire lived experience of postexpedition women by unfolding their real consciousness of the event itself. Relevance of research suggests a benefit can be gleaned from the findings especially poignant to the lives of women. I cannot stress how important I believe this research is to uncovering the transitional experience of returning from wilderness expeditions.

I strictly followed the tenets of honesty and mutuality within my research mode, as confidentiality, respect and the common rights of research participants were not jeopardized in any way. Naming, another criterion of adequacy in qualitative research, "is defined as learning to see beyond and behind what one has been socialized to believe is there" (Hall & Stevens, 1991, p. 26). It entailed endeavoring to understand the phenomenon under review from a feminine gendered perspective. Relationality is the process of working together. It is collaboration with group members interested, knowledgeable, and supportive with regard to the study. I adhered to this last criterion of adequacy by surrounding myself with intelligent, resourceful peers and advisors that were readily available to me.

Protection of Human Subjects

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board and the Northern Michigan University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved all study procedures prior to any instigation of this proposed research. Prospective

participants were apprised of the potentially minimal risk inherent in this study: that of uncovering possibly difficult, disturbing feelings or memories. Benefits possibly attributed to this research included a sense of closure or fond nostalgia at retelling or rereading past experiences. The time period involved in completing the task of being a participant in this study was between 2 and 3 hours spent in Internet discussion and an hour for finding, preparing, and posting the original journals. This time commitment was conveyed to potential participants. Informed consent was garnered and maintained before any exchange of experiential information occurred between the participants and me.

Confidentiality was secured and kept by implementing ID numbers and pseudonyms instead of using real identities. Additionally, the sensitive nature of journal/Internet entries entailed strict adherence to nondisclosure of all confidential elements relating to this study except with the major professor. Identifying data was kept separate from journal/Internet entries. All information was housed in a locked compartment within my domicile. No fee was demanded nor reward promised of participants other than the compensatory cash payment for postage and handling of the journals at the time of enrollment in the study. Participants thoroughly understood their participation in this research was voluntary and that their ability to withdraw from the study was without retribution. My home address, telephone number and e-mail address were shared with the participants as well as the university phone number and address of the major professor in case direct contact had been desired with either party for questions or concerns.

CHAPTER FOUR - DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

This chapter consists of three parts: the first section is a summary of expedition statistics whereas the second section is a brief demographic summary of each participant. Finally, a general description of the journals and subsequent e-mails is included to better detail the written quality and quantity of data. The specific year each woman completed her expedition is not provided in an effort to conceal any possible identifying characteristics. I have tried to impart some sort of background information for each participant while simultaneously keeping her identity confidential. This may be construed as being too general, but these women are easily characterized by their expedition colleagues on this most prestigious adventure. I did not want in any way to jeopardize their identity.

Expedition Statistics

Participants in this research study focusing on the description of what it is like to return from a wilderness expedition, currently reported their ages from 21 to 33 years with the median age being 27 years. All 11 women completed at least a 42-day canoeing expedition with Camp Manito-wish YMCA during the years 1995–2003. At the time of the expedition, 5 women reported being classified as *campers* on the trip whereas 6 identified with being “staff-in-training.” Women who were campers at the time of the expedition all were aged 17 or 18 years of age, whereas the staff members on the trips were several years older ranging from 19 to 22 years of age when they completed their journeys. There were 5 women on three different trips who were members of expeditions I led. Additionally, 3 women were on the trail at the same time as I but on different expeditions. Finally, 3 women who enrolled in the study were entirely unknown to me.

The first 9 days of each expedition were identical on a map with groups completing the same large water crossing over Wollaston Lake in northern Saskatchewan, the myriad of portages around rapids on the Cochran River and the well-trod watershed crossing to the Theliawaza river system into Kasmere Lake in northern Manitoba. From this point, several women ventured north to Kasba Lake, down the great Kazan River, and watershed crossed into the upper Kognak River while the other adventurers paddled down the Theliawaza River to the breathtakingly huge Nueltin Lake. After spending 1 to 2 weeks paddling this massive body of Nunavut freshwater, some women watershed crossed to the Kognak River from Sealhole Lake while others continued down the Theliawaza River to Hudson Bay. Travelers on the Kognak River eventually paddled to the Tha-anne River, which empties into Hudson Bay and shares a delta with the Theliawaza River. All groups then spent time paddling the 50 miles on the Bay towards the Inuit town of Arviat. Only one group was unable to complete this Arctic Ocean portion of the trip because of a polar bear encounter, which subsequently forced their immediate evacuation. These attacked women were rescued from the tidal flats approximately 2 days before reaching the town in canoes and were delivered to Arviat early but safely. Overall, though, in plotting out these trips on a map, the reader will notice how similar in length, terrain and locale each adventure was.

All expedition participants reported being on the trail between 46 to 51 days. Groups traveled between 711 to 743 miles in total distance. The difference in days over nearly identical routes is attributed to the time allowed for the expedition, an extraneous number of days preassigned by the administration at Camp Manito-wish YMCA. Consequently, as an example, covering over 700 miles in 51 windy days may be more

challenging than covering over 700 miles in 46 calm days. Only one trip reported being late in that they paddled in after their preassigned number of days was completed. This group was boxed in by shifting ice on Nueltin Lake, a very cold and deep body of water over 125 miles long, and was forced to wait 1 week for this frozen mass to melt and sink. Another group reported an injury severe enough to abandon a canoe nearly two thirds of the way through their trip, and quickly make their way to Arviat for medical care, arriving well ahead of the preassigned number of trail days.

Women reported viewing different wildlife including but not limited to Arctic wolves, Sandhill cranes, inland seals, barren-ground caribou, beluga whale, Arctic grayling, and tundra swans. In reading the journals, some women's trips seemed to battle black flies and Arctic mosquitoes nearly incessantly, whereas other trips, though never completely without these annoying creatures, did not share the same miserable fate.

Similarly, while reviewing journals, weather conditions on each of the expeditions were unique to that particular group, sometimes varying dramatically depending upon both the year of the expedition as well as the locale of the trip. Groups may have been 30 miles apart geographically for several weeks as they paddled parallel river systems to the Bay, but temperatures were completely different. One group reported much colder weather with windier days and consequently fewer bugs, whereas the southern route enjoyed relatively balmy weather with magnificent numbers of insects. Overall temperatures of the groups fluctuated dramatically from 33 to over 100°F. Windchills dropped to below 0°F in 50 mile-an-hour winds on one frigid occasion. These specific numbers were confirmed by an outside scientific source, which two groups ran into during the trips. This source consisted of a research group studying in the McConnell

Bird Sanctuary on Hudson Bay. The scientists noted the exact reading on their helicopter wind gauge and thermometer during the extreme cold. Another source, a Kasba Lake fishing guide, confirmed the upper temperature range of the expeditions by reporting his lodge's thermometer reading of the over 100°F temperature during one group's resupply.

Participant Demographics

Some aspects of the demographics have been altered to better maintain the identity of each participant. There were a total of 11 participants in this research project.

Participant One - Jane

Jane is 21 years old. She submitted a journal that was 124 pages in length. It was well-worn and compact measuring 4 by 6 inches in area. At the end of her expedition, she reported going to college and has most recently completed a degree in communication/outdoor recreation. She lives in a rural town in Wisconsin.

Participant Two - Keisha

Keisha is 22 years of age and lives in an urban area. She began her senior year in high school after her expedition and is now completing a college degree in environmental studies and finance. Her journal was 181 pages in length with a small portion, approximately 8 total pages, blocked out so as to be unable to be read.

Participant Three - Ina

Ina lives in a midsized town in Wisconsin and is 23 years old. After her expedition, she returned to her senior year of high school. She is currently a secondary education teacher and has started a graduate program. Her journal was 148 in length and written on waterproof paper.

Participant Four - Kate

Kate lives in an urban center in the South and is now 26 years old. She completed her senior year of high school after the expedition. Currently, she teaches eighth grade social studies. Kate sent me a copy of her journal, which was 120 pages in length.

Participant Five - Betsy

Betsy sent a journal, which was 206 pages in length. It included challenging handwriting, which took some deciphering to read. She is currently 28 years old and lives in an eastern urban area after recently graduating with a graduate degree in environmental sciences and policy. Following her expedition, she began her senior year in high school.

Participant Six - Padma

Currently Padma lives in a midsized town in Wisconsin. She is 28 years old and teaches middle school. After her expedition, she completed her senior year in high school. Her journal numbered 230 pages in length. It contained exquisite handwriting.

Participant Seven - Lisa

Lisa lives in the western United States and is 29 years old. She is an engineer. After her expedition, she completed her senior year in high school. She sent a copy of a journal, which was 168 pages in length with approximately 4 pages blocked off with white paper. Her journal included numerous samples of plants and flowers.

Participant Eight - Pat

After the expedition, Pat returned to a Midwestern college. She is now 29 years old and teaches for a living in a small Midwestern town. She sent a 124 page journal to me in immaculate condition.

Participant Nine - Kim

Kim is 29 years old and living in a midsized Wisconsin town. After the expedition, Kim returned to a university in the Midwest. She sent a journal of 133 pages in length, which contained very challenging handwriting to decipher. She currently works in an outdoor services field of employment

Participant Ten - Sam

Sam is 31 years of age. She sent me a copy of her journal with approximately 9 pages blocked out. It was 75 large pages in length. Following the expedition, she began her junior year in college and is now pursuing a graduate degree at a large Midwestern university.

Participant Eleven - Tess

After the expedition, Tess went back to college at a Wisconsin school. She is now 33 years old and works in health care. Her journal was 73 pages in length and was very easy to read.

Journal and E-mail Description

Journals ranged from 73 to 230 pages in length. These documents varied in size from small, 24 inch square bundles of paper to large 10 x 12 pieces of loose-leaf. Handwriting was thankfully legible throughout much of the over 1,500 pages of journal entries I received. Only two journals needed extra time to decipher compared to the other journals. Most journals were wire-bound notebooks, but some were extensively covered in colored paper and poems, like small craft projects. One journal was waterproof with smudge-proof pages.

All journals incorporated other information in addition to specific entries concerning the expedition. Such information included some of the following but was not limited to a menu list of all the meals eaten over the course of the adventure with portions of each food listed separately; equipment list of all personnel gear on the trip; recipes of certain meals; literary quotes; popular sayings of a particular trip; list of all wildlife seen; list of all meaningful/important events; drawings of nature; letters to loved ones; pressed flies, flowers and plants; and addresses of both trip members and people met along the route. Approximately four journals included worn loose-leaf pages of academic papers written about the expedition and within the first several months of returning from the trip. These pages were placed within the pages of the journal and were subsequently included in the analysis of the journal content, as it seemed as though the explorer considered them part of the journals.

Subsequent e-mails were received from every participant except 1 woman. She was sent one reminder postcard and two e-mails, but no communication was received from her after she had sent in her journal. E-mails were all single-spaced, and approximately 2-4 large paragraphs in length. These exchanges were information dense in that, unlike the journals, a woman might spend three pages writing about the beauty of a bird; the e-mails were highly concentrated data specifically related to what it was like to return from a wilderness expedition. Participants seemed very willing to e-mail me further content above and beyond what was recorded in their journals.

CHAPTER FIVE - FINDINGS RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

How do young women returning from a wilderness expedition describe the expedition experience?

Introduction

The previous question begs a brief examination. During the course of data analysis, it was found that women going on an expedition begin to mentally prepare for returning from that expedition sometimes before the expedition had even begun. Women returning from an expedition do so in their minds long before they do so with their bodies. They wonder about what it will be like to see family and friends again; some even contemplate melting into the arms of loved ones and how wonderful that will feel weeks before the actual event; therefore, upon closer scrutiny of the wording of this research question, I believe that the description of the expedition by women returning from that expedition began with the initial entry in their journals and ended with their actual arrival in the town of Arviat on Hudson Bay. At that point, their subsequent entries are distinctly descriptive of a return process more suited for the analysis of the next research question in this dissertation found in chapter 6. What follows is the descriptive thematic analysis of an expedition experience as written by women mentally preparing for the return from that expedition.

Upon extensive examination of over 1,500 pages of journal entries from 11 young women, three prominent themes emerged. These themes were all based upon some sort of relationship between the women themselves and the situation in which they were. These themes include connection to the journey, connection to the land, and connection to

oneself and the group. In reading the participants' journals, most of the content fell into one of these three areas. The themes materialized through a lens of attachment, a perception of relationship. In such a group experience as this, where connection to oneself, the group, and the land is critical to one's own survival, it is congruent that the emerging themes reflected this relationship. The data was immense but aligned itself easily within one of these three domains focusing on connection.

Analysis of Themes

The women's stories were viewed as one entity to better maintain confidentiality and reflect a holistic pattern of all of their writings. Their words were combined into one large grid before broken into themes and prospective subheadings. The themes are loosely ordered chronologically, reflecting their first appearance within the journal pages. There was a sense that women viewed the journey as a huge event, a massive unknown, even before they arrived at the camp. This theme is examined first. Second, women wrote of the immensity of the land and its surroundings prior to finally focusing on themselves and their trip group, though much intermingling of themes does occur within journal pages. An initial pre-expedition contemplation period occurred for several women, as they journaled about their experience before the first trail day began. This is included at the beginning of the description of the themes. It provides a short background for the reader of the mindset of some pre-expedition women. Table 2 summarizes the findings uncovered by this phenomenological analysis.

Table 2

Thematic Description of Expedition

 Thematic Description of a Wilderness Expedition

Pre-expedition Contemplation

Fear of the Unknown

Anticipation of Growth

Connection with Journey

Simplicity

Passage of Time

Connection with Land

Nature as Inspiration

Beauty of the land

Beauty of the animals

Beauty of the water

Beauty of the culture

Spiritual awakening

Nature as Challenging

Unpredictable randomness

Arctic wind

Arctic cold

Expedition bugs

The Bay

Connection with People

Personal Struggle

Physical

General hardship

Pain

Route complaints

Mental

Hard skills

Homesickness

Individual issues

Group Dynamics

General group issues

Issues with leaders

Leading among leaders

Participant conflict with leaders

Issues with other trip participants

Personal and Group Growth

Within this narrative description, sometimes the day upon which the journal entry was written is provided for the reader in that it was relevant to that specific quotation. Days are given as Day 1 or Day 10 meaning the first or the tenth day of the actual expedition from the put-in entry point. Often specific trail days are not provided, as entries were viewed as a pool, purposefully not tied to time or locale. Components of themes emerged only in relation to themselves, though periodically it was noted that the nature of the entries changed. This change often coincided with the inevitable completion of the journey, as the groups paddled to the end of the adventure; sometimes the nature of the entries and their individual focus changed. Where pertinent, the time of the journal entry is included based upon the trip progress.

Themes

Women write of a connection to the journey itself. There is something about the simplicity and passage of time, which allows them to identify with the expedition as an entity. This abstract relationship is present but separate from the second uncovered theme of connection to land. The experience with the land is more concrete and better detailed, providing inspiration as well as challenge to the explorers. A kind of love/hate affair with

the physical environment is indicative of this theme. The final theme centers on the social realities of living very closely with a small group of women for approximately 2 months. Such confines inevitably lead to conflict within the groups as well as further challenge for the individual, ultimately leading to personal and group growth.

As much as possible, the original entries in the form of quotations by the participants are included to assist theme development. These quotations are provided in the each writer's particular style, often with spelling errors and/or incorrect grammar. Some names and numbers, such as the count of participants on an expedition or the number of canoes present on a trip, have been altered for the purposes of maintaining confidentiality to the best of my ability.

Pre-expedition Contemplation

As the women arrived at Camp Manito-wish YMCA for the first days of training before they headed North for their expeditions, there was an overwhelming sense of emotion within them. Excited yet nervous were the prevailing sentiments of the participants as noted with this entry:

We've all arrived feeling a little numb, not knowing what to expect. People would ask me if I was excited and I wasn't sure precisely what I was feeling, was it excitement, was it nervousness, was it apprehension, was it nothing. These feelings I was feeling, I am scared, I am anxious, I am confident and yet incredibly, I am nervous. Talk about living life and experiencing emotions – this is it! As I switch from one emotion to the next I feel a bit out of wack, but yet totally centered.

Most of the participants wrote of jumbled thoughts and feelings at this early stage in the experience, yet this emotion was tied to two overwhelming topics: fear of the unknown and anticipation of growth.

Fear of the unknown

Not knowing the future seemed to force some participants to miss family and friends left behind. One adventurer wrote the following

I guess I am slowly ... and painfully – coming to grips with this confusion, fear and anxiety I have felt for so long about this trip. Things are still so far away from me, maybe it is alone that I feel. The people we are leaving behind at school and home, and at camp are fairly out of reach. I'm not sure if that's my fault. I am tempted to screw it and just deal with what is ahead, but I think too much to allow that. There are strings I have not tied off yet that I worry about.

Women described that they knew they would miss these loved ones but that somehow the summer would pass and they would return. "It's good for me to have some time away from him, but it's hard," wrote one woman. She later detailed that regardless of the pain, she would make the most of it and persevere because she knew the trip would pass quickly.

Pretrip training typically encouraged participants to voice their fears and concerns to their groups. Such conversation seemed to trigger further thoughts in their journals as well. Women additionally wrote of more concrete fears, such as potential issues with group dynamics, weather concerns, self-doubts about their own strength, and a general dread of the unknown. Some women, even before the trip had begun, began to anticipate the return. One explorer chronicled the following:

I know one of the biggest challenges will be the emersion back into society. I guess I can't be totally prepared for that, but like everything, being aware of what's possibly around the corner and keeping my head on straight will help in the transition.

Anticipation of growth

Within the fleeting fears and anxieties expressed by nearly every expedition participant was the overwhelming wish to learn on the expedition. While still at camp, they very much wanted to improve some aspect of themselves as well as accomplish something, as a member of their group as evidenced by this journal entry:

Attitude is the key and I pray that everyone in the group has what it takes to meet this challenge and complete the trip. This is major, the most intense experience yet, we all know it, together we will tackle the obstacles, overcome adversity, learn about ourselves and others and laugh.

Women wrote of learning everything new that comes their way, gaining insight, experiencing everything they could. There was almost a sense of urgency to not let this opportunity pass. "I'm really excited to get out on trail. Back to the simple life. The Wilderness is calling. I also have so many goals and things I would like to improve on myself."

Women wrestled with their goals as they identified their new role within their expedition group. They first sensed their position within the trip and adjusted their objectives accordingly. This woman wrote of her role within a group of staff members led by two more experienced staff members:

I've seen something in myself, that's relatively new. I want to lead. Having to suppress that leadership role in such a way as to act as a camper is constraining. I want to be instrumental in all aspects. I'm sure this hunger for control and influence will be satisfied once we begin our trip, but these last few days have been challenging for me.

Another woman, also on a staff trip, wrote the following:

All of these people are very far away from you right now, but that will not last, You are very far from yourself and have been for some time. Coming back to the center is not instantaneous, it is a path, so calm down, clear your head and follow it back home...and don't think so much.

Pre-expedition contemplation seemed to intensify as women left camp and were driven closer to the starting point of the expeditions. They were given a send-off, more of a somber moment of understanding by postexpedition people at camp, who seemed to know what the groups might face. This letter was written by one of those expedition survivors and taped to the red STOP sign leaving camp property. It is from a man who journeyed on one of the 1990 expeditions to Hudson Bay and was included in one of the participant's journals:

Men and Women who head North to paddle – You are lucky – there remain places nearly untouched, where the land faces the alterations of only Nature's design – you are headed there. Your adventure is a continuation of your personal development and a continuation of the spirit of voyageurs. Success will not be measured by abstracted goals on paper or by the preconceptions of others –

success will lie in the shooting of a rapid, the creation of golden cornbread, the living of each day's life.

There was more time on the *road show*, this drive from Wisconsin to Saskatchewan, to think as the groups traveled through hundreds of miles to the drop-off point. One woman commented as follows:

It is tough for me to comprehend that I am just starting the journal that will hopefully record everything from this experience. Once again (I remember feeling this on trips past) I cannot comprehend that this 3 day road show will end in 52 days on the trail. I never thought this day would come. I guess despite my apprehensions I am ready for this. I know that I am more ready for this now than I would have been last year.

Further mental preparation for study participants occurred until finally the group arrived at their put-in spots. Women wrote more that they were thinking what lay in the days to come, that anxiety yet excitement was increasing, and that as they drew nearer and nearer to the end of driving, many just "wanted to get in the boats and go." One woman summed it up by writing the following:

Nervously, with apprehension of the unknown we unloaded the trailers and organized our gear. We creatively packed all our gear into the boats. Four canoes, eleven packs, 400 pounds of food, three-three person tents, two first aid kits and one emergency radio were just a few items of our gear. Before we left the boat landing, and the world as we knew it, we gathered in a circle and cheered.

Connection with Journey

Upon entering the expedition, a relationship developed between the paddler and her sense of being. It is not concrete but more abstract in nature. It is a perception of time and purpose tied directly to the canoeing way of life, as the journey passed through an ancient land.

"Coming home"

Nearly every woman in this study mentioned that she was home in the wilderness. Whether they referred to it as a second home or home, there was no denying that this wilderness was the place that many of them were very comfortable. One woman contemplated: "I just got this feeling that this is home. We take our home with us, and always can feel it. I guess home is merely an essence, or a feeling – not a physical place." Another mentioned the following: "I can't believe I'm on trail again! It is such an unbelievably amazing and refreshing feeling! I didn't expect to be so happy about it, but I feel like I just came home." Repeatedly, the women wrote about being at home or feeling at home. "I am not needing to get 'adjusted' to trail. I feel like this is just picking up exactly where my canuck left off, only better and with my friends....," a paddler recorded in a journal, as she compared her 35-day Saskatchewan canoe trip, the Canuck, to her current 48-day expedition. Still another explorer echoed her thoughts:

I am hoping to find once again what I found two years ago out in the wilderness. When I left the trail, I left a home; a way of life. I feel like I've been out of touch with that life for so long that I can hardly remember what it is like. All I can remember is how great it was. And I remember reminding myself on the 34th day of my canuck that that was "the life" and I was never to forget it. But I have, and

trying to re-discover it scares me. But I know it is something I need to do for myself and that's why I'm here. I can do this; we can do this. Together.

Several women wrote that "there's no other place I'd rather be." They really wanted to be where they were. Another commented, "I don't believe I'm here, Feels good to be back. I'll be here for a while." For many, the connection to the journey is absolute. "I don't miss home one bit. I love it here. The tundra is beautiful. ...The constant buzzing o' the mosquitoes is unnerving. I feel soon though, it will become a sense o' home..." One paddler recounted how her leader had actually mentioned that although the group passed briefly through the land, the trail would become their home. It would remain their home for the next 50 or so days, thus giving added perspective to the nomadic journey. Another mentioned that, "It's so exciting to paddle once again, only after a year's wait!"

Simplicity

Nearly all of the women at one time in their journals commented upon the simplicity of trail life as noted with this entry:

I came to love the simplicity of being on trail, the ability to live with so little and yet be perfectly content with that amount. This simplicity was aided by only dealing with a small group of people that had little opportunity to be influenced by outside forces. In essence, I was able, and in some ways forced, to shed all layers to work with the group.

Women further recalled that the point, the reason for being out there was so basic. One paddler remembered her earlier trips, writing that for her 14-day canoe trip she was taught how to use equipment, for her 35-day canoe trip she perfected that usage, whereas for her expedition "the goal is just to get from point A to point B, no matter how you

have to treat the equipment.” The motto seemed very direct: Do the mileage and after counting up all of the days, the voyage is over. One woman wrote the following: “It still blows my mind that we get up every morning and basically pack up our lives and move on. Like true nomads.” Another canoer recounted that her more difficult questions on the trail were when to eat: before or after the portage. She summed it up as “life out here is so nice. Hard but simple.” A routine developed for some: “She asked if it’s a lifestyle for me, it is a routine, not a lifestyle yet. I am slowly becoming invested in this thing and this place....”

The routine became automatic. “The days are becoming more and more simple it seems, because you quickly load the boats as a crew, chow scrumptious breakfast, paddle, chow, paddle, set-up camp, chow, ... and write in my journal: It seems so simple.”

Another voyager wrote that this life was its own civilization, her own community at present. It was basic with its own normal purpose. Another compared her birthday, which she celebrated on the trail, to a time when now she could rent R-rated movies and do some college shopping but that “instead here I am in the middle of Nunavut where age has little relevance. Life here is amazing. The land, people, history, simplicity, and adventure.”

With time, the simple routine seemed to develop into a way of life, a kind of lifestyle for the women. Several mentioned doing it forever; they schemed about how to keep on paddling once they reached the Arctic town of Arviat on Hudson Bay. This routine, rise and paddle and sleep, became ingrained in their sense of purpose, as one woman journaled the following:

Today this all became my lifestyle. It is just what you do. The huge waves took me in. As I sat almost within them, the power took my mind away. It surged and threw itself over the rocks edges. It is fierce and powerful and beautiful.

Another woman recounted that she was almost jealous of those that lived there as the world was so beautiful in the north country; she additionally exclaimed that with the passage of time, her comfort level rose, and her perception of that time shifted into a kind of obscurity. Her journal entry follows:

All the doubts of days before are quickly drifting away. I am more acquainted to this lifestyle and my shoulders are sore but doing so much better than last year. I wish I could remember what else I thought today but the days are long and the things are easily forgotten.

Passage of time

Evident in the last quotation, this lifestyle seemed to possess a unique sense of time or lack thereof. Time flew on the trail. It slipped past the explorers so fast that repeatedly journal entries began with comments such as “I can’t believe it’s day 29 already – that is crazy!” or “We like ‘av [sic] gone 340 miles already. It just seems like yesterday.” Most women on the trail do not wear watches or any other time piece. The leader may possess a watch for medical reasons should she need to count respirations or check a pulse, but normally very few people like to know what time it is. Nearly every woman commented in some manner that time was hurrying past her as described in this entry:

Time is FLYING out here. I keep saying it, but it’s so true. I just can’t get over that. I mean, wasn’t it yesterday that we got off Wollasten Lake? Time is so

relative, that fact is just more evident up here where we are left to our own devices.

Another paddler commented the following:

I need to write good creative stuff but I don't have the time or energy... Wow! The days have gone fast & me & all of us so busy. No time to write. I'm falling asleep. I'll wake up all too soon & do it all over again. But I'm loving it. Which isn't to say I won't love having more time to read and write... When you're out here you don't have to live by the clock & be on the same schedule as society; That's one of the beauties of trail life.

There were times when the trip was challenging, yet this sense of time slipping past them almost helped the voyagers rally to endure. "No matter how cranky I get, or miserable I am, I still enjoy this. How wonderful these moments are, and what is life, but all these moments strung together." This paddler later recounted another description of the expedition and time:

Thinking a lot about tripping. Why it becomes an addiction. I don't think anyone would understand without doing it themselves. It's about not having a concept of time. Eat when we're hungry, sleep when we're tired, & paddle the rest of the time. I love it. It is simple. It is life stripped of complications. We work until our bodies are exhausted & go to bed with a feeling of accomplishment that is rare in our sugar-coated society.

Still another expeditioner echoed this warped concept of time: "I am getting my days confused. That is a good sign. For me that is, everything is blending in more and more, it seems like one long day. Cool. Every day the trip becomes more enjoyable."

Many women knew the number of days of the trip; they sensed when they had been on their longest trail day ever. "The end of today marks the longest I've been on the trail. The Western was 21 days...wahoo," she wrote as she compared this journey to the backpacking trip offered by Camp Manito-wish, which is traditionally 21 days in length. Another commented: "From here on out I'm doing the Expo and every day will be my longest canoe trip." Still another reported the following: "Oh my goodness. At TL (trail lunch) that was the longest I've ever been on the trail, I sure don't feel any different. Ha! What a fantastic motorful day." Having been on the trail the longest ever for some women was an important milestone, which was recognized even when time seemed an elusive concept. One journal entry follows:

Finally some women gained a new understanding of time.

The one thing I've really become aware of today is that you can't save time, you can only spend it, and while everyone tries to save time, in reality, they're only wasting it. What a thought – you can only spend time, but you can spend it wisely or you can spend it foolishly.

Connection with Land

Travelers to this kind of country did not easily dismiss the beauty and immensity of the land. A relationship developed begging respect:

I entered an element today that I have never been in, ever. The tundra is this knowing, powerful expanse. It demands respect, not forcefully though. It seems to say that if you choose to enter it, there is no option, but to respect it. So I do.

Women both adored and cursed this nature, often in the same journal entry. Their feelings were expressed in a twofold manner, much like the duality intrinsic to the land. One woman recorded the following:

Alisoun just finished singing us a lullaby. Perfect way to end the day - @ our campsite tonight we've had a full rainbow, a gorgeous sunset, a caribou, mac & cheese, and hot drinks. But the day was tough – freezing cold at 45 degrees, rapids, very strong headwinds, and a rain which hurt when it pelted your face.

Nature as inspiration

It was impossible to read over 1,500 pages of journal entries and not be dumbfounded by the immensity of the beauty the women described so eloquently within those private pages. Constantly, there were references to the majestic wonder of the land, including raging whitewater, land/sea animals, the weather, and the Bay. For many, a gratitude seemed deeply inherent; they could not have ignored it if they had tried.

Beauty of the land.

Women recorded that such beauty brought them to tears. Never had they ever witnessed such nature that actually hurt it was so incredible. “The whole day was beautiful!! The beauty was so intense, it hurt. I was on the brink of tears. I have never seen such beauty in my whole life.” Rivers were “gorgeous beyond words” and the “area dreams are made of.” Colors seemed to be their most vibrant and diverse array ever. “I swear that the colors I’ve seen in the past few days have been so intense – the brightest blue, deepest purple, prettiest pink and blazing orange. Incredible.” Another commented that the “tundra was awesome – emerald green spaces among deep blue river.”

There were more rainbows seen by each traveler than they had viewed in their entire lives. Women commented that the sky blossomed from one end of the horizon to the other. Like a “huge bubble,” it dropped down around them in every direction, massive in size. A traveler recorded the following:

I am truly amazed at the beauty of this place. The great sweeps of treeless land split by clear blue or gray water is awe-inspiring. While we've only been amidst the tundra a short time I can't imagine being bored of it as I partly expected I might. Tiny tundra flowers I have yet to explore. The wide open space allows for campsites anywhere, movement anywhere, movement anywhere & the wind; the wonderful wind blows unchecked across the landscape as a protector from the bugs.

It wasn't just the tundra that inspired the travelers. Expedition canoers must journey through 2 to 3 weeks of trees before reaching the barren-grounds. This trip through trees was also breathtaking, described by travelers as the following:

There was mist curling in the distant waters. The different forests of trees layered the lakes outskirts. Rainstorms came and went leaving incredible clouds and patches of blue sky among them. Floods of bright rainbows watched us from overhead as we made our 2 big lake crossings. The moss & lichen amaze me underfoot...

To live and grow and eat surrounded by such beauty did not go unnoticed. One woman whose journal was surprisingly sparse in terms of discussing group dynamics, route specifics, or even bugs mentioned the beauty of the land:

We also had pancakes. The night was incredible. There was a beautiful sunset which Bitsy had as a back-drop while fly-fishing so it looked incredible. We then had a clear stary night w/phenomenal northern lights! It truly was an incredible mix of blues, greens, purples & whites – They seemed to dance across the sky.

Northern lights were more visible the closer the women got to the Bay. As time passed, the ever present light decreased enough for some semblance of night to occur. The timing of this tentative darkness aligned itself with the journey along mudflats and seaweed, as trips paddled 50 miles of treacherous Arctic coastline towards Arviat, their end-point. One woman recorded the words of her tentmate while paddling along the Bay: “In our final hours we awake with the dance of the northern lights and the rise of the morning sun. We paddled under the moonlight towards the glow of our destination.”

There was something special about reaching this massive body of water. One woman commented that it was odd that she had had this as her goal for over a year and then to finally see it: “Unbelievable.” Another made the following comments:

Then we saw the mouth of the river & Hudson Bay! Absolutely incredible! It did look as I imagined it...entering the Bay was amazing. It has been just as I expected it only more incredible & different from anything I’ve ever experienced. Approaching the Bay we smelled the salty ocean air through our nostrils and felt the moist breeze.

This massive size of the water affected every woman to some extent. No one just arrived at the Bay and did not describe some aspect about it. A traveler recorded:

looking to our right and seeing the vast expanse of the Bay. Amazed at it's hugeness, and me feeling almost comfortable with the unknown it represents. Just as silence set in again, a huge shooting star blazed over us and we were taken.

The Bay was described as refreshing, beautiful, marvelous, and amazing. Women wrote that people on their journeys were "awe-struck and mesmerized" by its "vast openness of water and sky."

Beauty of the animals.

Women were not just amazed by the land or the Bay but by its inhabitants as well. They wrote about viewing polar bears, caribou, birds, and whales with awe and amazement:

We experienced an incredible site today. An entire herd of caribou along the river's edge. It was amazing. They were bleating, grunts and snorting as they clipped their feet and grazed along the shore. We were able to float right next to them without them getting too spooked-out. I felt as if I was at a petting zoo. We are so lucky...

As the caribou migrated northwards in their quest for calving grounds, these animals intersected expedition routes. Trips had to wait while hundreds of animals crossed the river in front of them or were privy to scores of visitors to their tundra campsites. On describing the caribou, one woman wrote, "They blend in really well with the land. We saw across the river on the other shore another herd. It looked like the land was just moving until you saw antlers & realized what they were." One explorer recorded, "They seem to be watching over us, accompanying us in our travels or better yet are we accompanying them?"

Another group was impressed by the inland seals they saw. The women passed these rare animals swimming up river while the boats were maneuvered downriver through whitewater. Amazed at the animals' ability to swim up the rapids, one woman's contemplation was as follows: "It just shows what a difference there is between different life forms, specifically between humans and seals. Something no human could possibly do. A seal can do with the greatest of ease."

Often women wrote about nature with an appreciation for the life present throughout it. After releasing the first-caught fish as an expression of thanks and hoping it would tell its friends that hungry women would eat the next prize, one explorer recorded the following:

The second, 30 inches, we kept. It was an absolutely beautiful fish. Its body taut and full, speckled like the river bottom. We killed it by smashing its head with a rock. It was very difficult to watch such a beautiful life go and to feed only visitors to its home.

Overall, women greatly appreciated the sacrifice of killing that which fed them periodically. Another traveler, who did not fish but who would eat the fish recorded this: "I am thankful tonight for the full bright gorgeous moon outside our tent, the weather I would ask for in dreams once again, Her the fish who supplied us dinner, and for the sight of so many incredible wonders."

Beauty of the water.

Spending over a thousand hours surrounded by water had an impact on the women. Being a canoe expedition, their entire fate rested with this life source. One woman commented that her tentmate had "said something really cool last night about

being groundless. Our world is water here.” The beauty of it offered contrast to the ever present openness of the spacious tundra. A traveler wrote the following:

We were right next to the Kognak, and it was beautiful. The water was crystal clear, and tasted so great. We then shot 4 sets of rapids on the river onto Hawkhill Lake. Going through the rapids, the river was somewhat narrow, and the hills were huge and green on both sides, and the sun was glistening off the water. It was honestly one of the most beautiful locations I have ever been in.

Rapids and water and land merged to offer a fantastic experience few women did not describe. They often wrote of this exhilarating ride as the following:

It is intense! Huge waves, fast water, quick decisions, strong paddling, beautiful scenery. Set after set, corner after corner, around each bend we were faced with more waves and rocks. We all were experiencing some major adrenaline rushes. It was close sometimes but everyone was successful...It was beautiful! Every sleeper, hole, boil, we maneuvered correctly. Adrenaline flowed through us with every turn of the canoe. Afterwards we looked at each other, knowing we kicked ass! Then into the next set, and low and behold we found the HOLE! It was massive! (The leaders) embraced, we all sighed sighs of relief and looked on with amazement.

Shooting whitewater was an integral part of every expedition. It demanded effective communication, quick reflexes, daring paddling around pillows, and strong braces through huge standing waves. As women recorded these events, their entries speak volumes concerning the emotion felt during the actual experience. A woman recalled her first whitewater on the trip with this entry:

(The leader) held the angle as I made small but crucial maneuvers in directing the boat around holes and boilers. Water crashed down upon me as walls of blue water fell upon me. I was drenched but not my soul. I've never felt so alive. We made it through exactly as we planned. Smiles were plastered on our faces for the rest of the day. It was incredible!

It wasn't just whitewater that awed the participants of these expeditions. They reported huge wind and waves, swells which buried them but through which they needed to paddle for hours. One such entry described this:

I love it here. I was paddling, breaking my back working across the lake and it dawned on me that I love it and doing this and being here. This/that is the moment I look forward to all year. The fight across nature (wind, temperature, the WAVES) and w/our own physical power overcoming it.

Another woman summed up her feeling concerning water while contemplating the days paddle from a hilltop:

The moon is getting full as it rises above the barren outstretches of verdant hills. Deep purple, lavender and grey clouds drift past the now pale white moon of the night to come. Across the sky the sun penetrates to the lake reflecting its warmth and light of the crashing, turbulent water. The water that quenches our thirst, cleans our hands, moves our bodies and souls. All around us is a sense of magic which is felt in all crevasses of the tundra and in every person on this journey.

Beauty of the culture.

Some expeditions spent time learning about the people who at one time inhabited the land through which the travelers were journeying. Theirs is a tragic history of

starvation, forced relocations, abandoned tent circles, and much suffering. Respect was offered to these memories by some of the women as evidenced in the following:

Kasmere was buried standing up facing the North so he could watch his people pass by and wish them luck on their hunt for the caribou. It is sad because now the land is empty. We paid our respects as we passed and asked him to watch us.

Many explorers found empty tent circles of rocks, which at one time had been used to help anchor the homes of the inland Inuit. These circles remain though the people who left them no longer live on the land.

One woman commented on the pain that must have been felt in one particular region of the Kazan watershed. This area was home to hundreds of people approximately 50 years ago, but mass starvation caused the people to move elsewhere. "It was eerie, especially knowing all the hurt and pain from the starving Inuit coming for help in the past. You could almost feel it." Many groups read books or articles that helped educate them about these cultures. One woman wrote the following:

We did a bunch of classes which were great. I learned a lot about the area & culture & history. I just love that we are not just paddling up here but learning about the area & really consciously learning how to be better leaders & people.

Spiritual awakening.

The beauty of the land, the Bay, the animals, and the old culture awakened a sense of gratitude in most women. Many reported being thankful, "under a spell of gratitude & awe," or just plain lucky to have experienced this grandeur. One explorer remarked in the following:

Wow! This land never fails to amaze me. No matter how beautiful the land is, I just have to go around the next river bend, or into the next bay or across the next portage & an even more beautiful view is exposed. I'm ever so grateful for being one of the lucky ones to experience this pure and natural country.

Repeatedly, some women wrote of a spirituality attached to the experience. One woman recounted the following:

In the beauty of my walk I never want to leave this place yet I am so excited to get to the Bay and do the paddle in. There is so much history and uniqueness to this land that some days like today I would rather explore than paddle, Nevertheless, my paddle and the water with the combination of the people I am with make this trip so beneficial, spiritual, and forever ingrained in my memory.

Nearly half of the writers mention God as being the one who guides their voyage.

It was with much respect and gratitude that they wrote of His work. One woman remarked, "I am just amazed at God's handiwork. It is incredible. I can't believe He loves us so much to give us all of this, thinking about it leaves me speechless." Still another traveler recorded the following: "I was so entranced by the glory of God's creation with clear skies beautiful weather (warm enough for long johns & tank top!)." Women wrote that His work was so beautiful that He must have loved the women themselves immeasurably to share such work with them. As one explorer commented, "I thought that I was going to cry multiple times because the beauty was just overwhelming. God's love is so amazing. I can't believe He made all of this for our enjoyment!"

Women recorded an appreciation for God for their being on this trip: "Thank you for giving me this opportunity," and "I am thankful for this tent. I am also thankful to

God for this beautiful weather....” These sentiments were repeated numerous times throughout the journal entries. Others commented that God was watching out for them, taking them “under his wing” and keeping them safe.

Overall, whether a woman recorded the aura of the land as belonging to God or not, she sensed the power of it. Repeatedly, women wrote of this power as noted in this entry:

We made dinner and sat around the fire with wind howling through our hair and creating a magical atmosphere. This is what I treasure about the trail. The wildness and unpredictability, the power nature displays over us as we journey through her land, discovering its life and experiencing its heart. Its beauty is breathtaking while its power is terrifying. What a world we are in, this empty barren land which is so full of life and activity.

Another explorer discovered this power and recorded the following: “for the power of this place, the power of us, and the power of the unknown – that I was so scared of before, but am now embracing.”

Nature as challenging

As much as the beauty of the wilderness surrounded the travelers and inspired them, so too did it challenge their very existence. A duality presided within the journal entries of women, as they were both impressed by nature’s majesty yet stung by its intensity.

Unpredictable randomness.

Beautiful and awesome, the land through which the voyagers ventured could quickly become cruel and was deceptively swift to change from nurturing to dangerous.

Women mentioned wild fires and thick smoke, which contaminated the air they breathed. One trip's arrival was delayed at their put-in point as forest fires raged on either side of the dirt road that provides the only land access to this region. Another viewed the fire from her canoe and recorded this:

We saw quite a few forest fires – actually only the flames from one, but we saw tons of smoke. Paddling through the smoke was very strange and a bit disturbing.

At one point the smoke got so thick it was irritating to breathe.

Frequently, women wrote of the fluctuating weather systems, how quickly the weather would change, and how the women would scramble for any sort of shelter. One woman recorded the following:

Then suddenly, inside the tarp, I saw a flash bolt and immediate thunder. Boom, we scurried so fast from underneath and crouched down around the boats. The sky held the strangest looking orange tinge that beheld our whole world. Like a dreamy state. Random acts of lightening exploded the whole perimeter of us.

Freaky, so I started to pray for safety and sang, “Amazing Grace.”

Being the highest point in the tundra for sometimes miles in every direction led some women to fear the lightning and thunder that seemed to boom endlessly over the barren land with little to absorb its earth-shattering force. One explorer chronicled, “It seemed to rupture the depths of your soul.” If a group was paddling at the time of violent weather, women battled through waves and poor visibility. One such encounter very reminiscent of most reports was this, “We didn’t get far before a huge storm broke out. The waves were enormous, and the rain was coming down so hard it hurt, and was difficult to see much in front of the boat.”

Women frequently mentioned how fickle it was to try to predict the weather.

“You can never predict weather up here. Storms blow in so quickly up here. One day 80F the next day 45F. Bizarre.” Often, women wrote of the enormous range of temperatures: blazing hot one day and below freezing within hours. One group noted the consistent cold chill in the air for several days prior to being surprised by their 125 mile lake frozen solid, like a dam of ice midway through the paddle. After camping for the night on shore, this ice sheet shifted, blocking the women into a frozen area with no water escape possible. One traveler recounted how the ice shift had occurred 1 day after their resupply when they were carrying close to 500 pounds of food, all of which had to be portaged into smaller bays and lakes in an effort to escape the huge ice covering.

Another woman wrote with a particular optimism when confronted with the unknown. In detailing one of two pending watershed crossings, she noted the unpredictability of the route but seemed resigned to make it through the challenge in an upbeat manner. She wrote the following:

The next few days will be extremely demanding. Portages, lift-overs, we will all strain ourselves and push ourselves to our limits and beyond. We all are aware of it and are ready for what is through our way. We wish and pray for the best but prepare ourselves for the worst. I’m anxious to see what all comes to us and how we all respond, I know we will complete our challenge successfully, but I’m anxious to see how we all handle it differently.

Random weather was not the only force the women confronted while paddling over 700 miles through raw wilderness. Animals, some big and some small, were also unpredictable. A voyager recounts her episode with a specific bird:

I've never had a bird dive bomb me so bad in my life. The seagulls were coming at us from all angles, and so low, that we totally had to duck or they'd crash right into us. Once, I saw this seagull a ways away, and then it looked at me, and starting flying at me eye level super fast. I started to scream and pretty much hit the bottom of the boat. We survived the whole ordeal, but it was quite traumatic – very high anxiety.

Larger animals haunted some trips. In fact, this route to the Bay is no longer used by Camp Manito-wish YMCA partly because of the episodes such as this next incident written by one of the voyagers:

She spotted a polar bear right where we had come from. Jane once again got out the binocs and watched it. It was looking right at us and was totally sniffing us out. We were downstream and upwind of the bear, which is probably one of the worst places to be, however, I didn't feel as freaked out as I had the first time I saw the bear, or the first bear, we're not really sure if it was the same one or not.

The polar bear continued to follow the canoers downstream as they portaged around massive and very long sets of rapids. There was no escaping this creature that was at least 50 miles inland from the Bay. This woman continued to write about what she had learned from this incident:

What a day!!! I have learned so much. First, I have a totally new respect for the land, and the animals that live up here. And I have a new outlook at life. As humans we think we're the greatest, the best – we think we're invincible. We may be the most intelligent creatures God created but we're not the strongest, and out

here, when it comes right down to it, the strongest will survive. It is strange to know that besides humans, polar bears are the only ones who hunt for pleasure.

Arctic wind.

Although women periodically recorded episodes with violent weather or erratic animals, nearly every day they either battled or praised the wind. The tundra is without trees, so the wind moves across it unhindered; it is enormous. Described as having “no boundaries” and serving only as an “obstacle,” women recorded frustrations with trying to build fires or tend stoves with this entity swallowing up the heat of the flames. One adventurer recalled the following:

After that the 3 of us made pancakes and bannock. Hard to get the stoves going in the wind, it is also hard to keep things warm. Actually luke warm. The pancakes would not cook normally because the fry pan would not get very hot. Same w/the bannock, it was gross. The butter would not even sizzle. We tried to heat water up for hot drinks, but that was luke warm also.

Wind also ravaged campsites. Once it was recorded at a constant 20–30 mph with gusts into the 40s and 50s by a wind gauge of a helicopter. Temperatures in the mid-thirties drove the wind chill to dangerously low levels. One woman recorded the following during this horribly cold and windy day:

We moved our tents to a wind eddie on the opposite side of the island. It took all six of us on each tent obviously. We moved some food packs and the wanagan over here too. It is much calmer although I have not heard silence all day. The wind roars at its strongest moments raging over the hills and through the tent flaps. I’ve mistaken the wind for thunder.

Another tentmate recorded the following:

Rain began to pour and pour, like you wouldn't believe! Pounding on the poor grey tent! And then our tent began to cave in!...We all 6 spent a huge amount of time grasping the tent and bombing it with huge rocks...Rain pelts felt like ice and it reached 33 F today! Gusts so huge you could lean literally at a 45 degree angle. ..While the winds howled and drizzle came down in blizzard sheets, I believed that one day I would truly miss these feelings of dismal miserableness.

Wind being a near constant in the Arctic, women wrote of battling it often in their canoes. They wrote as if it were an everyday commodity. "We battled 14 miles up wind today," and "All day against the wind, I am exhausted" were very commonly styled entries. Several women though recorded water crossings that were out of the ordinary recordings. One is as follows:

Next came the crossing from HELL. No really, This was so scary. Big wind. Huge wind! Massive wind. We were paddling and totally getting pushed back. Big waves, we were like surfing. Well it was very hard...I'm back to fill you in on the waves. They were huge, it was scary. Every wave almost swamped our boat. Huge.

Another woman wrote how in the middle of their water crossing the wind rose unexpectedly, and the water responded by creating massive swells well over her head. The water hit the boats, broad-siding them and washing over the canoe spray skirts, which luckily the travelers had fitted before the crossing began. Tense minutes became hours before all three of her group's boats landed safely across the 30 mile round lake.

Arctic cold.

Besides the wind, the cold seemed to impart a challenge for every woman. Nearly all of them recorded some entry about combating this element from which there was little escape. One cited the following:

Today was so wet and cold. Its hard to put on cold damp clothes in the brisk mornings and crawl out of your warm haven to put on wet socks and boots to have wet feet all day. Its worth it to sleep with your wet clothes against your skin at night just so they'll be dry in the morning – hopefully- as uninviting it may be at first touch.

Women wrote of numbing fingers and “slow senses” while trying to maneuver through dangerous rock gardens of whitewater. One woman recounted a scary experience regarding her trip mate’s hypothermia on the Bay:

We spent the morning battling the wind, cold and waves and made about 1 mile in 1 hour. After that we got out and walked our boats along the shore. That was good because we made up some miles, but it was bad because we ended up with people freezing.

This traveler wrote that her partner became incoherent, slurred her sounds, and was unable to drink warm liquids safely. The group tried to walk her in circles, but she had neither feeling in her legs nor understanding of what was going on around her.

Eventually, they were able to warm her up. Other woman described damp clothing, slimy socks, and rank rain gear icy to the touch. Another voyager detailed a cocktail of challenges including cold that confronted her one particularly frustrating day:

My frustration levels started to rise today. The rain and cold were very unpleasant. To top it off were large amounts of bugs and wind. This would not have been so bad had my shoulders not been acting up.

Expedition bugs.

There is no doubt in reading through the volumes of journal entries that the one consistent obstacle for all expeditioners, the one horrific force which brought many of them to tears, was smaller than a blueberry: bugs. These mighty insects chewed and sucked with such deliberate will, that most women recorded their most passionate and frustrating entries about them. Women described eating these pests in porridge, as they swarmed around anything close to the travelers. Pelting the tents, it was occasionally difficult to differentiate rain from their dive-bombing. Groups sang songs about them. These were some of the lyrics: "Black flies are biting, Mosquitoes are swarming/ Our bug nets are on and this hot day is warming/ We've got four trippers and nine heavy packs/ We're headed for the Bay and we're not turnin' back...." Another song was this: "Today while the black flies still cling to our necks/ We'll paddle these waters in our bug nets/ A million mosquitoes cannot keep us away/ Ere we forget all the joys that were ours/ To the Bay."

The heat made the black flies worse. Rain made the mosquitoes worse. Women wrote of inhaling them while portaging, finding them in bras, and crawling through hair. As recorded by one woman, a trip discussed which bug would they choose to have chewing on their naked bodies, strapped to a tree: black flies, mosquitoes, or horseflies. Everyone, she wrote, wanted to confront the black flies, as the trip members figured they would die, bleeding to death, soonest this way.

Overall, though, the bugs absolutely tortured some women with festering sores and rashes, swollen digits, and puckered eyelids as recorded here:

Today sucked ass. The heat is tolerable but not when you have to wear polypro to keep the rain pants from sticking because you have all the fucking black flies! They suck, they suck, they suck!...My crotch is bloody. My neck is bloody too! The bugs are cloud like...Julie's neck is chewed but not as bad as Ann's neck and face. It is swollen & looks like hell. I told her not to look at it. ..it is repulsive. Not only did I almost gag...the sight of her neck almost made it uncontrollable.

Nothing kept the bugs away entirely, not even the wind as Arctic mosquitoes are specially designed to crawl along the ground seeking prey. Described as "haneous [*sic*]," women wrote pages about the horrors of relieving themselves within their midst. This is one entry:

Everything is just so amplified by the bugs. Today I got really knawed-worse than ever before. The worst part is that it happens in seconds. All of a sudden I can get dripping in blood. My right hand is deformed with welts. I counted over 30 new bites (which will be welts) on my lower legs. I think I have a bite inside my butt and crotch...I hit such a breaking point today. The bugs were so bad, they just won't let up at all.

Another woman recounted her first experience with the beasts in this entry:

But only one thing dissipated almost all the joy I felt this morning, & that's the vicious black flies! Jane wasn't joking when she said that they were 10 times worse than mosquitoes because these guys maunch on you & crawl, suck, and

swarm & jump down your shirts! My ears get it mostly. Huge blood clotted bumps behind them...

Of note was one woman's private hell facing these insects. They seemed to swarm her the worst, bite her the most often, and never leave her alone even when her face became disfigured by their appetite. She recorded numerous entries about their onslaughts such as this:

The bugs beat me up today. My face is a swollen mess. The black flies are the new "devil beasts" of the tundra, not the wolverine. I felt like crying a couple times – I just was so defeated...The bugs beat me to the ground again today. My eyes are swollen... my ears are swollen and scabby, the sides of my face are fat and bloody. More than anything, the black flies are my mental downfall. I can not seem to get away from them. I have to stop giving them a will, they are a part of this place and will always be, so deal.

The Bay.

The one element that did help to decrease bugs was salt water. Although the might of these pesky insects diminished when groups entered the Bay, other challenges began. Unlike any land the women had paddled through, that place seemed to rewrite all of the rules governing wilderness travel. With extensive tidal flats, women had to ascertain if the water was ebbing or flowing, a unique concept to them. Some groups wrote of possessing tidal charts, but not every expedition had one of these. As one woman commented, "Fueled by the moon, the bay has 5-mile tidal flats. How do you travel on water that comes and goes like that?"

At times, the women wrote of the endless hours portaging out to meet the tide after sleeping on solid ground at night. A voyager recorded the following in her journal:

Portaged and portaged and portaged again after our mini-conversation, to meet the tide. Unending in muck which would suck us right in to the tidal flats if we weren't careful. And then paddling on a beautiful calm bay with Annie until we got to portage again.

Depending upon the time of high tide, which comes twice in a 24-hour period, groups could be portaging any time of day as one woman wrote in the following:

What a beautiful day, we started out at 4:00 AM and again, ok, 6 ½ hours of sleep. The sunrise was beautiful 30 degrees F. All time low. We ate our wonderful granola and started our portage out to meet the tide.

Wind increased on the Bay as there was no real visible shoreline for miles; it was just a vague transition line of rotting seaweed, sand, and dirt. There was no bank along the waters edge to catch an eddy from the wind, which seemed to constantly dampen trips' progress. One frustrated voyager wrote, "We've worked so hard and overcome so many obstacles to reach the Bay and to get to Arviat on time, but now the wind seems to have thrown it all back in our faces." Another recorded the following:

Paddling that stretch was awful. The wind was out of control. There was a pretty large crossing that most of the boats were making, but we weren't comfortable making it because if the wind picked up any more we could easily be blown way out into the bay, and who knows where else.

Occasionally, this incessant blowing when combined with darkness, an element travelers had not encountered on the trip, made a scary combination. Nearly half of all

study participants wrote of storms picking up just as the tide was creeping towards them. Paddlers were stuck on the tidal flats in the wind and cold with no water beneath their boats during low tide. They huddled for warmth and passed the hours waiting for the tide to come back often tucked inside spray skirts or kneeling next to canoes for protection from the wind. When the salt water did advance, it became impossible to crouch near their canoes to wait out any storm. Soon, they recorded, those boats would be floating over deep water yet it was nearly impossible to paddle through pelting rain, incessant lightening, and blinding offshore wind. Shoved by water behind them, pushed back by wind in their faces, women strove to make headway in such storms. Being the tallest objects for miles, the travelers were easy targets for direct strikes of electricity. Pending darkness did not help matters. One woman recorded the following:

I felt nervous, anxious & excited crawling into the bow. Scared because the waves were the largest we've seen on the Bay & it was high tide; I was a bit chilled, & we had to find our way around through the dark.

A paddler on the same trip noted she too was terrified of trying to orient herself in waves, wind, lightning, cold, and darkness. This group attempted to paddle towards shore, or what they thought was shore, as that line between land and sea was very elusive on the Bay. It was a constant danger on Hudson Bay that groups might get swept east across the great expanse of sea, where it is doubtful they would survive the roughly 650 mile water crossing to land. She recalled, "We stopped where we thought the water would end, it is hard to tell just how high the water will go as that line changes each day." This remark is in reference to the shifting tidal forces that play with the water, drawing it on shore at higher levels some days of the month, most notably during a full-moon.

Other forces tricked the women as they paddled north along the Bay's shifting shoreline. One commented on the fog that can thickly blanket any large body of water. She noted the fickle weather for which Hudson Bay is famous and the onslaught of thick, treacherous fog in this entry:

We paddled for a few hours in the morning and the weather really did some crazy stuff. At first, the clouds began to lift, and we could see stars for the first time the whole trip. The moon was also visible, and was shining so bright, the water was fairly still, and the whole experience was incredible. After paddling for a while, the sky clouded up again. It got so foggy and misty, that I could hardly see the boats in front of me. It was a bit nerve wrecking. We were completely surrounded by the fog, and if for some reason we would have gotten turned around, there would have been no way of telling which way we were going.

All but one woman wrote of completing the journey of 50 miles along the coast of Hudson Bay. Her story was one of terror from an unexpected nighttime visitor to the group's campsite. Her journal entry consists of incomplete, almost incoherent phrases doused in fear where she admits to being too scared to actually record the events of the polar bear attack. She wrote the following:

As I write this down and relive it again in retrospect, by myself when it's dark out, it frightens me in a deep down fear that isn't like anything I've ever felt before, so I'll maybe write the story down later. My emotions are so mixed up right now for so many reasons. I think the near-death issue really will haunt me for awhile. It just is too new of a wound right now – too much right now.

That trip was evacuated north before finishing the paddle to Arviat in canoes. This story was the exception as nearly all of the women's journals mentioned the awesome beauty of that place. They commented that such a place was almost under a spell, a fantastic yet terrifying ride during their final days of the expedition. A voyager reminisced the following:

I think paddling on the tidal flats today was one of the most intense experiences of my life. Paddling along the everchanging shore during high tide was amazing and I felt like I could have done it all night. It was absolutely intense. Rocks jetting out everywhere and then disappearing under water. The smell of salt and the ocean everywhere.

Connection with People

Each voyager spent nearly 2 months in the company of other women. Never was a person really by herself. If women weren't interacting with each other, they were left alone to their own thoughts but physically present in the group. Of all of the content recorded through over 1,500 pages of journal entries, the most common theme was one of the women's struggles with themselves.

Personal Struggle

Such a struggle involved both physical and mental aspects, sometimes simultaneously, as women wrestled with their own demons while endeavoring to improve some component of themselves.

Physical.

The amount of physical strength needed to complete such expeditions is incalculable. Groups moved across the land under their own power alone. Sometimes, the

wind might assist them from behind, but typically every day witnessed the raw nerve of moving muscles which ground through the miles.

General hardship

When the tears begin flowing
 the heart about to break
 When the wind keeps blowing
 the paddle a metal rake
 When the sky begins dumping
 the tundra wet with rain
 When the stroke keeps pumping
 the head a massive pain
 Remember campers, life seems to say-
 Suck it up
 Tomorrow is another day!

Written by an expedition leader, 1990s

Connecting to one's own limits was recorded in journal entries through amazing glimpses of numerous occasions of hardship and adversity. Some journal entries seemed to summarize perfectly the synthesis of all of this hard work such as this:

It was intense, the strong wind blew the canoes off our shoulders. The 120 pound plus food packs broke our backs. To watch everyone deal with this ordeal was interesting, from pumped up to devastated, frustrated to exasperated, sweat, bugs, muscle pains, mental stress, intense concentration, it was completely exhausting. We felt it all. People were screaming with anger, frustration and determination. Determination, that's what kept us going. We persisted together and completed the portage. It took all day, but we did it.

This same portage extracted its toll from another portager that same day. She recorded the following:

By the time I made it down to the swampy area around the lake I was screaming and yelling. I made it to the shore and threw the canoe off my shoulders. It was an incredible feeling. I had won. I was persistent and determined, and it felt awesome.

Women wrote of 40 mile days with 20 miles upwind causing exhaustion and mental stress. They commented on “another expo day” when they were barely able to record anything in that day’s particular entry. Portaging consistently wreaked havoc with groups if combined with bad weather as described here:

Kate and I took boats and all swore that it was the hardest portage with the wind we had ever done in our lives. The wind was/is directly @ us – straight out o’ the east. Only to find on our second portage – around a falls which is not marked on the map – carrying canoes w/the 40 mph gusts on wet-slick-rocks o’ all shapes - sizes – contours. We were a team. I held the bow for her boat on one trip and we did the reverse on the next trip. At least 4 people fell hard. I fell & smashed my pinky finger. Jane fell flat on her back. Kim fell and hurt her leg etc.

At times it was the pace of the expedition that challenged travelers. Not only did they battle bugs, wind, ice, cold, and numerous other forces but did so with little rest. Trip members began to question the constant push. One trip, as recorded by two members, reported no “duff” day, a day in which the group did not journey, for nearly 3 weeks, which is highly unusual. One woman commented that her trip mates had begun to fantasize about sleep. A meal was served in which noodles and peas had been mistakenly combined with spice cake instead of cream-of-mushroom soup mix. Everyone thought

the food disgusting, but it had to be eaten because it is dangerous to carry spoiled food onto polar bear inhabited tidal flats. An exhausted traveler recorded the following:

The pace of these past 42 days has been bone-crunching, and there are times when all I can think about is sleep. We are exhausted and Kate can hardly function and Mary said the other day she's going to reach Arviat and be like "What the Hell just happened?"

Fatigue seemed a constant companion to travelers. One woman wrote about her trip mate who exclaimed that she was too sick and tired to care much about anything. She continued, "She told me it took all o' her strength to hold the paddle & that she would not care or know if she was cold." Fingers might lose their fine motor ability in cold weather. One woman's fingertips blistered and split open, causing tremendous pain with every canoe stroke. She described them this way: "My writing is still bad due to my fingers. We washed them, disinfected them, and put bandaids on all of them and the lotion and gloves. Today they got so bad I could barely hold things."

About half of the study participants questioned why they were doing this expedition. One woman ended her journal entry midway through the expedition with this: "And I'm doing this again because...?" Another reported her pain just 1 week into the trip:

Today was the day from hell. No really it was. My back hurts, actually every muscle in my body hurts. And we are here in our tents late, once again. ...I am so beat...This trip is a total push trip. It has tired me out already, and it's only the 7th day. Wholy-cow. I am freezing right now and can't wait to go to sleep...I don't think I can be pushed too much further.

As trips progressed, journal entries citing physical complaints increased. One woman cited, “This is all definitely taking its toll on my body. Things hurt and I have to take care of them.” Others complained about falling apart or reporting less energy or drive, which was worrisome. Nearly every woman described being sore at some point on the journey. “I never knew I had so many muscles,” wrote one traveler. Another reported that she “failed to drink on portage from hell and ended up paying for it – a headache to crush stone, dizziness, nausea, fatigue – I basically covered Julie’s whole class on dehydration.”

As groups neared the end of their journeys, bodies seemed to be at the breaking point. Several women wrote of trouble with hygiene, where the smell of themselves after so many long weeks was truly offensive. While traveling north on Hudson Bay, approximately 6 weeks into the trip, one woman very passionately recorded the following; “...Second, I’ve got some kind of butt rash, probably a fungus, and thirdly, I think I have a yeast infection. I feel like amputating my crotch it’s so bad.” She recounted the messy treatment for such a rash in very animated language. Finally, one voyager in what is assumed to be written in a sarcastic undertone mentioned, “I don’t think things could be any better if only I was itch-less, the air was bug-less, I hadn’t spilled my water bottle on my dry shoe, and I was wearing a clean pair of underwear. Okay, any underwear.”

Pain

Travelers recounted stories in which they felt great pain, such as falling with canoes or tripping over rocks. Others were plagued by discomfort their entire trips with sore backs, festering bug bites, or raw blisters. One woman’s story of pain, though,

affected not only herself but the entire trip. Her progress was completely hampered because of her burden of a sore hip. She had had difficulty in the past with this joint's hurting her and had even contemplated surgery, but with extra training through the winter months, both she and her doctor assumed she was ready for the expedition. After several weeks on the trip, she began to notice inextricable pain creeping into her side with resulting insomnia and homesickness. She recounted, "I have never felt pain like this in my life. At certain points while bowing this morning I thought I was going to die. It was so awful."

She wished she could have just lain in bed and cried all day. As far as her journal entries record, no one on her trip was aware of the magnitude of her discomfort. As the pain inevitably increased daily, she wrote, "I am so frustrated that I wonder why the hell I am out here." She contemplated having the other group members saw off her leg yet spare her life. This passage was recorded when the pain was at its most severe:

I have never felt so much pain in my entire life. My left hip throbbed and lay motionless while the left side of my back spasmed and shot intense pains up it. It hurt so badly I could barely speak and after two hours was able to sit up.

She continued to describe "tearing" feelings deep in the joint and finally questioned if she was really cut out to do an expedition. Her injury eventually forced the group to make very difficult decisions concerning their route. Because of her inability to move without searing pain, her trip mates were asked to severely modify their journey. Consequently, this woman, wracked with guilt, began to observe the disintegration of her trip and blamed herself for their seeming demise. She wrote the following:

I have decided my hip is not reason enough for our group to be killing themselves and fighting. I am hoping for a duff day tomorrow. For the past 3 days I have watched these wonderful 5 women get angry and snippy at each other all due to the fact that I am in constant pain.

Route complaints

Although more women discussed the physical difficulty of most of the expedition routes, there were several who held the opposite opinion. These women were in incredible shape before the expeditions began and did not recount the same fatigue or hardship as most of their trip mates did. As one woman pointed out, "We debated about how hard the days have been – I said they were relaxed & she jumped down my throat & said everyone was hurting. I shrugged." This same toned woman later recalled that she really hadn't "felt hardship or pain yet," though two other members of her group recorded they were struggling just to make it through a portage.

One voyager complained that her group was just not as fast as she would have liked. "It's day 11 and we still haven't gotten on to a good schedule as far as I'm concerned; that is, an earlier schedule....I'm still hoping we can be quicker and more efficient..." Basically she had hoped to paddle hard to the campsite each night so that more time could be spent reading or journaling. Other members of her group recorded in their journals that they were paddling quite hard already and could not move any faster. This member hated stopping to speak with another expedition group along the route. She viewed it as inefficient and a careless use of time, whereas other group members recorded that it was wonderful to meet with the other expedition trip.

Several of these women, who were in the minority from most other comments, amazingly recorded that their overall route “wasn’t quite so challenging & would’ve liked more....” They hated the perceived low mileage days during their expedition. One of them commented, “It was a bit sad, though, knowing that it’s lunch time and you did the day’s worth. I would’ve loved to have gone further....”

Finally, one expedition, after being iced in for over a week, was informed that it would need to take an alternate route. Camp administration made the decision to send the group down a river different from the one planned. The expedition group did not agree with this decision, and one member in particular journaled extensively on the topic. She felt as though her group had earned the right to paddle whichever river the women believed matched their skill, as they had motored ahead of every other group that summer in particular earnest.

Her frustration at sitting for 8 days waiting for ice to melt or for camp administration to fly the trip over the ice as it had for two other groups that week was palpable. She wrote, “But our main problem is that we are getting even more behind even though we worked so hard to get this far quickly...it has been really irritating trying to work this out....” After learning of the new route, she chronicled, “That was a huge blow to all of us! I was absolutely pissed off & terribly upset.”

Mental.

The mental baggage on a trip of this caliber was unbelievable. Not only were there the obvious concerns over safety and illness being so far from any sort of medical assistance, but women battled with themselves and each other.

Hard skills

Travelers focused on the learning of so-called “hard skills,” especially those women who weren’t very good at those skills. These skills included basic to advanced concrete camping assignments, such as cooking, navigating, whitewater lining, packing packs, and setting up tents to name a few. Most of the voyagers’ determination to not only learn but in many cases perfect these skills was present in the early journal entries of all of the women unless a certain skill, such as finding fresh water on the Bay, didn’t appear until later in the trip. Then later entries might attest to women’s anxiety as those specific skills cropped up. Typically, those skills which people should have mastered on earlier trips were the ones that gave women much concern. For example, finding fresh water on the Bay, though a skill, was not as anxiety-provoking as starting a fire since group members weren’t expected to know how to find such drinking water in the middle of salt water until taught by the leaders, whereas it was expected that fire starting be second nature to these women on Day 1.

Navigation caused some women much anxiety. Usually one person is assigned to navigate each day. It greatly behooves at least one leader to act as an assistant with this so the trip does not get hopelessly lost, but usually this task falls to the trip participants. Groups use aerial photos (not satellite photography), topographical maps of two scales, compass headings, and gut instinct to successfully meander over 700 miles of wilderness. One woman recorded the following:

Two of the three things which frustrate me the most were present today. First was navigating. I feel so stupid, but I know I can navigate. Not that the reputation which was built helped much. So the idiot navigated today. ...

Others wrote with joy about how they had navigated and not gotten lost that particular day. It seemed a massive relief that their assignment with this task was currently over.

There was a particularly troublesome area in terms of navigation in the middle of a massive lake teeming with islands wrapped in fog. Two women wrote about how impressed they were with their trip mate's skill at successfully finding her way through that maze. One commented, "She did a great job finding the route. I never could have done that and I'm not sure our leader could have either." Still one woman, after a particularly difficult journey, wrote, "I have three things to say: My paddle broke I got my period I navigated in the pouring rain." This was the extent of her entire entry for that day.

Some women dreaded the inevitable rapids. They reported fear or inexperience as fuel for these tense entries. One voyager wrote in her journal:

We had a long set of rock garden like rapids causing us to do fast maneuvers rightish & leftish. It was horrible. Again, I was forced to turn around in the canoe on one part. I am so afraid and tense about rapids right now. Thank goodness we are on a lake.

She references "turning around," in which her canoe must have actually changed direction in the middle of the rapids so the bow was pointing upstream. This is not recommended strategy and rather dangerous; however, paddlers can in fact turn themselves around in their seats and paddle the canoe *backwards* down the rapids.

Other women also criticized their own efforts in such demanding situations as this bow paddler noted:

We were doing fine until the ledge. I didn't even see it until we were right on top of it with nothing to do but paddle through it. We made it safely but I was so angry with myself. I should have seen it. I put Julie and the entire group in jeopardy. It could have been a lot worse, but I should have avoided it completely. It was a good reminder of how much control the water has over us no matter how hard we try to master it.

Homesickness

In the early stages of the trip, women often spent the long hours paddling in conversation with each other about their respective homes. Usually groups cover close to 20 miles each day, which is roughly 7–12 hours of paddling in decent weather. One woman recorded this in comparison to her long canoe trip the previous summer:

My most exciting realization is that unlike last year I have already thoroughly enjoyed this trip and group. Last year I was so homesick and this year I have, well, not been. Yet, I always talk about paddling in or home, but it is not like last year which makes me very excited.

This woman seemed to have reached an understanding with her emotions in that talking about home was comforting, but not every woman witnessed the trail as she did. There were many more participant comments directed at women battling “homesickness” than text concerning their “hard skills” as discussed in the previous section. One younger participant chronicled the following:

We talked about our goals and fears. The majority goal was to make it through the trip and arrive safely in Arviat. Some fears were hypothermia, big water and big wind. My big fear is not being able to get over this “missing being around” thing.

I am not sure what it is or anything. I have totally enjoyed my trip...It is homesickness I guess. But it is improving every day. No one really knows, so I think that is good.

Other women additionally wrote about missing boyfriends, parents, and friends. Some wrote letters to their loved ones, which were mailed at the resupply drop or tucked in the journal for the entire journey. One woman mentioned her boyfriend several times during the trip but always with an understanding that her journey was the most important thing to her at that moment. She made the following comments:

First of all, this experience is great for me and I totally need it for a million reasons, but I miss John. Not that I'm crying about it all the time or anything. I think that being away from each other for two months at this time right now is very good for our relationship, but it certainly doesn't feel the same not having him around...

Her thoughts traversed their relationship, and periodically she revisited her thinking of him through the trip.

One woman, though, fixated on her parents throughout the entire expedition. Her journal was written to them when she constantly noted how she missed them, how she wished they could go fishing on a certain lake together, or how the noise of a boat reminded her of them. She wrote wonderingly about what they were doing and how it would feel to melt into their arms when the trip was over.

Early in the trip, however, she recorded the following:

This morning was hard. I was so homesick, I don't know why, well because I miss you. Just being around you guys makes me feel great. I now realize that I

take you guys for granted. I should not do that. You are all too important to me. I love you so much.

She believed her homesickness stemmed from her knowing just how far away her parents were. She noted, "I really think I am so homesick because I know that I am really far away, in uncontrolled environments and have no way to contact you."

She wrote on Day 14 that her homesickness was doing better and that she had been with camp for about one month and was prepared to do another. Two weeks after this, she wrote the following:

I am so glad that I am here. It has got me thinking about everything love, job in the future, family, where I want to go to school. Everything. But the thing I think about the most is you guys. I love you so much! Good night and I will see you in about 28 days!...

Over the course of the trip, she related that her homesickness improved, and she believed she had handled it well: "I have been pretty good w/ being homesick but I am dealing with it pretty well."

Individual issues

Although these travelers were on an expedition and they wrote about the beauty of the land and animals, most of them continued to record content one would normally expect to find in an everyday journal. The following is an attempt to describe the innermost thoughts and fears of young women as recorded in their writing. Most of them engaged in a self-assessment, a critical analysis of themselves. One woman noted the following:

Life is not as happy once you grow up. Everything is not good and what once made you feel warm inside doesn't always anymore & you realize....nothing you can do will make things "all better" or at least it hard enough that you give up trying. I want to understand people and understand myself.

She continued writing about her beliefs in optimism versus pessimism and how this might play out when working with people. Admittedly a perfectionist, she wondered why she was that way and that she would someday need to explore that quality about herself.

Most women enjoyed the expedition for the time it "let [their] thoughts meander." Travelers often recorded some of these rambling thoughts in the pages of their journals, but more than one traveler admitted she was concerned that her journaling might not have been sufficient enough in capturing all relevant thought. One woman wrote, "It's amazing to think that I will always have this journal to read and reminisce. But I am worried that I haven't got all that jam-packed wholesome good news written in."

For one traveler, the trail sparked a personality growth spurt. She wrote that she vacillated between feeling self-confident and then "rotten and run down." The trail for her offered a chance to be strong, but something held her back. Her leader eventually commented that she ought to try to change some parts of her personality, such as not voicing every thought that arrived in her head. This voyager brooded over this information, wrote that she was thankful for the criticism, and then several days later chronicled, "But also, deep inside, I don't think I need to conform to everyone's wants and desires! You're you! But it is nice to know for the future! Criticism can be constructive."

Another woman wondered why she had spent her life savings on the trip. She believed she “was at her best” when on the trail, definitely happier than at college, but why would anyone do this? She wrote the following:

I was thinking today that we go on trail to figure “stuff” out, whatever that stuff may be to each individual. However, I can’t work through my problems such as anxiety about school or boy problems. All I can do is work on my attitude & myself personally. It’s kind of weird to think about that. This is such a personal time. It’s almost selfish for me to be out here because it is all about us. Us being the unit of 7 individuals.

She continued to chronicle how difficult it was to stand out among those 7 individuals, as they were all exceptional women in her opinion. She had always been the “good camper,” but among such excellent peers, she had to excel even further, learning constantly about them, and simultaneously focusing her attention upon “improving myself b/c that is why I’m out here.”

Still another woman journaled about improving her relationship with God. She believed the expedition would afford her much time to improve herself emotionally and physically while also strengthening her relationship with God. So thankful for this opportunity, she repeatedly mentioned how wonderful such an experience like this was and how lucky she was. Hoping the trip would give her new perspective, she recorded the following:

I don’t want to go back to the insanity of society. It is so peaceful out here and the freedom and clarity that being up here brings is one of the major things that draws me here, but even though I have God, I know that I would get lonely out here

eventually. Right now, I need this time to learn – to learn about God, nature, and myself. I find an incredible part of myself out here that is killed when I'm in society for too long. I love to challenge myself, and to push my limits both physically and mentally.

Another woman was pleased to see her leadership abilities and decision-making skills blossom in such a way that other trip participants commented that some day she would make an awesome expedition leader. This voyager glowed at such comments and recorded them with pride in her journal. She did, however, struggle with group dynamic issues. After one particularly nasty group confrontation, she questioned her ability with group process. She admitted to being very sensitive yet quiet in group settings but was very critical of her role at this group meeting. She recorded the following:

I'm always watchin what I say, because I don't want to hurt anyone – so I just keep my mouth shut. Have I always been that way, and am I just realizing it now. In this group I have found my own notch – whatever that may be...I am going to try and change, or at least be more aware of what I say and how I am around everyone else in the group. And to be more blunt, express my feelings more openly and be more vocal. Small steps, small accomplishments in order to reach the final goal. Nothing ever just disappears, deal with the situation, and learn from it and move on.

Finally, one woman's journal offered excellent insight into her quest for self-knowing about not only herself but also the group. She wrote the following:

I want to get to know these women so badly, and am sometimes scared I won't. Then I remember we have 47 days left. The group feels distant to me now, not

like before, but in a surface way. The anticipation and expectation I don't really want anymore. That time is over and the actuality is here.

I need to slow down, and be more quiet. Silence is okay, and after so long my body, and head are ready to do that.

Later she recounted that in a "crazy, but incredible" kind of way, she was really doing this adventure; that in fact, she astounded herself by actually being on the trail.

Questioning what really brought her out there, she acknowledged, "I think a lot about how unreal it is that I am here. What made me even consider doing it?" She did admit to being disappointed that her journal entries did not have as much meaning as she would have liked, though. "I am thinking things out... Clearing my head and just letting my mind go without having the responsibility of coming up with answers. That can be later. This just needs to all happen on its own accord, not forced."

As the trip progressed, she reported flashes of clarity and often found solace in "listening" to the river as if it provided the realization she sought. She noted, "I am here to learn the ways, and that takes humility, strength, openness, and acceptance. And energy of which I have little so I am going to bed." Repeatedly, she wrote that in knowing the water, she would understand its character and mood, but this was only accomplished by listening and slowing down.

Simultaneously, her knowledge of the group was heightened by group conflict. "Things are getting pretty serious, it isn't just a trip. People have a lot of fears going on in their heads..." she admitted concerning the group. This woman envisioned the trip as a process, "a learning process," and she recorded multiple abstract comments about self-learning and acknowledgment.

Group dynamics

I believe anytime a small group of individuals is placed in a stressful situation with a difficult task to do, that tension will occur. Human interaction is already so complicated that with added stress those relationships compound exponentially. One woman phrased her feelings related to groups as this: "I'm glad that last year enabled me to get over and wake up to the fact that every trip group you are put with will not necessarily be great friends for life or be completely tight."

General group issues.

Women noted early in the expedition that group conflict could be a reality on the trip. As one explorer commented, "In bits and places I can see group tension. We've got so much riding against us I just hope we can make it through cohesively." In the initial days of travel, women remarked that steps had occurred on their adventures to further the bonding among group members. As one woman commented, "We all agreed that we can tell each other whatever we think of them and we respect it and it doesn't bother us...." Another woman recorded, "We've planted the seeds to bonding this trip together thru love and communication." Still another traveler remarked that her trip had agreed on a series of evaluations through the trip during which the leaders and the participants would communicate individually on how well the participant was doing on the expedition. A growing optimism was prevalent in one woman's journal especially as she wrote the following:

I can't help realizing how amazing we eight women are. We are tolerant, up beat, fun, strong, courageous, trustworthy, and a unit. This trip will challenge all these strengths that make us this unit whether it be the uncontrollable forces of nature or

a conflict among our community, but together we will survive and apart our journey is worthless.

As the adventure progressed, further comments concerning tension and conflict arose.

One woman admitted that she thought she was perhaps paranoid at seeing group tension, as she was the only one with such thoughts. Still another began to experience some “mixed feelings” concerning the size of her group of 9 women. She admitted trip members worked well together and knew what to do but that something was “kind of strange.” One explorer commented, “Allisoun fell w/canoe on her down @ water & no one helped her. I confronted the group afterwards. The leader said good – set a precedent early on.” This same woman reported the following:

I told them the group needed to be changed. We are totally slacking in morning, T.L., paddling, dinner. I feel time could be better spent. How do you initiate this w/o hurting their feelings, being bossy or if the rest of the group is feeling pushed?...I will work on motivating the group myself & passing work onto others if they need it.

She later commented about how she had further told the group that “they need to ask me why I am doing something instead of being frustrated” after one particular incident in which the group felt uncomfortable with her specific behavior but did not approach her until the end of the day.

As the journal entries progress through the expedition, general group meetings seemed to occur more frequently. One woman described this:

We stopped for TL on a very buggy island, and decided to have a kind of “group meeting” to talk about goals and opinions and what not. We shared a lot, but one

thing I really had to share were my feelings about yesterday. I explained that the reason I was so frustrated was because I was so focused on myself and what I could portage, not stopping to think that the rest of the trip might be tired. So, I apologized and actually was even crying a little bit under my sunglasses.

This same woman commented several days later in her journal that the group again had a discussion “mostly about group dynamics and stuff.” She related that they were “too tired and irrational” to shoot some upcoming rapids and needed to stop and talk. One woman’s group talk centered around four items that would improve relations among her group. She listed these in her journal; “- internalizing feelings when we should be externalizing them to the group, addressing obstacles (not problems), honesty and openness, setting a standard.” Another reported that her group was not making the miles they should have been and that there was trouble among group members. She wrote, “this is teaching me patience, I knew it would.” Still another traveler commented that she felt tension was an integral part of the trip. She recorded, “conflict always seems to be necessary in a group.”

A woman who early in the expedition wrote that something about her group of nine was “strange” made the following entry later in her trip:

9 is a good number in the fact that there are many people to talk to, but, 9 can become exclusive and clicky. At times we’ve both felt excluded or competitive for active time with the group. It bothers me to a point, but not so much as it does to Julie. I just blow it off and realize to myself that I don’t need that as much as I used to, when and where do things like that change? Am I becoming more introverted?

She later recorded a large group session in which the expedition erupted, “the tension began to build and on Day 32 everything came out. Things were said that should have been said on day one.” Controversy was openly rampant as her group exploded from four weeks of brewing tension. She later reminisced about it:

Probably the most crucial aspect of expedition travel and living was discussed that day. The importance of voicing your feelings. On a trip this extensive, you depend on each other for survival. Without communication, the group dynamics suffer. Even though it may be difficult to bring up controversy, it is imperative to the entire group.

“Day 32” was referred to in another woman’s journal. After being apprised of certain issues with the group, some of which were specifically directed at this woman, she recorded her insight as follows:

We had this talk tonight too. I don’t really know how to explain it, but it stung for awhile. I don’t, or haven’t ever felt like I had been hurting people as much as I did tonight. I was thrown. I would hate to think that the way I interact or express myself, hurts people. Things are working themselves out though. People needed to realize that...

She continued to visit this episode in her journal, citing that her thoughts were still not clear on the topic and that she often thought about the events of that particular day.

One woman commented that most members of her group believed they were in a group therapy session the entire trip because of all the group process meetings they had. Conflict was constantly present on her trip especially when members were alone with one or two other women as opposed to being around the campfire as an entire entity. She

complained in her journal, "We have so many god-damned group talks and everything appears to be better but sometimes it seems as if things only get worse, or at least stay stagnant. People seem to fly one way and then the other."

By the end of the expedition, one woman, whose group had fallen apart on Day 32, recorded, "for once, all nine of us all reached the same level of belief simultaneously. A sense of closeness that brought us closer together." Another woman mentioned that she and her leader seemed to agree that conflict though painful can stimulate self-growth. It can actually be good for a group to experience she believed.

Overall, group tension was present in every trip each woman experienced. It mainly focused on two areas of tension: between the leaders and the participants of the expedition and interactions among the participants themselves. As there were no leaders who included their journals in this study, I have no written record of the leader to leader conflict which may or may not have occurred.

Issues with leaders.

Leaders generally were in charge of the expedition. This especially applied to camper expeditions where minors were the participants and a more traditional approach to leading was sometimes assumed such that campers learn and follow, and leaders lead and rule. Variations of this style obviously exist, and some campers were very capable of leading themselves when and if the leaders allowed. Regardless of the expedition, though, whether the individuals were staff-in-training or campers, there were subtle differences in leading versus commanding among group members. Tension concerning leadership styles was typically over this delicate balance of guiding without offending.

Leading among leaders

Staff expeditions and, to a lesser extent, camper expeditions were privy to the concept of leading among leaders. All of the participants on the staff expedition had had some experience with leading other camping groups. From several of the comments written by these staff participants, it was an issue to be among leaders on such an expedition. As one woman recorded early in her expedition, "The leader/nonleader dynamic has been strange for me so far, I don't think we've found the balance yet at all." Another woman reflected, "We've begun to discuss our feelings about the trip and our leadership roles. The biggest challenge is leading among leaders, peers among peers when to take charge and when to step back. It will take awhile." Another woman commented that as a leader herself, she was so amazed at the actual leader of the trip. She was in awe of her and had difficulty relating to her but wrote that with time this would lessen.

Several episodes were recorded in journals that dealt with leaders—meaning actual leaders and participants—leading, or the lack of leadership. One episode around Day 31 of an expedition recorded an event in which some people wanted to continue paddling for the day, some people did not have an opinion whether to stop or keep paddling, and some were too tired to really have an opinion but mentioned they needed to stop in less than 20 minutes. As the episode unfolded, no one actually made the decision to camp until exhaustion was rampant, nerves were on end, and communication nonexistent. One woman reflected on this in her journal: "Crazy: A lot of talk today about the future of their trip after yesterdays confusion and indecision about camping. A review

of goals and expectations for the remainder of the trip.” Another on her trip commented, “The leaders should not always have to make the call w/where to camp.”

Another woman recorded an event in which her group had some challenges putting up a tarp. She wrote the following:

Putting up the tarp was quite an experience. It made me really frustrated to see a lack of leadership, so I told everyone that we needed to talk about what had happened. It ended up being a really good discussion, and I think we all learned a lot, or at least I did.

Participant conflict with leaders

At times, women recorded that their leaders were tense and emotionally upset over some event. One woman wrote, “I was surprised, in fact scared of the crankiness of my two leaders today in the boat, but I guess I could see how tides and the power of the bay are extremely stressful.” Another commented that her leaders were in her opinion too stressed out. She recorded the following:

their over-anxiety is not beneficial to the group. I have to remember when I’m a counselor not to get too worked up or upset when things aren’t going perfectly + not act mad or take it out on the campers.

Sometimes women recorded that there was much tension between them and the actual leaders of the expedition. One woman noted that another expedition her group met on the trail was “so full of life, excitement and always lifting each other UP!” She further recorded that she believed there was no “affection” on her expedition, that it was an “OK” trip so far but nothing great. Another of her trip mates noted on Day 20 of the trip that there was no real “bond” between trip members. Several members of the group

recorded that they wanted to have more ownership of the trip, and make more of the trip decisions such as how many miles to paddle a certain day or where to camp. It was written that this might bring the group together more.

Eventually, several group members recorded similar comments concerning their leader in their journals. One woman wrote about her leader:

The 6 of us have been talking and we have decided how we have a conflict with Cindy and her sometimes rude remarks towards us. We have all been able to deal with it very well with the support of others. She is, well borders between aggressive and assertive. Mostly aggressive. But we are glad that we all have been able to experience this.

Another woman echoed her concerns:

I resent our leaders for having an alliance we are not part of and treating us like we need to be watched and reprimanded every time we don't take a situation as seriously as they do...They now make confused faces at each other whenever Sally speaks in a slightly garbled way...

She continued to record how the leaders were belittling not only her but especially Sally, mentioned in the previous quotation. Several of these women mentioned feeling like a child who had been punished or who was "inferior, small, backed-in-a-corner...."

Eventually, several of these women recorded that they started to cry after some of the comments their leader made to them but were comforted by other group members with hugs. One woman reported her group believed their leader could "make or break" them in terms of working for the YMCA facility in the future, so they were unsure of how to confront their leader or any other staff member on this matter.

Issues with other trip participants.

As one woman described her trip group, “different people are at different places mentally and physically.” Over the course of the summer, women undoubtedly had conflict among themselves. Weeks of strain and wonder were marbled with tension, sometimes calculatedly subtle and at other times painfully noticeable. Another woman noted in her group that every trip member seemed to do things differently. She wrote, “how some people work and some people sleep. I guess I really don’t care if someone chooses to do either, I just like to do things. Nervous energy! Its funny how something so little may cause a problem.”

Many issues arose over actual “hard” trail skills and either doing them differently or not doing them at all. Such trail skills include but are not limited to paddling, portaging, setting up tents, fire-building, and cooking. One woman who was charged with being leader-of-the-day wrote, “these girls don’t listen to what I have to say... today it was more apparent because I was leader. It just frustrates one, it makes me feel as if they don’t respect my opinion.” Complaints were recorded concerning trip mates not being fast enough, not paddling in a straight line, or paddling too straight in rapids. Women called each other “lazy” or “whiney” or “rude.” When conflict broke out among paddling partners, the river could be more dangerous than ever as one woman noted of her arguing trip mates, “They almost killed each other and wrapped a boat and lost all the packs in it.” Another explorer became frustrated when she was practicing her navigation skills and she wrote the following:

It bothers me that she hasn’t trusted my navigation since yesterday and never believed we were where we were. She just tends to be such a know-it-all. No

matter what anyone says, she has a comment – usually it involves her talking over you to get her words in. I find that she is constantly talking over me.

Several women recorded multiple entries concerning a woman who they claimed was incompetent on the trail. One of them described her, “She can’t portage very well, swerves all over when sterning and to top it off misplaces everything – drops everything and is really unorganized.” She, in reference to this particular trip mate, did not “get the Manito-wish way” implying that the woman did not do things like everyone else who had worked or attended Camp Manito-wish for many years. After nearly 2 weeks of this behavior, the woman recorded that her group experienced the following:

(They) broke loose and we all vented our frustrations over Angel’s lack of organization over personal gear. It’s been frustrating. Anyways she feels tension too and we sat and had a group discussion...She wasn’t being treated right and we all needed to talk about it. Other things came out too, and Jane is annoyed with my tone of voice sometimes...

According to the journal entries of several women, this “sloppy” behavior improved and this woman, they claimed, became much more part of the group.

Other women strictly reported that they had concerns over another member’s personality. One woman recalled in her journal, “She just really cares about herself and so many actions of hers indicate that that’s the way she is and she has no need nor want to change anything.” Often it was written that aspects of a woman’s behavior irked them a certain way. One woman described this exchange:

I had a few problems with dealing with Betty. She was very confrontational, even if we were taking a pee break...It was so frustrating that I felt I was going to lose

my temper...Another thing was that I almost let my top fly with her paddling stoke.

This woman made multiple entries about how challenged she was with this particular woman's sarcasm and harsh commanding tone. Eventually, her entries reflected an understanding between the two women, but this took several weeks to develop. This woman, in turn, wrote about how frustrated she was with the other woman. Trip mates stressed each other to the point of giving one another names, which they claimed were never called to someone's face.

Most of these spats were interspersed within trips but did not dominate them. Of all study participants, only one group of women—in fact two women on the same trip—wrote of one fellow group member whom they “hated” as she could not, or would not “pull her strength.” On that extremely physical adventure, this woman was labeled “lazy” by the other group members and many adversarial comments were written concerning her.

Sometimes an explorer would record a particularly pointed remark as mentioned above, but this was rare within all of the journal entries. Such a remark, though, follows from a very soft-spoken individual:

Or else when June tries to tell everyone how much she loves this weather with the wind because it challenges her and we should smile because we're challenging ourselves and I told her if she didn't shut up I'd hit her over the head with my fucking paddle.

Personal and group growth

In the midst of conflict with themselves and each other, growth blossomed. Every woman cited specific examples of what she had learned on the trail. Many believed they were “lucky” and were immensely grateful, some even proud of themselves, to be on such an adventure. As one woman mentioned, “this trip improves with the sun.” Most of the thoughtful reflection written pieces directed at self-growth or growth within the group occur in the latter days of women’s journals after Day 30.

There was a prevailing feeling of contentment among women who paddle hundreds of miles in the middle-of-nowhere. As one woman recorded, “...joy has been finding me lately.” She furthermore expressed how she had such a content feeling inside her. Another paddler chronicled, “I am beginning to like moments like sitting in the rain feeding the fire, in the sand, waiting for water to boil, while starving. It is a somewhat contented feeling.”

Women wrote that they loved “just living.” Everything, some explained, was so in the moment or “raw.” Life seemed very real to them. Some women felt very “small” in that vast wilderness. An explorer wrote the following concerning her self-growth:

I am really enjoying learning, and the learning process up here. There is so much that can be taken from every situation that is often overlooked. I am trying to make the most of every situation, even the ones that seem awful because it helps me to grow, and to appreciate things I otherwise wouldn’t. Today, I appreciated a rainstorm I probably never would have if I didn’t sit back and think of the awesomeness of it. This week, I have really learned that nature isn’t the answer to whatever I’m going through in life, but I can learn a lot while I’m out here that

will help me later on. Being out here really helps me to re-evaluate myself, my priorities, and where I'm going in life.

One woman examined it as follows, "On trail you have to work for everything yourself. That is a wonderful gift that trail gives you. It teaches you self-sufficiency." Another explorer explained that the trail for her was made up of "unacknowledged triumphs" which benefited the group and fed her own satisfaction. One traveler wrote, "It's not about the miles or route for me. It's about the growth, learning and experience in general."

Growth within the group was sometimes as exciting for some women as self-growth. There was a sense of anticipation as to where a group would be in 5 weeks' time with such maturation. One traveler appreciated working together to face problems, "accomplish," them and move onwards. As chronicled in this woman's journal, the explorer describes what she has learned from her group:

Being on trail is a great place to learn about yourself. Not only your physical capabilities or development of hard skills, but about your hopes and dreams and fears. I have learned so much in these past 38 days from each of you. Hearing a different opinion or 6 other people's life and love stories gives me so much more perspective. The biggest lesson I've come to realize is that I can make my dreams come true. Whether it be becoming a famous movie star or living in a tree house, I can put my mind to it, and at least know that 6 great women will be there to cheer me on.

On the whole, several women commented on how wonderful it was to learn about the land, different trail skills, group dynamics, and leadership. One woman wrote the following:

I'm so relieved to hear those good things after my leadership started out so poorly. I've grown so much that its hard to imagine not going on this trip. I have a hard time thinking about the beginning of the trip, it was so long ago.

Some women journaled that they appreciated not having to worry about how they portrayed themselves and that the journey gave them confidence in their bodies. As many travelers attended to intimate self-hygiene matters in the obvious company of others, one woman found comfort that her body, with all its supposed flaws, was just as beautiful as everyone's "flawed" body. Noting how her physique compared to others' brought a sense of normalcy to her own self-image.

One group asked each of its members why anyone would do such a trip? Why would people live with each other in such stressful conditions in the wild for 7-8 weeks at a time? A younger traveler within several hours of the Bay answered the questions in this lengthy entry:

Why do I like to come out here and canoe? I like to come out here because it is a challenge for mind and body. An excellent experience. A great adventure. One I can remember and enjoy the rest of my life. A time to discover who I really am. What I like. What I want. The feeling of independence, away from home. Being able to make decisions that effect me immediately and in the long run. The feeling of being independent while totally feeling dependent. You cannot go on with a person missing or not helping. You need everyone to help and participate. You

have to work as a team to accomplish every goal you set. Even getting to bed. Being away from schedules, time, responsibilities, questions, decisions and worries. Feeling free, young and carefree; you have no worries. Unless you make them for yourself. You have time. Time to do anything. You are on your own schedule, time is not a factor at all. You set when you want to get up. Stop paddling etc. great feeling. You are in charge. To play in the water (when it is warm enough) to daydream, to follow the clouds, to enjoy everything around you. Admiring the beauty of the leaf, bird and sky. Hearing silence. Knowing you are the only human beings for miles upon miles. Watching clouds float by. Seeing storms blow in and blow out. Paddling on clear glass lakes and paddling in raging wind. Duffing and relaxing. Sleeping and not worrying what time it is. Going to the bathroom right outside of your tent. Not having to worry about what you look like. What you smell like. What clothes you wear. Impressions someone. Listening to the birds and wind in the trees, what few trees you hear in the tundra. Seeing wildlife. You only dreamt of seeing. Being warm and toasty in your sleeping bag, falling asleep to the sound of rain pitter-pattering on your tent. Watching fish jump out of the water, Watching birds playing. Reading, writing, talking. Finding yourself.

Many journals were filled with learning moments that the women chronicled. As their journeys reached the Bay, the entries, like the above, became longer and more detailed. More self-reflection aimed at themselves, the journey, the group, and the land was recorded during the paddle north on Hudson Bay than anywhere else in most women's entries of this adventure. The Bay was 50 miles, approximately 5 days from the

delta to the Inuit town of Arviat. Every woman knew that the adventure was inevitably coming to a close once the water turned salty and the air sweet with ocean breezes. One adventurer asked the real question of what life would hold for her once she returned:

Kate and I sat on the bow plate of 2 canoes, beached on the flats talking about fear and comfort and confidence, and how this place must have a soul. We talked about if we would come back here. – I said that I will come back to an unknown this big someday – Sitting there, in the dark of midnight, with our feet in the water being struck by lightning all around us, on Hudson Bay, in the Northwest Territories of Canada, with not many more options than doing just that – and I was loving it. So what do I do with that now?

Summary

Detailed relationships with the journey, the land, and one another are the holistic picture of what an expedition is to women returning from that expedition. This event as described over the preceding pages is awesome but very difficult to comprehend. It is an adventure focusing on self-discovery and survival. No doubt this expedition affects young women as they physically return from it. As the young woman mentioned in the above journal entry, “So what do I do with that now?”

CHAPTER SIX - FINDINGS RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

“This voyage is not over, it has changed circumstances and location. The water is in my body, the tundra is in my mind and the women are in my heart.”

Postexpedition returnee

How do young women returning from a wilderness expedition describe the return from that expedition?

Introduction

As women paddled through the wilderness, their journal entries spoke to their concerns along the route. Some feared the cold they thought would inevitably grip them as they passed the 60th parallel, a noted accomplishment. Others were uncertain about the route they had chosen; would it allow enough time for them to enjoy themselves? Would injuries be kept at bay, would the tundra void of trees really be so barren and lifeless, and would the wind offer any help from the relentless bugs? Many questions concerning the actual trip riddled journal entries; however, certain milestones in the journey triggered recording of thoughts beyond the expedition, concerning the future when women would not be paddling but back at home. These milestones, whether they were concrete, like completing the 500th mile or finishing all of the sausage brought on the trip, or more abstract, like no longer dreaming of home or feeling that the journey was finally a lifestyle, often mirrored a recollection of feelings toward a world very much in the future. One woman recorded the following:

Kate and I talked today that we are excited to go home, but I can't imagine it at all. I cannot comprehend that after I leave this the summer is almost over and I go

right back to school. Things move too quickly...simplicity out here, complexity back home: That's the way it is and that's why I keep returning to the trail.

With a kind of nostalgia, women joked about what they had gained on the trip, such as the habit of hot drinks in a particular Esso Tiger Mug or trail hands of "permo-dirt," which brought "unsurpassable joy to my eyes because it reminds me of daddy with the deep creases of dirt." Still another woman noted that life for her would never be the same. She wrote of gaining an inner confidence that cannot be taught, which she had never had before. Travelers divulged that they would take these gifts home with them. Whether it was dirt or confidence, it was undeniable that the trail gave them something. This something accompanied them home, but first they had to make it through the expedition. While on the trip, talking and writing about the time after the expedition was a key component for women. Eventually, the trip did end and people did return to their former homes. Table 3 summarizes the findings.

Table 3

Thematic Description of Return

Thematic Description of Returning from a Wilderness Expedition

Expedition Returning – Beginning – Nostalgic Reminiscing

Initial Connections

Middle – Realistic Pondering

Connections Attached

End – Expedition Introspection

Connection in Jeopardy

Embracing New Connections

Immediate Return – Connections Interrupted

Embracing New Connections

Environmental Newness

Social Newness

Dichotomy in Self

Afterwards – Self Concept Alteration

Respect for Land

Augmented Sense of Self

Group Process

Physical Healing

Loss

Home Newly Realized

Environmental Disconnectedness

Social Disconnectedness

Connections Merge

Change in Perspective

Transition Triggers and Pointers

Reentry Realized

Expedition Returning

Admittedly abstract, I believe the women on these expeditions began their return from these expeditions on Day 1. This being the first trail day, some of the travelers began to wonder what life would be like after their travels. Would they be in shape for sports in the fall? Would they make it on time to Arviat? Mostly logistical or tangible in nature, such questions flooded the early journal entries. As the trips neared their end, contemplation concerning the physical return from the journey intensified. Viewing the adventure as an entity, I have noted the actual trail day of many of the journal entries to assist the reader in describing this return experience relevant to the journey itself. The entries were divided into three piles based upon when during the adventure each woman had chronicled the text concerning her eventual return. Operationally, whether a traveler

made a reference to missing coffee or fretting over her boyfriend, any words that indicated her attention focused away from the expedition were classified as being related to returning from that expedition. This shift in concentration was cut out of the broader text and placed into piles of entries. These piles were categorized as belonging to the beginning, middle, or end of the journey and were the foundational components of how women described returning from a wilderness expedition while still on that expedition.

Several themes related to returning from this journey were traced along its path. Through the course of the adventure, travelers periodically recorded thoughts of home. These initially were nostalgic reminiscences that evolved into a kind of realistic pondering in the middle of the trip, as explorers concentrated more on the reality of what home was for them. Finally, towards the end of the adventure, paddlers' thoughts of home were very real contemplations concerning their future role in that place.

Simultaneously, women on the expeditions were connecting to the world around them. As the miles passed, these connections not only blossomed but became a very real part of each woman's being so much so that when the journey was imminently over, women were concerned about how to incorporate these connections into their ordinary lives at home.

The Beginning

The initial portion of the trip was labeled as being from the very first day the women began paddling on the expedition to the time they reached the tundra, which took approximately 16 days. Until this point in the trip, most of the scenery was not new to most of the paddlers, being trees and smaller lakes, and most of the tripping skills needed to the tundra were not remarkable in nature. This was an introductory section of the

adventure when paddlers were getting used to each other and the environment around them while also missing comforts and memories of home.

Nostalgic reminiscing

Women wrote about wondering which kind of job they might enjoy someday, what people back home might be doing, and one woman even questioned what grade she earned on her ACT. Several recorded that they wanted to make the best of the trip because they knew “in 2 months I will wish I was back here, so I need to just enjoy every minute and not worry about stupid stuff that won’t matter.”

Several of the women, as previously covered in an earlier chapter, battled homesickness especially during the early days of the expedition. On one trip, two women were able to share their personal feelings on this subject, as they each thought of home often in the early expedition days. Taking comfort in each other’s stories of family and home, the two developed a special bond. Interestingly, one of these travelers recounted in detail those first moments of returning home from her 30 day canoe adventure that she had experienced 1 year prior:

Lucy and I discussed in detail our first encounters with mom and dad when we were picked up last summer and all the good trimmings of details about feelings and stuff...I enjoyed beyond belief the feelings in a car ride with mom and dad and feeling their warmth again and just being near them. I remember getting food at the huge grocery store (ROLES) and daddy staying back off the main road to do my laundry.

Expeditioners early in the journey wrote of missing things. One woman missed her bed, another corn-on-the-cob, still another a hot bath or just a cup of coffee. Some

wanted to be warm, others cold. In the early days, women yearned for the comforts of home that are often lacking on longer expeditions. One woman on Day 6 summed up the gratitude she acquired on the trip:

Time will suddenly matter again and we will need to get used to life being fast. Paddles will be replaced by car keys and tents will be replaced by dorm rooms. The greatest gift trail gives, however, is appreciation. If only for a while, I will be able to enjoy rain and thunderstorms – knowing I have shelter and warm, dry clothes. I will appreciate being able to eat without all the work of collecting wood, building and feeding a fire, and making the meal. Going to the store for necessities will seem luxurious and brewing a cup of coffee will be pure gluttony.

Initial connections

Upon entering the trail, a kind of stutter-step occurred in some women's journals, as they contemplated actually being out there and consequently tried to make sense of where they were and what they were doing. There was the initial shock of experiencing the trail and how that impacted the inevitable return. One woman made the following comments:

Things are going well though, but this is still such a crazy notion to me that I am actually here. I often forget that the other life Rachel lives is part of the one I am living here. It is all connected somehow, and maybe someday it will make sense to me. Just have faith and let it happen.

On Day 12, one adventurer chronicled the following:

I am enjoying so many aspects of this trip, still, but do look forward to the end. I still feel that time is going really fast. Each day just flows into the next and every

once in awhile I find myself stunned to look back upon what we've done and seen already. I sometimes feel like I've had enough, and it would be OK to go home now, but then I remember that there is so much more changing and learning that will occur in the next coming weeks I started thinking about what I'm going home to, and started having a lot of anxiety.

Another woman recounted that she was so excited for both the trail and life afterwards. Several days later on Day 10, she recorded, "but I don't want it to be a traumatic experience at the end. I've heard there is a lot of culture shock when we go back to civilization. I'm excited to see how that goes." Overall, most travelers in this early portion of the trip wrote of accepting the challenges offered by the route, facing inevitable issues with group dynamics, and enjoying the sheer beauty of the land. It seemed a transition time for them, as they strove to connect to that around them but also disconnect from that which they missed at home.

The Middle

The middle segment of the trip was qualified as groups reaching the tundra to approximately 2–3 days prior to reaching Hudson Bay. In trail days, this was from roughly Day 16 to Day 41. Weather usually worsened near the Bay, the landscape changed slightly, and even the air smelled differently. At this point, I classified the middle portion of the trip to be over. Entries concerned with returning were decidedly dialectic in that periodically there were light-hearted jabs at home life, longings for some comfort item, or the brief realization that eventually the expedition would complete its course; there was also the pained awareness of the meaning of journey's end.

Realistic pondering

Similar to the early stage of the trip, some women missed their families and friends. Those in partnerships wonderingly wrote about what their boyfriends were doing and sometimes whom their boyfriends might be seeing. One young woman questioned, "Wonder what Mike is doing? ...Is he living with a girlfriend? Does he think of me?" Some travelers pondered relationships to come with their significant others. They asked "what if" phrased questions about their special partner such as this traveler did: "I sat and thought about the direction I would want my life to go in if I were not in a relationship with Jack. It was kind of a weird thing to do...."

Even on Day 26, one trip excitedly spoke of the plane and train rides needed to leave the tundra, which would occur approximately 25 days in the future. One woman admitted she "thought a lot about the paddle in and returning home. It is so bizarre how we think about trail all the time we are home, and think about home while we are on trail." On Day 34, a woman mentioned it was scary to think that her group was so close to the end. At about this same time on another trip, a woman wrote, "I never want to leave this place yet I am so excited to get to the bay and do the paddle in." Finally on Day 38, a woman recorded the following:

My emotions are going crazy. 6 more days on the trail, 3 in Arviat, 3 roadshow, a few in camp. Then home. Do I want to leave this wonderful place? I want to see you guys. All the responsibilities at Home: work, school, v-ball, college app. Where to go, What to do. Who cares? I will figure it out.

Some women planned particular activities for when they got home. One rather sarcastically wrote that she would miss the trail days, "Gosh. You know how miserable it

is to have soaking underwear?" On Day 31, this same traveler very specifically outlined meeting her parents after the trip. She wrote the following:

I just got a foreshadow of me in the kitchen with mom and dad and it totally felt like I hadn't gone on this trip at all. I'm really looking forward to that time of reunification, although it will honestly feel awkward at first, I'm sure. But to just sit and be thankful of who they are and what they stand for just makes me so full of excitement to be their daughter.

Still other woman planned future living arrangements with trip mates, mountain-climbing treks, or longer canoe expeditions. With all of the healthy, high-fat eating on the expeditions, more than one woman wondered about her accumulation of fat during the trip. One explorer wondered if she would be ready for fall sports, "I'm anxious about volleyball. What if I'm not in shape? I'll just have to deal and be patient." One woman on Day 34 daydreamed about how she would go home and end up:

Cooking great meals with recipes in my urinal, wear my fleecy clothes and hiking boots (cool!) like my polartec stretch pants, wool socks, hiking boots, and wool sweater and top it off with braids! Excellent! Also, possibly make fires in my backyard to cook foods for friends and roast marshmallows. Carry on writing in my journal...

(The reader is reminded that most long trips do not often use recipes to cook meals, many women prefer to wear braids to keep long hair at bay, and apparently urinals can be multi-functional.) One traveler admitted that even though her leader told her she would miss this challenging moment the group was enduring, she fantasized about a warm shower. She continued, "(I wish for) clothes right out of the dryer. Remember that being

warm and dry are not overrated – I would have given anything today for those, or a roof over my head.”

Connections attached

Towards the middle of the adventure, voyagers wrote of the journey as though they were finally connected to it. After roughly 3–5 weeks of travel, the investment of paddling each day, portaging for miles, battling wind, and solidifying personal relationships seemed to become a reality. So ingrained with the lifestyle of tripping, women imagined themselves without this lifestyle. They thought of the future without the wind or bugs, a time growing closer but still weeks distant. Many entries within women’s journals beginning around Day 25 were bipolar in nature when describing the return. Travelers wrote of longing for dry socks but then couldn’t imagine being anywhere other than in the tundra. The same traveler who desperately wanted the warmth of dryer fresh clothes continued to record almost the opposite sentiment at approximately the same time as the previous entry:

As much as this weather sucks, it’s why I’m here. While paddling I think of the way things are in life not on the trail, but I can hardly imagine myself being there, not here. I know I’ll miss it so much while I’m gone – times when I’d give anything to hear Nicole’s giggle of a laugh not too far away or to be sharing the 2-man with Jessica or to shoot a rapid with Ann. The tundra is beautiful, even in this weather, and each day I grow stronger and stronger – not only physically, but mentally too. I smell horribly, I haven’t brushed my hair in 35 – some odd days and it’s probably dreading in these braids, I’m cold, and all my clothes are wet; but Leslie and Jessica are cooking dinner and tomorrow the sun might be shining.

Might I'd say it's worth the chance, if Jessica and I don't blow away in the 2-man first.

Still another adventurer echoed this polarity. She wrote on Day 41:

I may never return and need to enjoy each passing moment. In a short time I will return to "reality" of responsibility to others (other than these 8) and money matters and stress. Things out here are so simple, I am not sure how I am going to handle going back to that. I will miss new friends and support system. They have grown/ laughed/ screamed and cried with me and soon we must part. I'll have to actually decide what clothes to put on each morning and learn how to run again. I'll need to actually go to a bathroom to pee and take showers every day (or close to it) On the other hand I won't need a bugnet whenever I'm outside, I can shave my armpit hair, I'll always have warm dry clothes (that are clean) and I don't have to poop with 50 thousand black flies attacking my sensitive regions..."

Some paddlers openly admitted to deep worries. Several times the phrase, "I don't know what I am going to do without these people" appeared throughout the journals during the trip's midsection and later. One woman on a particularly difficult trip in terms of both group dynamics and route summed it up:

...developing a sense of security with these people. They are my life, livelihood. It is sad to think we only have 20 more days left together on our journey. I love it here...These people I know I will miss. With all their faults, complaints, stealing more of their space in the tents, slowness, lack of common sense etc..They all are cool.

On Day 20, one paddler wrote of anxieties that seemed to grip her both in the Arctic as well as in her future life at home. Her mind drifted from one thought to the next:

Being scared of what is to come. And I think I am also more worried than I would like to be about teaching piano lessons next year. I am starting to become a worry wart again. Are you guys okay? Will I be OK? Is everything at home okay. What is ahead of us. Is this wind ever going to stop. Will we make it to Hudson Bay? In one piece? Do I want to do this again?! Is this what I want to do for the rest of my life? I do not know. What about senior pictures? Will I be totally fat in them. Do I even want to get them taken? Will I make it through my senior year? Yearbook. Volleyball. Homework. Dance Work. Time for fun. Time for family. What college to go to. What college to get into? ...

Finally, in this midsection of the trip, one paddler contemplated the end of the journey. She wondered about life without her group, that constant team of women who surrounded her day and night. What will happen when they are gone she chronicled:

I really don't know and don't expect to, but it will have made some sort of difference. Life will be different – how much and why and what I don't know or expect, but something, will be. Right now my mind thinks about how windy it is outside and how many miles we have to the Bay, and when I should start hydrating dinner, and how nasty this tent smells, and it is comfortable that way.

She continued in another entry close to Hudson Bay:

The seagulls, at least, this is my theory, fly above and kind of watch us. They are saying "Come on, I want to show you something" We'll get to the bay and they

will say, "See this is what I wanted to show you" This is comfort to me now, and it will be more than difficult to leave."

The End

Defined as roughly Day 42 to the physical completion of the journey about Day 48, the end of the trip was always marked by the long ascent north on Hudson Bay. This land, 50 miles of coastal flats, was unlike anything the voyagers had encountered. Just as paddlers battled with finding fresh water, encroaching tides, and avoiding large carnivorous mammals, women thought over the events of the trip. Some explorers detailed this flashback over nearly 7 weeks of trail life in their journals. Simultaneously, women confronted their imminent arrival in Arviat, the small Inuit hamlet that marked the physical end of their expedition. This town represented the return: a parting from the journey and the land. Women wrote of their excitement to reach its dazzling lights and the possible life afterwards but also realizing what the end meant. Again, as in many of the written segments from the middle portion of the trip, there is a polarity within the text, a pulling of emotions in different directions reflected in the words.

Expedition introspection

One woman summed up her reminiscing of the trip while she sat with a friend on the Bay waiting for the tide:

We talked a lot about what kind of trip this is, How complicated it is, and how the group part of it is so intricate. We talked about how you lose yourself in the group, which will make it that much harder to leave it.

Still another woman wondered about the very early days of the trip during the first watershed in which things had been so difficult for her. She wrote, "that time seriously

seemed like a lifetime ago....” She further reminisced about her trip with a close trip mate. She commented, “We got to talking about the things we remember quite a bit and stand out not only the most, but held quite a bit of frustration and thoughts over the course of our trip....” Some women recounted their stories of days, several weeks previously, concerning some exciting fish that was caught or a particularly nasty paddling day. As groups traversed the shore of Hudson Bay, their minds not only strayed to the weeks of journeying behind them but also to connections made.

Connections in jeopardy

Paddlers braced for the inevitable shock of leaving the trip. One woman commented, “I’m not so excited to put an end to this surreal, yet so real life I’ve lived all summer – I can’t go back now – time is ticking and all I can do is enjoy EVERY second.” Another explorer who had battled homesickness through the earlier portions of the trip recorded that upon reaching the Bay, her group met another expedition trip that was having trouble dealing with the trip’s ending. She exclaimed that her group had not faced this inevitability yet. She recorded, “One more trail day. Wow. A part of me wants to leave but another wants to stay. Such a hard thing to deal with. I hope everything will turn out just fine, I hope.”

Her thoughts were often echoed in journal entries by other participants. One woman wanted to “stay here forever” or at least stop into Arviat briefly, and then head back onto the trail. Another explorer mentioned that hitting the Bay made everything, “complete, beautiful. I sit back and smile. I will miss it.” Still another paddler upon her first day into the Bay mentioned that getting so close to the end of the trip was “unbelievable.” She termed her feelings as “rather unexplainable – I forget that when we

reach Arviat we're done completely. It still feels like we'll simply take time off then continue."

One woman chronicled this upon reaching the Bay:

The Bay! Our glorious ocean Hudson! It's amazing! Extraordinary! I was baffled by the beauty and overwhelming to think that we're here and I think so soon! Rest of the trip has zoomed like a blink of an eye. If I feel this so far, What am I going to feel when I get home? I don't ever want to lose this life-changing warm trail feeling. So natural, so free and here to live on the Land!...

Another woman wondered on Day 43 how she would end the trip. She questioned, "I guess deep down I'm not sure how ending this trip is possible. It seems like such a distant idea." While paddling on the Bay, one explorer commented that she felt so comfortable to be out there: "I will miss all of this power and thereness very much. So much, I will need to come back someday. There are all these unfamiliar yet comfortable sounds outside our tents. I will miss it all very much."

Women additionally chronicled missing people with whom they had journeyed so far, but these entries were much fewer in number possibly because the actual groups would not part ways for another 8–10 days. One woman on the Bay recorded the following:

Leaving it, leaving them will be hard. It will be tearing, and I am glad about that. If it doesn't tear, then maybe it wasn't deep enough. I want it to hurt and make me sad. Leaving this place will be hard too, but I will return someday, somewhere.

Still another woman described a trip mate with whom she had traveled through several long journeys. Towards the end of the trip, after nostalgically reviewing the 5 years the two of them had shared at camp, she wrote the following:

I have learned a lot from her. I think about her frequently every year at home and in school. Her attitude and values encourage me. She has a special quality of befriending everyone and working to understand what differences they have from her like no one I have ever know.

Embracing new connections

Bipolar in nature, entries revealed the raw human emotions of anxiety laced with excitement as the journeys came to a close. Day 45, on the Bay very near to the Inuit hamlet, a woman wrote the following:

Anxious to get to Arviat, to see the town and meet the people. All of us feel that our bodies need the rest but our minds are still so active and into this trip. I might call home tomorrow, I wonder how that will be. Maybe I will wait a bit longer to extend the trail feeling, yet I know my family would really appreciate it. We'll see what happens. Yet again – exhausted.

One woman reported she put on new, clean underwear in honor of her close proximity to the expedition end point. (The reader is informed that any clean clothes during this stretch of the journey were extremely rare.) She was expected to reach the town on the morning tide the following day. A certain explorer after meeting her first Inuit on the tidal flats was excited to greet more of them the next day after her imminent arrival at the coastal town.

Another group, as written by one member, sat on the Bay shoreline, eating breakfast and light-heartedly spoke of “boys and loves we missed, random affairs, friends taking to lovers....” She reported the group couldn’t believe they were so close to finishing the trip, as they kept talking about home in a fun, upbeat manner. One member of a group wrote that she wondered if she would first go to volleyball practice or work on the school newspaper upon arriving home. Another paddler, as her group approached the Bay, reported that she viewed home as an odd reality. She recalled, “It seems like such a distant place right now. I’m both sad and excited about it. I’m really excited to see my family though, and Julie and John (her boyfriend), get mochas...and just talk for hours.” Still another paddler, within sight of the Bay, hoped her buffed muscles would stay with her. She wrote the following:

I hope I can keep myself this way. The muscles in my arms are just incredible, having carried me this far. Our bodies are so strong, putting up with pushing this much each day. And mental strength is unbelievable. Putting up with the stress of pushing day after day and constantly dealing with Jane. Everybody’s got their own things to deal with. I think we’re all going to come out of this changed, maybe some more than others.

Finally a paddler after many long days of canoeing saw the lights of Arviat for the first time. As groups approach from the south of town, they must travel across a large bay, approximately 8–12 miles in width. The lights then immediately flicker in front of the bows for many hours as women paddle towards them. One explorer recorded the following:

The lights appeared to be floating on the water, since we couldn't see any land. I couldn't take my eyes off the lights. They made me feel a thousand different ways. I felt anxious and excited to get there, but at the same time a bit sad and confused. It marked civilization. A different civilization than I am used to, but civilization none the less. I knew I would be getting off the trail soon, and things would be very, very different.

The Immediate Return

Most groups arrived in the town of Arviat on Hudson Bay after approximately 48 days of wilderness travel. One group of women was evacuated to this town after an encounter with a polar bear on the coast. As women landed at the town, I operationalized the journey to be over. Physically, they were no longer paddling alone but were in a small hamlet rife with activity, including ATVs that provided the townspeople transportation to stores and churches (there are no roads in or out of Arviat) and satellite dishes. The immediate return continued from this moment to the point at which the expedition traveler was no longer with her trip mates. This return spanned between 7–14 days, depending on the time spent in Arviat, in transit back to Camp Manito-wish in Wisconsin, and in posttrip activities at the camp.

In reviewing the journal entries from this immediate return experience, three themes emerged. Women wrote of feeling anxious or confused because they were going to miss the world they had grown to love but were simultaneously intrigued about what lay ahead of them. Life after the expedition held a small fascination for some of them. One woman whose entry is typical of combining all themes into a thought recorded, "I

am so anxious yet so scared for tomorrow. I can't wait to shower, but it will be so hard to leave."

Connections Interrupted

The abstract relationships women forged with the journey, land, and people changed once the women reached civilization. One woman noted the following:

This is it? Our Expo has now ended it's part on water? Strange. I believe that (my) mind went in a sort of denial state, not letting myself realize the fact that I will have to leave this natural and beautiful world I've known for so long, but not quite long enough!

Immediately, the most obvious connection with the land changed drastically once women were encapsulated by the more urban environment. One explorer wrote that she knew her camera would not do justice to the Arctic terrain they had left but "it will live in my heart, head and memories." Another noted that being surrounded by sky and water was empowering to her soul. She further described the process of leaving the rocky and peat-mossed land as this: "Its hard to say good bye to an old friend. I've only known that arctic land for 7 weeks but known it with more intimacy than I know my town of 14 years." Another traveler vacillated on how to take the breathtaking night sky with her. She met an Inuit in a pub who told her she would always have a special pact with the land. She recorded, "(he told us) about the ties we will always have with the land. When we die, we will carry with us these ties." One last recollection of the land was noted as a woman flew over the tundra. She journaled, "Getting on the plane was a little hard. Leaving the tundra, the place, was pretty sad. Just knowing it is still there though, that means something. I think I may be seeing Arviat again someday. We shall see."

The physical journey of actually paddling ended when women arrived at Arviat as well. One traveler pondered the balance of that journey with their survival. She noted the following:

What awes me is not only traveling all this way with our bodies as the only machine to get us there, but what we must do just in order to eat and sleep. There are no switches that provide a source for cooking, no buttons to press that will tell you when your food is ready. No one around to pick up after us.

She vividly recalled the previous day in which the journey and land were one. Her perception of the two was that her canoe was in a video arcade game and the scenery was just floating past. She noted this image in the first days after ending the trip:

How can I describe the feeling I get from being out here? I always say you can't really describe them. At least I can't maybe not yet anyway. I'll try.

Complete immersion in uninhabited wilderness fills me with strength as an individual and as part of my group. Reflecting on the work we have done does that for me. Getting through the day I don't always notice it. Enjoying this land all to ourselves...be as naked as we'd like, talk about whoever and whatever we'd like. Freedom is the word that comes to mind. Freedom from the restrictions of society...

One woman noted that Arviat was just another step in the expedition. She remarked, "The actual trail time was over but the trip was still going....Once we entered Arviat, it was another experience to add to the expo. We weren't paddling but we were experiencing another aspect of the land, the people."

Another woman remarked upon stepping off the train that carried some groups into the heart of Manitoba before driving over the border into the United States, “I cried getting off the train – a mix of being weirded out, overtired, and not wanting to leave the land or the trip.” In an effort to not leave the trip or to really preserve the memories of that adventure, at least two trips went over the expedition, day by day, noting all of the happenings and reveling at what their individual memories had preserved and let go.

During this immediate return period, groups seemed overwhelmed by many other people only because they had been alone for so long in the wilderness. One woman commented it was nice that some visitors to the newcomers gave them space and time to be their own group once they set foot on Arviat shores. Another woman wrote of the moment her group splintered, when she was not back at her home but when she had to leave them a bit earlier than the rest of her expedition. She wrote the following:

It was time to say good-bye. It was one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to do. I love those girls soooooo much, and spending 62 days straight with them and then waking up one morning without them there would be something that would be extremely hard for me and I knew that.

Embracing new connections

Upon arriving off the land, women were confronted with a culture few had ever experienced. Inuit culture, the community many of them had read about or studied over the last several weeks, met them as they entered the small town of Arviat. New sights and sounds greeted their weary, travel-worn bodies. Society with its accompanying noise and hurried pace did not lessen as the women journeyed south to the United States.

Environmental newness.

This immediate return was markedly noted by the ATVs that often met expedition groups. Women noted how loud these machines were, one making a traveler “whoosy” as she was ferried into the heart of town from the tidal flats behind the settlement. She additionally remarked on how fast her vehicle cruised. One woman remarked that the silence was gone with the “constant roar of the Hondas.” Another commented on the dogs barking as Arviat is home to many mushers.

Senses seemed to be on overload as an explorer recorded her trouble with being inside as she felt it was too warm. Another admitted the plum she tasted in her first moments back was absolutely “great;” she had not had something this good in a long time. Still another woman marveled at a pay phone; others contemplated whether or not to use the pay phone to call family members.

Visiting expeditioners to Arviat were sometimes treated to the generosity of townspeople. As one woman remarked, “Then it was off to a wonderful meal of caribou, rice and veggies, salad, bread, jello and ice cream. Who can forget the pickled beluga?” One traveler on remembering her northern feast commented that “remembering (the meal), a slightly sickening feeling does fill my stomach.” Many journal entries practically salivate over the enormity of foodstuffs available that were consumed with relish by postexpedition women. From doughnuts to French fries, many but not all women, savored the new and classic flavors they had not enjoyed in months. Although some people journaled that seeing local fast food joints in Winnipeg reminded them of home, others were completely overwhelmed by the immensity of these places. As one woman

described, “Anyhow, the whole grocery store experience was quite overwhelming and all I wanted to do was get out.”

Several women noted the reappearance of trees. Some of the returning groups traveled south towards Winnipeg by train from Churchill. “They are sort of a warming, welcome sight after all out time in the Barrens.” wrote one traveler. She continued as follows:

The land takes on a more gentle and softer tone as we make our way South.

Maybe the harsher temperatures way up North require a toughness from the land, or maybe it’s just that the middle of the continent is more familiar to me.

Another explorer on this 36-hour train ride ventured, “Passing through land today – the trees are just so huge! I look at the scenery and long for the 360 degree horizon and lands where you can see everything.”

Social newness.

Women noted that it was nice to slowly transition into going home through their arrival into Arviat. One explorer noted the following:

I felt that the return back into everyday life was a gradual transition. When we entered Arviat, the paddling and traveling aspect of the trip was over yet the cultural and emotional part of the trip continued. I may not have been challenging my physical capabilities, but I was however still learning about myself and this new culture that I had become to respect immensely.

Another noted that she found the town “relaxing.” She wrote, “It is so amazing up here. The culture is so rich in tradition! It is so different from the States. I love It !!!” Still another wrote, “Their smiles light up their faces, you couldn’t help but return the smile

and happiness they showed. This is a perfect way to immerse ourselves back into civilization. They made us feel welcomed and brought us into their homes.” Some explorers commented that they would like to learn the language or even spend some time student-teaching in a place such as that hamlet. The reader is reminded that the Inuit tradition of Arviat is the same culture explored over the course of most Camp Manitowish canoe expeditions. At present age, as opposed to 60 years ago, the people possessing this culture now reside in mostly coastal towns as opposed to small clusters of families on the land. Women recorded learning about some of these traditions in an earlier chapter of this dissertation.

As welcoming as new faces were to some women, others wrote that the very presence of all of the people was difficult. One traveler noted both the aspect of crowds as well as the newness of being alone:

Being alone is strange. While having to deal with hundreds of people in Arviat and coming off the trail and being in cities all of the sudden was shocking, so is being completely alone. There are now times when I must be conscience of hoards of people but also time when no one is within a cry away from me.

Another woman recorded, “A bunch of people came to visit us last night. It was cool, but quite overwhelming. At one point I was about to have a meltdown. There were so many people...I almost lost it.” She additionally noted her trouble imagining all of her family waiting for her at camp when she completed the ceremonial “paddling in.” (Post canoe expeditions paddle a short distance across a lake to the shores of Camp Manitowish to greet staff and family members instead of arriving home from a 49-day canoe trip in a camp van.) She wrote, “It would actually probably be really over-whelming if everyone

was there.” Furthermore, she continued to record the oddity of actually seeing her family after so many weeks: “We talked about how weird it is going to be and how hard it will be when we see our families because we will go from the 8 of us being a family to having our own separate families.”

Interestingly, several women commented upon the physical need to move. After tremendous muscular activity over the last several months, some women found it odd not moving at the pace to which they had become accustomed. One woman remarked, “I get the feeling in my arms that I need to paddle which is a wonderful thing.” Still another explorer offered this:

The lack of the routine and regular life on trail – trying to figure out what the new roles in the situations were, we were supposed to be doing and feeling and acting.

There was a feeling of idleness in our daily life once we were not paddling and going!

Dialectic self

When the trip ended, women became more aware of the dialectic within themselves, concerning their anxiety to finish the trip and their anticipation at seeing family and friends. Every traveler, to some extent, mentioned this parallel pull, yet some women felt it more strongly than others. Most people commented the trip had zoomed past them and that time was at an accelerated pace. Some people mentioned being in a fog and feeling absolutely physically exhausted as well. One woman commented as follows:

I have no idea where to begin. Not writing will catch up to me. Waves of emotions sweep through me, leaving my head and my heart totally and

completely unsure of what to think now. I think I've been on automatic pilot for awhile (no pun intended since we're on the plane).

One woman could not call home because to her the trip was not over. Those women who chose to call home mentioned being excited to do so, but afterwards one caller was homesick and "very stressed out;" another noted it was "weird" speaking with her family, and still another was livid. She explained as follows:

This trip kicked my ass. It was the toughest, most incredible thing I've ever done – the parents tried to tell me that my sister is tired, too, after a week in South America and I had to yell at them to not even go there. I'm sure they assumed it was my usual blow-up at them, but if they only knew... 16 hours of working out a day, 8 hours of sleep if I was lucky. I have never been so whipped my life. Them not understanding really made me realize that no one is going to understand for me. And now I'm not on the trail but I'm not back in civilization – it's the grey area – somewhere in-between.

At some point, everyone commented on the fatigue they felt at the end of the trip, especially those women who were members of very physical trips. Many simply commented to themselves, "It's very different being in civilization again. I really don't know how I'm feeling."

The reality that not everyone would understand such an adventure hit some women at this intermediary point in the expedition. As alluded to in the lengthy previous notation, a woman's parents did not seemingly comprehend the adventure, and she realized perhaps no one would. This sentiment was echoed by another expo member:

I will always remember the 8 wonderful girls I spent each day with and I know that even though most people I talk to will never be able to fully or even partially understand the experience I've just had, there are 8 girls out there who know, who understand, who have experienced the wonder of Canada, of the forest, of the tundra, of the Bay of Arviat, of life in the woods. They are my tundra sisters, and I will forever love them.

Still another woman wondered at the possibility that even her boyfriend, whom she missed dearly, might not understand the magnitude of the adventure she just survived. She entered into her journal feelings concerning the inevitable ride home:

It is absolutely insane how fast time flies which I liked, but hated at the same time. It really hit me today how hard it is going to be to leave these girls and say goodbye in a few days. We've been through a lot together, but at the same time I'm excited to go home. I really miss Jack. I have a feeling that things might be a bit strange when I get home though. Because of this summer, my life will never be the same again, and no matter how close Jack and I get, there is no way that he will ever be able to understand the experience. I have experienced the power and the beauty of the Arctic, and very few people have. While that's difficult, it's very special, I will always appreciate the time I've had out here to grow and change. It's been an incredible journey.

A couple of women entertained the thought of staying in the north forever. It appeared as though this was a passing thought but still relevant. One woman recorded the following:

My feelings are so mixed about going back to "reality". I have had the most incredible summer of my life and feel that it will help me to be successful in my

future endeavors – as well as lead to bigger and (dare I say) better opportunities. I still have the childish desire to refuse to go home. I loved the tundra....O love these women as well. I don't know what life is going to be like without making my decisions – EVERY decision, along with all of the girls.

Another wished her family and schooling could be in Nunavut where she and they could be together. "But this is impossible and life must go on," she conceded. Her personal struggle with lingering between two worlds was especially evident. She recorded the following:

I sat at camp tonight watching the moonrise over Hudson Bay with the city roaring behind me. This was such a great symbol for where I am right now in my life. The middle of an adventure and having to return to civilization. I saw myself longing for the adventure but somehow being drawn to the civilized world. This is how I will be for the rest of my life: longing for adventure but drawn to the civilized world. Oh the harsh realities of going home.

Furthermore, she admitted her group was plagued by petty bickering. She felt their pulling apart, ready on the defense, and arguing over pointless matters. This stress as well as her internal drama racked her with anxiety. She admitted, "This makes me homesick and extremely stressed. This and my lack of sleep are probably cause for my constant headache and stomachache."

At the prospect of the imminent arrival home, women all succumbed to feelings of excitement, anxiety, and wonder. They recorded a vast range of these feelings, but each adventurer commented upon them at this stage of the adventure. One paddler

commented how incredible it was that people admired her upon her return to camp.

Another mentioned she was sad that camp was about to end. She recorded the following:

I definitely feel that I am a stronger person after this trip, but I really don't feel like facing society or really dealing with it at all. It seems so empty to me....I knew camp was going to go fast, but really didn't believe it would, and man has the time flown. The next time I write I will either be home or on my way home. What a strange thought! I'm excited, but also scared at the same time.

Afterwards

Once women parted ways with trip mates and journeyed to family homes, the expedition experience was over. There was no doubt after reading the journal entries of this moment in time as well as the retrospective glance provided by the e-mail exchange, that this was a very unusual point in people's lives. Every woman had her unique story of this event, but several prominent themes did emerge. First, women returning from a wilderness expedition grapple with a self-concept alteration confounded by several elements. Second, women experience home newly realized. With eyes transformed by several months of expedition, women looked upon their family, friends, and society differently. Finally, a transition, weaving the experience into the woman's individual world, began to take shape and solidify.

Self-concept alteration

Women who ventured north the previous spring were not the same women who returned home the following school year. Something happened to the way they viewed themselves and the world around them. Several elements contributed to this alteration, all of which, according to the women themselves, originated on the expedition.

Respect for the land.

Women returned from a seven week journey through some of the only undisturbed tracts of land left in this world. They witnessed a forest, one of the largest on this planet, that runs from Newfoundland on the Atlantic to the Canadian Rockies in the West. Women respected this place for it had allowed them passage. One woman noted the following:

Of the countless insights we discovered on our voyage, we were constantly reminded of how small and insignificant we become. This land was in control and we could only yield to her power. We paddled only when she made it possible to travel, we shot the rapids only when she allowed for it, we pushed ourselves to our individual limits, then stopped when she took complete control. There was a certain sense of respect that was necessary to survive in this wilderness. A respect for ourselves, each other, and the environment we explored. Often times we felt as if she was looking out for us, a greater spirit that was in the water, on the land and in the sky. This spirit gave us the energy and determination to proceed, but always reminded us of the power and control she had over the land. The challenges we faced were not to be conquered but experienced. We became a part of this great land while remaining a visitor to the barrens.

Another woman noted that she experienced the land on its agenda not her own. There seemed to be an understanding in some women's journals that the land, though fragile as Arctic ecosystems are, was also powerful. One paddler journaled, "...and the fact that the sub-arctic region is changing so drastically, it will likely never be the same is depressing to me. But I guess that is one of the reasons the experience is so valuable to me." One

woman expressed that her love of the land now extended to all land. She vowed to live simply and to protect the earth where she could. She included this in her e-mail insights:

I was acutely aware of how much resources we consume in “civilization.” Like how we use more water and energy to live our daily lives. That made me sad, too. Because there wasn’t a way NOT to live that way. You can try to live more simply and conserve, but it’s not always easy. Coming back, I was reminded of howmore people “consume”. It felt overwhelming and depressing.

Augmented sense of self.

Without reservation, every woman returning from a wilderness expedition felt stronger as a woman than she had prior to that expedition. Interestingly, it is mostly through hindsight that this concept materialized so vividly, as much of the data supporting this was written as women e-mailed me their recent thoughts on what it was like to return from a wilderness expedition. Of note, only one woman mentioned how she had become a better camper. In a sense, she was empowered by her newly perfected skills of “knot-tying, handling the packs, handling and not banging the canoes, getting out of camp early...having as little impact on the environment as possible...”

Most women reported that they were more aware of who they themselves were.

One explorer recorded this in her Internet exchange with me:

The knowledge and memories I have gained from the eight women are priceless. I have learned so much from them and they have become a part of me. I have become much more confident and secure with myself for who I am and what I can do. I feel as if I am capable of handling most anything that comes my way and I thank the expedition for that.

A traveler noted shortly after her return from the north that she had learned discipline on her trip and used it to get to early morning sports practice each day. She further noted, "I've come to the conclusion that many of the things we were exposed to, were there for the purposes of growing. I've learned more this summer about myself than I can remember! And I thank you for your kindness!" This last comment was directed at the country of Canada to whom she was very thankful.

Another commented that she had learned to become more open with her feelings, which had always been a struggle for her. One woman who had had shoulder surgery 6 months prior to the expedition was extremely impressed with herself and her body for finishing the trip. She noted, "I completed my Expo six months after having surgery, and that also helped me to feel more confident and more sure of my strength of character as well as physically." This woman wrote of feeling "empowered" after the trip from her gained physique.

A traveler wrote of her return:

Upon returning from an expedition, I felt an incredible sense of accomplishment, pride, strength, and confidence and inner-calm. Prior to my expedition I had felt these emotions at different times, but I returned from my trip with an overwhelming sense of all of them combined. I felt confident in my abilities and my strength, and I felt that I had experienced something that so few people get the opportunity to experience.

Still another expeditioner noted the following:

I became more confident in who I was as a person. I was never the type of girl who felt the necessity to have a boyfriend in order to feel good about myself, but I

after the Expo, I had an even stronger sense of self. I was proud of our trip and the women it helped us to become; I felt that whoever wanted to date me in the future would have to prove he was worth it. It sounds arrogant, but it was just that I felt so confident and calm in the person I had become.

One of the travelers who had completed an extremely physical trip noted upon returning that the journey had been the toughest she had ever had to take. She noted, "I guess "had to do" is wrong- I just accomplished the greatest adventure of a lifetime and worked up to it for 6 years." One woman described that she appreciated a sense of simplicity in her world and wanted to slow the pace, as she figured the world was moving too fast. Eventually, she noted she did catch up with the pace of most of the United States but overall she felt strong.

Finally, a woman wrote the following:

Myself, the person whom I contact on my journeys. With the help of the eight other women and the world in which we explore, I find myself. In the water, air, land and the women around me, I see myself. I gain a sense of balance, on outlook on myself, for the woman I've become. The amount of personal growth that occurs on an expedition like this is immeasurable. Confidence is gained each day.

She further noted that it was in pushing herself beyond normal expectations that she tested her abilities and ultimately came out a different, stronger person.

Group process.

All women worked together as a group to survive in the wilderness. This took a certain kind of group behavior, which facilitated healthy communication between group

members. Additionally, most expedition groups were confronted by group conflict at some level. The conflict boiled over in a violent explosion of yelling and sometimes hitting, or it smoldered the entire trip; therefore, women had different experiences with group process, but nearly all of them reported a change in how they played group dynamics.

One woman reported that she realized after the expedition that group bonding occurs at its own pace; it cannot be forced or manipulated. She further expounded, "I have a more real and tangible (figuratively speaking) concept of what it means to communicate as a group and make decisions that way. What it means to bond, the hard times bond a group." Her group had a very difficult time with group dynamics in that 2 members of the group set themselves apart from the other group members. At the close of the trip, the group needed healing, and this woman began that process with what she described was healthy communication. She wrote the following:

It is never too late to begin communicating. I have learned how important it is to let a group you work so closely with know what your needs and strong feelings are. You can't completely change people but you might influence them and just letting your feelings be known will change the way people think about their actions...maybe...

Another woman on this same expedition reported a similar need to work through the suffering group dynamics of the trip. She reported the following:

Because our experience seemed tainted due to a lack of connection between the group members, I had to hash things out. ...I couldn't help but feel disappointed with the way it turned out...Our little fires felt snuffed out. So...to help cope with

what we endured mentally, a couple of us met with someone before we left camp, and when we all went home, I talked further with my parents...Though I was disappointed and confused at the time, I did grow quite a bit.

Another woman whose view of group dynamics was forever altered by the constant bickering that plagued her expedition reported the following in her e-mail exchange:

You know, returning from the expo was almost as substantial an experience as going on the expo. I had thought that the mark of a great trip was coming home and holding hands and singing a beautiful, meaningful song in 7-part harmony in front of the camp community, not headlocks and storming out of dinner while swearing at each other. My outlook on tripping (and returning from tripping) had to change significantly. We spent time trying to figure out what happened in the little time we had at camp...and I spent much time after returning to my regular life of home and school trying to figure out what happened. I also had to figure out how it all connected to me.

Obviously, her group was still actively working through dynamics at their closing meal, and this explorer further reflected how those dynamics related to her. She additionally offered, "Our closing ceremony the other night was not a closing, but a beginning. We'll be working on things, learning continuously, throughout the year and into next summer and hopefully beyond."

One woman noted in her e-mail exchange with me, "Realizing peoples different personalities and their needs is a huge skill that I have developed on the expo. I use this

all the time working and dealing with a variety of different people.” Another woman summed up her feeling of the group as noted in this entry:

We were thrown into a new environment in which we had to change our lifestyle in order to survive. Our community of seven women had to become a cohesive group in order to accomplish our expedition. We overcame adversity, rose to each challenge and reached our destination. We may all have had the same physical destination of Arviat, but we had varying mental reaches. We became a new culture in a very different world.

Physical healing.

Women returning from wilderness expeditions often reported physical maladies or unusual sensations with their bodies. These ranged from obvious overuse injuries to the need to move. Most bodies bore the scars of wilderness travel. One woman noted the following:

You saw my scared [*sic*] legs! I still have marks on my wrists and legs from black flies and mosquitoes. Around Day 43 or so I began to experience tendinitis in my right elbow, the side I paddled on the most. I also had a back issue before the trip and it proved to be a burden throughout...I went to physical therapy...it does creep up on me.

There was one other case of tendonitis among women paddlers postexpedition as well as one significant hip injury, which was described earlier in this dissertation. Another explorer noted having numb fingers for a couple of weeks, whereas one described the day her knuckle hairs began growing back presumably after being burned off from

starting/tending fires: “Even my tiny knuckle hairs are growing back and all of the scratches and bites on my right hand that caused scars are slowly seeping away.”

One woman described her newfound prowess as wonderful. She recorded:

Physically I felt great after getting back. I was a varsity soccer player and had amazing power that season. It was a bit difficult because I had bulked up so much in the legs, I had to find clothing to accommodate for that. No big deal, I was fit and looked like it. Not being so super active was a bit hard to get used to, as the year progressed I did stay in shape...

Another woman echoed the decreased activity sentiment mentioned in the above entry.

She described this as follows:

I missed the physical exertion everyday where you were so in tune to what your body was doing and going through. I remember being sad when the callouses wore away on my hands actually looked clean again (no perma-dirt around the fingernails). That was a physical sign to me that I was no longer on the trail. I remember hoping that the scars I had on my knuckles from packing the Duluth personal pack every morning would not go away.

One woman remarked upon the need to feel pain. She recorded this shortly after arriving home: “More than anything to just feel pain. Feel pain, so that I would be able to recall to some degree what it was like to be on trail. I ran 3.5-4 miles a day...” Another woman mentioned that though she was physically strong and felt empowered by this strength, she had some setbacks:

I did occasionally face a few setbacks in my confidence regarding my body image after the trip. Most times I felt good about my body, but occasionally I felt

depressed because I had put on weight on the trip. Not only had I increased my muscle mass, but I also did gain a little weight and that just made me feel a little fat and unattractive. However, being an athlete, I never felt too bad because my strength worked to my advantage.

Another athlete reported a difference in her muscle tone to which she had to adjust. She admitted to trying to train for volleyball on the trail by doing sit-ups and push-ups. At times, she even tried running in place, anything to assist her with practice in the autumn. Upon reflective insight through the Internet entries she described the following:

It was a tough transition into team training. I believe my high school off-season training began just a couple of days after I returned home that summer. I recall being out-of-breath and having jelly-like legs. I sensed a real sense of muscle mass in my legs as well. (It did get better...I had my best volleyball season after that...I truly believe that was achieved with more heart than training!)

Finally one paddler reminisced the following several weeks after her expedition:

The physical aspect of our voyage is over. The calluses are peeling away, the muscles are losing their shape and the rhythm of paddling is gone. But only for a moment. I know I will return to this state of being again. Experiencing something of this intensity is addictive. I need my fix, that insatiable desire to push myself to the extreme, to find out what I am capable of doing, to learn more about myself.

Loss.

Of all of the descriptors women returning from wilderness expeditions reported, loss was by far the most universal and poignant. Each person detailed her missing

someone or something and in sense mourning that which was now gone. Some women wrote about missing the tundra. One woman recalled the following:

I missed the tundra in a way that made me feel like my heart would leave my body when I'd see a photo of horizon and sky, and the missing seemed to get worse as the year progressed and I got farther and farther away from the trail. The missing getting worse as the year went on was a big surprise for me.

Another paddler echoed the loss of not seeing the horizon and how this stung. One woman noted the quietness. She recalled, "I'd give anything to hear that silence now, seeing the sunset light reflecting off the tundra."

Some paddlers missed the journey. That predictable pace was comfortable to them. One traveler noted the following:

Just the change in daily routine or habit was tough. I had become so used to having the same, exact schedule every single day (wake-up, pack-up, eat, paddle, eat, paddle, set-up, eat, write in journal, sleep) that it was tough having all of these things I had to do (getting ready to go back to school, clean-up trip stuff, see people, etc.) It's not that those things in and of themselves were difficult, it was scattered schedule, the relative unpredictability of it that was hard.

Another described the need for paddling and actually moving on the water. She wrote this shortly after arriving home:

I wanted that pull in my arms and shoulder and back of setting the paddle into the waves, and the boat through the water. I wanted that rhythmic strain, and dipping and ebbing along the waves and swells. I wanted to be in all my layers, slouched in a canoe...

One woman recounted that the simple outdoor life she had left felt years ago. Another missed the simplicity of the trail but also ached for the complexity that the trail offered emotionally and spiritually. A couple of other women commented upon the spiritual connection they had had in the north but that was now changed. Another adventurer noted with joy how she loved to count the spacing between lightning and thunder. (Expeditioners often count out the seconds between lightning and thunder to better gauge their proximity to the storm.) She noted, “it gives me a little heart ache for that adventure. Gosh, I miss you! Those times when we were soaked to the bone but still loving it, were numb in the fingers so bad, but laughing about it....”

Undeniably, women missed each other tremendously. They acutely mourned the essence of their expedition groups. One woman recorded the following:

I thought those few days in camp were hard but I was about to be surprised at what would be the most challenging part of the trip – leaving the other 8 women I had just spent the expedition with. We often described it as losing a limb when we all went our separate ways back home or school or work. I guess I could refer to it as phantom limb pain – the way it feels when a limb is removed but still continues to ache. Those next few weeks were full of ups and downs; happy to be home with family and friends but aching to be back with trip mates and to have that connection again. Over time the ache began to subside..., but I still remember how it feels to be in a close relationship with 8 incredible friends and share an experience like an expo.

Women mentioned bonds between their trip mates that would never disappear. One commented upon how lonely it was without her group present. She cited emptiness as

well. She wrote, "You just feel their presence after being with them for so long. They become your best friends and you know how they think, act, move and when they are not near ...it was a hard transition...." Another woman echoed these words. She recorded, "Emptiness, I felt incomplete without everyone....all I wanted was to be back in a canoe with caribou in the distance, the open sky above with a friend in the bow and three other canoes on the river." This traveler noted a similar reaction to leaving her group:

The most difficult thing for me after the expo was being apart from the girls I had just spent every minute of my summer with. As you know, expos offer some very unique experiences, and not being close to the people I had just had these experiences with was very hard for me. I was very lonely for a long time.

Another adventurer admitted that her mind was always on her trip, and she wished that she could have completed the journey again. She further noted, "I also realized how much I loved the girls I was with and the relationship we had. We were so comfortable in front of each other and they were always willing to listen." She explained that the people she knew at home were not that way. She retorted, "They are much more up-tight and less interested in your life."

Another woman recorded her feelings in the early days after returning home. She journaled the following:

I've been showing hardly any emotions except glumness. I notice how I don't smile nearly as much and aren't excited to speak at every moment and laugh, probably more reserved....Am I afraid to admit I am happy that I'm home, maybe? Gosh, I don't know if that is what I want, to pretend and shuffle through at

home...I just miss those great carefree days working so hard in the tundra and the people we met!

One woman summarized all she was missing with one entry written several months after her return when some of her trip mates had gathered at a place she could not:

I just feel so removed and torn apart when I know they are all together. I guess what I am really sad about is that this summer is no longer. I will never have that experience again. But I will have others, and maybe with some of the same women. This summer opened some worlds to me that I don't think I can turn away from, even if I wanted to. And knowing that does make me happy. It's just that right now I would love to be sitting in a circle with them, laughing, ...and just being with them, it's been so long.

Finally, an entry written 3 months postexpedition is included:

I went to the woods to find myself. I don't know why, my life was perfect and my future was planned to the very second. I had things worked out, decisions were made, and I was going to go places. As my paddle guided through the water day after day, I began to think, to ponder what lied ahead, and if I truly wanted it that way. Life was simple. A routine with no crazy technology and unnecessary items. I loved it! No worries, a strong support group, an adventure, and a desire. My soul desired and longed for this place. The solitude, silence, peace, water, sky, and companionship became my heaven. It was perfect, life was perfect. Why can't perfection last?

Home newly realized

As travelers returned to their homes, they were reunited with family and friends whom they had left behind. Of note, many of these explorers possessed a newfound sense of self. They perceived themselves differently from when they had left their homes, schools, and workplaces. They perceived the world around them differently as well.

Environmental disconnectedness.

Operationalized as being out of tune with one's environment, explorers expressed multiple sentiments to this effect. Not being in sync with the physical world around oneself, led many explorers to remark on seemingly trivial matters. One woman did not want to open her mail, but the context of the remark centered on her not being excited to jump into filling out college applications and taking senior pictures. She didn't want to see anyone who hadn't been on the trail with her. Another woman felt as though her bedroom was enormous; still another paddler remarked upon the headaches she felt constantly from all of the stress of being back in civilization. An explorer reported she completely forgot about how to handle money. She ended up bouncing her checkbook badly, as it just never occurred to her that she needed to actually monitor finances. She admitted in her e-mail exchange with me that "Money was a weird commodity for me when I got back, I remember." She also reported trouble with marking the passage of time, as though keeping track of when events occurred postexpedition was elusive.

One woman described it as follows:

Socially – the first few weeks was a blurr....so many people at camp, loud, scary.

It took a while to adjust to civilization again. For a while I felt like a new child

experiencing the hustle and bustle of the world. I also felt there was just too much stuff in the world and was minimal for a while.

Another postexpedition member reported this odd feeling as “sensory overload.” She continued, “You have to deal with so many more people at once, as opposed to having the same 8 people everyday. There are more noises, sights, etc. Things aren’t as simple.”

Although crowds were frequently described as trouble spots for postexpedition women, so was the odd sensation of being alone. Another woman noted that lights or even noise bothered her. One paddler resumed her smoking habit with the ever-present stress. Still one remarked upon how well she handled the changes around her:

Overall, I believe that I handled the change pretty well. I had trouble dealing with peoples attitudes, being inside buildings and crowded places and not being able to go to the bathroom where ever and whenever I wanted to, seems pretty minor but changes nevertheless.

This woman felt as though the changes around her were hardly unexpected considering the magnitude of events she had just experienced. She attested that her dealing with these issues took time: “it just took the time that it needed to take.”

Social disconnectedness.

Some women admitted that seeing their family and friends after so many weeks of wilderness travel was wonderful initially. A traveler’s ecstasy at seeing her boyfriend for the first time in months, a moment she had journaled about for weeks, was awesome in her mind. One woman described this, “Coming home, as in actually paddling in, being in camp, etc was actually pretty fun if I remember it. We were mini celebrities around camp

and it was great to see people.” It was much harder than she had supposed actually “being home.”

One woman basked in the glow between her parents as they dove away from camp. She noted, “I could read the love that was shared between mom and dad, they’re so happy together after I came home and that means so much for me to witness it!” She continued to remark how fantastic it was to share stories with her parents. She commented that “I just felt like if I didn’t talk as fast, all my stories wouldn’t come out!” Another woman remarked how once reaching home, she was able to hide within its shelter and do as she wanted.

Several women reported that the time they spent at home served several purposes. First, it gave them time to think and to sort through the last couple of months. Second, some of them were able to share the expedition with their families. One woman reported, “The best part about coping was being able to talk with my family about my trip and explain things.” A wise grandmother reported to her returning granddaughter that components of the trip might fade or weave together but that the trip itself would never be lost. The paddler herself was comforted by these words, as she recorded them in her journal 1 month after her return from the Arctic.

Although some women seemed reassured at being home, others struggled with the company of their families. One woman finishing her senior year of high school found that life at home was so “restrictive,” though she did not elaborate. Several women reported that though their families were supportive of them, even interested at hearing stories of the expedition, these relatives could not understand the magnitude of the trip. One

woman described how she was appreciative of her family even though she knew they could never fully comprehend her adventure. She wrote the following:

I was able to spend a week at home with just them before getting thrown into the “real” work of high school. I appreciated how they know, from past camp experiences and long trips, that I would need this to regroup. They were also patient and waited for me to tell them the stories of the expedition for when I was ready.

Another woman cited that she went to her dad’s house to recuperate, as she was not emotionally competent enough to face her mom. Her mother reportedly became upset with this decision. The paddler recorded this:

About a year or so afterwards (time is skewed) I had shown my mother my photos of the trip and she made the comment...that – that was the worst thing she had ever done as a mother to allow me to go on that trip – She crossed the line with that comment and I told her so (maybe forgetting my soft skills that I had learned on my trip). She apologized and that was a nice clean line drawn in the sand – for our relationship.

Repeatedly, journal and Internet entries reflected similar feelings expressed by women concerning the nature of describing the expedition. In general, women admitted, proper descriptions of the expedition were impossible, or readers of such descriptions were incapable of comprehension. As one woman recorded, “I felt like I had this huge secret thing that I didn’t really even want to start talking about because no one would really get it.” Another woman recalled shortly after arriving home, “I don’t know how to express my trip. I can’t put into words how the trip was....” Finally, one explorer

admitted, "The family seemed interested in my travels, but I felt almost guilty trying to explain to them what it was like because I couldn't express it the way it deserved to be expressed." One woman figured that she had such a hard time relating to people because she struggled twofold with this issue. Not only did she feel her explanations of the trip were lame as she couldn't properly find the words to describe her experience, but she felt that those close to her could never truly understand her stories. There was little enjoyment, she conceded, in sharing the trip with others.

There was one notable exception to these insights. A good friend of one of the postexpedition women shared a wise comment with the paddler. She wrote this shortly after her arrival home:

Jack started talking about how even though most people will never understand our experience, it doesn't take away from what we have accomplished. He also said that when it seems that no one understands, we should just remember that there are seven other people out there somewhere who do.

All of these women reported that they returned to school, either high school or college, after the expedition. Initially, some postexpedition entries related how excited women were at being with old friends. As one woman recorded, "Got so many compliments on my hair and must say I'm so comfortable with my goofy yet honest self at school. Quite different than in the past." Another noted that after exchanging hugs with some friends, she recalled, "(she) was grossed out but yet impressed at the same time by my legs and armpits. It was great to see everybody again, but to be honest, it was all very overwhelming." She later wrote that again one of her friends thought it was "great" that

she hadn't shaved in so long, but another friend found it "completely disgusting." One woman summed up her feelings recorded here:

I don't think anything could have made the adjustment easier, just as nothing could have really prepared me for the experiences that I would face day 1 on Wollaston (Lake). The most disturbing facet to the adjustment for me was the way some people reacted, how the only questions they would ask would regard the sanitation issues, smells, hairy legs, no soap or deodorant, stuff like that. All those topics seem so trivial to me, so I had to constantly remind myself that not everyone sees it the same way and to answer these questions with the same respect as the questions that I wanted to answer. It was when the attitude would change to disgust and disrespect from them is when I would get angry. It would have been nice to realize that this would happen so I could prepare myself a little bit more, but it seems pretty difficult to have done that. It was a learning experience, as everything is. I began to read those people pretty well and try to avoid the situation, realizing that it would just make me angry....I just wanted them to be open minded and respect this accomplishment for what it was.

Her sentiment was echoed by several women. One woman mirrored her thoughts:

They admired the statistics of the trip and admired the ability to live in the wilderness for so long, but they could never understand how an experience like that can change one's perspective on life. I returned and often felt that "real" life was so trivial in many ways....what life was really about, or should be about, was being completely responsible for your actions and decisions and being able to challenge yourself physically and emotionally every day. I felt that somehow I

had matured more than the kids around me and that they would never understand exactly how I felt or how I perceived the world.

Women repeatedly wrote that there seemed no one who could understand the adventure they had just completed and how this was a very lonely period in their lives.

One explorer reminisced of her arrival home in the following:

I was very lonely for a long time. The people I was surrounded by at school and work every day seemed miles away. I didn't care about what seemed important to most of them, as I had just lived through an entire summer where things like cool clothes, cares, money, popularity etc. were pretty well irrelevant...

Another reported her arrival back to school was very difficult for her:

Arriving back at school: Ugh! Talk about too much over stimulation and so many people who sucked!!! Of course, I had friends who were great, they would listen to me vent my feelings and frustrations about what I was going through, and they would ask questions about the trip, other than how was it and then walk away, but there were some people who thought it was the weirdest thing ever and thought that I was crazy for doing it. At first I would try and make them understand but I quickly and painfully realized that it would never happen. It really hurt when some would laugh or make fun, but these people weren't good friends anyway, so I tried to brush it off. Getting back into the college life was difficult, especially the social life. The bars made my stomach turn...Being immersed in such an unhealthy and pathetic environment was hard for me to handle. I was a different person in an old environment.

One woman admitted she downplayed her descriptions of the expedition after her return, as no one seemed to really understand the trip. Being elusive, she referred to the expedition as a long camping trip. Her friends never asked for real details so this modesty covered up the true dimension of the adventure until a teacher asked her to expound upon the wilderness expedition with specific questions midyear. She reported the following:

Polar bears, forest fires, flies, rapids, thunder and lightning storms, finding fresh water or not having much water to drink until it was found. After that the idea of this long camping trip changed in their minds and they were impressed. Less of a “wow, you did not shower for 50 days” now they had the deeper meaning and jumped to that next level.

An explorer grappled with society as a whole. She felt lost at not knowing what to do. She recorded the following:

At home, people were involved in their own routines and didn't understand. I had “forgotten” what to do. There were no places to try to get to. There were no situations where you have/had to know how everyone was feeling/tired/cold/hungry/sick/dehydrated etc. These life and death characteristics of human survival are of little consequence off the trail...Returning to school was a whole new ball game. Now, important events of life were deadlines to turn in homework in – that was it. There is just a feeling of lack of importance in these simple tasks. Would someone cry, die, hurt themselves if I didn't show up at class, do an assignment?

Coming home personalized story.

I have included the following story not to generalize that all women return as this woman did and not to glorify her pain above the rest of study participants but to relay her words so courageously shared with me. These are a series of very poignant narratives authored by a postexpedition woman on her return home. She admitted in her e-mail to me that she journeyed down a dark path for several years before she really understood the return process as it related to her specifically. Even today, the following story captured within her journal entries is difficult for her to revisit as feelings of weakness and guilt concerning her depression still plague her.

Upon arriving home, this woman noted that she immediately was pressed with multiple responsibilities both at school and at home. Most of what she enjoyed about the trail immediately vanished. She recorded the following:

I've returned from my dream to this complex, horrible, confusing life. My heaven vanished before my eyes to become stress, confusion, and conflict. The desire, adventure, routine, simplicity and support all vanished as my boat hit the sea wall (at camp). I learned so much about life and how I want to live but I returned to the world and plans I left behind to find myself trapped, unable to do what I really want and fearing any decision I must make.

Quickly, she became overwhelmed and wrote, "I want so badly to be myself and control my destiny, but I am afraid to disappoint." She continued in a later journal entry, "I should be in control and I am not. My parents control has prevented me from making decisions, hectic lifestyle has shaped my go mode attitude, and lost dreams have sunk my heart."

Over the summer, she had learned that she could not handle everything alone. On the expedition, she had needed the group to succeed but was now back in a society where she perceived her personal perfection was paramount to survival. She recorded the following:

People expect this attitude and perfection out of you, so when you finally realize it can't be this way, it is too hard to change cause of what people remember about you. This is where I struggle. People remember who I was so I lead two different lives. ...The hardest part though as this struggle reaches its peak, my only consolation is the words I write, because the irony of it all is that letting people know would ruin everything. Plus, who would I tell.

She eventually recorded feelings of wanting to cry often, difficulty sleeping, poor motivation, fear of what lay ahead, and going through the motions just to survive. She wrote, "Help me, I am a failure and am falling fast to the end." Her thoughts rambling at times, she further recorded, "But I am easily thrown off and then my mind wanders only to the river and finding rest among the frozen water."

During that Christmas season, she journaled the following:

Upon returning from the woods, I found myself trapped and unable to show myself, my real self, to those I loved. So now I struggle to live two lives, that which I want to live and that which has trapped me. The struggle rips, tears and breaks this wonderful spirit I had formed.

The postexpedition returnee hoped she would find some sort of respite from these feelings over the school holidays. She convinced herself that with that relaxing time and the New Year she could start anew, bridge that transition between her two worlds. It did

not happen. Instead, she contemplated becoming a machine. She recorded, "I will seem happy and successful to myself and this book. I will be a person with feelings and emotions until the time comes when the machine takes over and my entire existence will be like clock work." Admitting that her life was in ruins, and she didn't know what to do, she recanted that maybe becoming a machine was not a good answer to her troubles.

Struggling during the January after her expedition, she wrote the following:

I just can't do it anymore. I can't fight back. I want to step over the edge and become a part of the sunset and stars. If that's not the case at least Hell can't be as bad as the hell I am living. I can hold myself together for most of the day. Put on a show so to say...help me, I am a failure and am falling fast to the end. Please, someone be there and tell me it will be okay.

She contemplated asking for help, finding it funny that she was so out-of-control that she, so perfect, considered telling someone how she felt. There was a problem, though, which she realized:

I need help but I have nowhere to turn. What's my problem you ask? I don't know. That's the hardest thing about these horrible thoughts and feelings is I don't understand them. This alone would make it difficult to tell anyone anything.

Recognizing that it was her confused soul, so painfully divided, she eventually planned to end the turmoil, which raged inside her. During late winter, following her expedition, she recorded the following:

I planned my death last night. Scary thing! I wrestled with my mind for hours last night. Its hard as I tried to not go this far I have, But the pain is so great and I don't know where to turn.

Eventually, she reported working through this phase of her life and wrote in her e-mail exchange with me several years after these journal entries this quotation:

It has become difficult for me to verbalize what it is like to return from an expedition because I have both grown tremendously from my postexpo experience and participated in other types of expeditions that included some sort of reentry.

Connections merge

Most of the women returning from a wilderness expedition did not immediately journal about the merging of the trip with their lives. Much of this data was obtained from the retrospective glance exchanged through e-mails. Looking back at the transition period offered some of the women an opportunity to share this integration process that had not been recorded in the actual trip journals. As most of the trip journals stopped within 1 week of the last trail day, it might have been too early for women to actually write how they felt concerning the integration of the experience into their then current realities. One woman had difficulty immediately postexpedition describing this process:

This is really hard, harder than I thought. I am back at school now and have been for about 3 ½ hours. There is just so much to deal with. I don't have my space yet, which will be hard. Everything is so far away now, I feel like I can not reach out to hold onto it or even touch it – it's just too far away. What "it" is, I don't really know. Maybe it's that freedom to just be that was my life this summer. I am just afraid that it will all slip away, I know it can't though...I really do feel torn. ...It is all complicated here.

Through e-mail discourse, women provided fantastic insight concerning their reentry process. This most often coincided with a change in perspective between their lives prior to the expedition and the world they perceived after the expedition. Additionally, women offered pointers directed at what they might do differently during another reentry moment and what they would suggest for others going through such an experience. Finally, returning explorers recorded their thoughts on the overall integration process directly.

Change in perspective.

Many of the returning explorers mentioned in their Internet entries some sort of change in perspective. One woman recorded, "I felt that somehow I had matured more than the kids around me and that they would never understand exactly how I felt or how I perceived the world." She continued by recounting that she did not dwell pessimistically on this view. She enjoyed being home, though her thoughts often meandered back to her trip. She continued as follows:

I think that the opportunity to remove oneself from society is a gift that few people are able to experience. You learn things about yourself that you would never have the opportunity to discover during the daily grind of life. It makes reentry into the "real" world challenging because you feel that you have experiences that few people can relate to and that even fewer people can understand. But it is worth every moment of disillusionment you feel when you return, because you gain so many new skills, feel so empowered, and feel so much more prepared to re-enter the world as a confident and capable woman.

Another woman echoed this sentiment: "My expo put life in perspective; the issues I thought were so important before I left were only a shadow of a thought after I returned." She recalled her burgeoning strength, for which she thanked the expedition. Still another postexpedition woman recorded her thoughts about the journey several weeks after her trip. She simultaneously acknowledged the strength that the trip had imparted and relished the confidence that grew anew within her, subsequently feeling capable of any challenge she might face. This explorer additionally brought the wisdom acquired on the trip into her everyday reality. She journaled, "I am able to bring what I have learned from this experience and apply it to daily living. The expedition never ends when the knowledge and confidence are used every day."

One woman looked back at the trip and wondered at what her group had learned:

Sure some learned how to build fires and set up tents quickly. Some learned crying helps, some learned you don't always get your way by crying. We all had to grow up and stand on our own god darn feet. ..The trip for us may not have given us the results and teaching we set out to learn, But I know we all learned something. Have it be that dreams are just that and not reality, fact of growing up.

Still another woman offered her insight on skills learned on the expedition and how these had changed her life. She recorded shortly after returning home, "You're better prepared for life anywhere. Learning respect for nature, respect for life, working with others, living with yourself. I have skills most of my peers do not and probably will not ever have." She continued to mull over the effort needed to survive in her everyday life compared to an expedition. She reported, "For the better part of 2 months I've had to work just to get through the day. The amount of effort required to live on the trail surmounts that required

at home.” This explorer then mentally leaped to how wasteful her current reality seemed, how little personal energy was needed to get through the day, and that the environment took a huge beating for this.

One traveler recorded several days after her return home that she was working on trying to live in both worlds at once. She wrote that somehow it was possible to combine the happy memories of the trail with her home life. She chronicled, “I can live both and interact the feeling of my two worlds, each possessing a unique quality of happiness. I mustn’t destroy that happiness here, either. I must go on and live with those joyful memories forever....” She continued to expound in her Internet descriptions that in the years following her expedition, she returned to camp and became a counselor. With vigor, she admitted how wonderful it was to motivate and encourage young girls, sharing with them the identical skills she had learned from “both my positive and negative experiences” through life. She continued, “What I wanted to emphasize here is that I garnered a bigger threshold after our Expo trip...we CAN do things when we work as a team, understand each other’s expectations and encourage one another.”

Transition triggers and pointers.

As women returned from a wilderness expedition, I noticed that within many of their journal entries, subtle at times, were the unmistakable moments that served to remind women of the trip they had just completed. These moments served a dual purpose: to both whisk women away to their vivid memories when they least expected, like subconscious triggers, and to offer a respite from reality when they most wanted. As one woman noted, “It also helped me to sit and think about everything that just happened.

I also found getting my pictures back helped because I could start looking at them and slip off into a whole different world.”

Other women reported that talking with people who had had some formative experience with reentry was beneficial. At times, it seemed helpful to share the many pictures with those other people as well. One woman described that she felt a sense of validation towards her thoughts and feelings after talking to someone familiar with reentry at many different levels. She wrote, “It was really good to hear her voice, and be reassured that all these thoughts and flashes of emotion I’ve been having are real. This summer really did happen.” One woman tried to read a book on the Arctic but found she was overcome by memories. An explorer artist painted in arduous detail some of the images that repeatedly danced through her brain nearly 2 years after arriving home.

Another noted the following:

[that she] called people from the trip a lot, sent stuff back and forth and of course started talking about the “next big trip.”...that is key to dealing with being home, is planning the next trip. Even if you know it probably won’t happen, it helps to think about it.

One woman, shortly after arriving home, recorded what these triggers did to her. She wrote, “I miss it so much. Something will happen that triggers a thought and feelings will come back at me. It doesn’t depress me or make me not want to be here, it is maybe kind of sad, in a way.” She continued to admit that often in reminiscing over these triggers, she would spontaneously smile to herself.

Another postexpedition woman, a college student, signed up for two independent study courses to better integrate the experience into her life. She expounded on activities that also helped her with this transition:

Time outside – walking, standing, hiking, eating lunch – Anything to feel, see, touch what Earth was doing. It was so important to be with it again, brought a feeling of satisfaction. If this was shared with close friends it only helped in most cases. Emailing – other fellow trip mates often – phone calls – pictures to hear and see what we did, feel, and ... how each was still doing. We provided a network for each and could discuss what life was for us – off the trail and how to deal with it.

This explorer insisted that several years after her expedition, the communication among her group had lessened but that if she were to ever need that strength only they could provide, it was just a phone call away.

One woman repeatedly slipped back to the sights, feelings, and stories of the expedition so much that it interfered with her ability to get ready for school. Still another returning paddler missed 2 days of high school being on the expedition and returned to the chaos of secondary education. She admitted, “If I ever completed another lengthy expedition I would leave more transition time.” She also reported that getting professional help when trouble first arises with reentry is paramount to proper support through this process.

Two years after her expedition, a woman recalled that she had trouble with remembering stories and events from her trip. Wanting to hold these memories forever she wrote the following:

I wonder if I will ever forget this trip. Many times I have a hard time with places and organizing the event as they happened. But all I have to do is flip through my journal, and even two years later the day and the scene is as vivid as ever.

Reentry realized.

The transition back from a wilderness expedition is a unique, personal journey. One woman admitted that she felt she had integrated the event immediately by telling stories or using lessons learned on the trip in everyday life. Most women differed with this assessment of the experience of coming home. As one woman noted, "I think that I am always trying to integrate the expo into my daily life. Some days I'm more successful than others of course, but I try not to forget what I've learned." Another returning woman expressed the following:

It's been 11 years since that trip, but I still have a very vivid memory of what the transition from an expo back to everyday life was like. It was tough at times and welcoming at others (no more black flies and a shower sure feels good) but all was worth it and very much a part of the entire experience.

One paddler chronicled that she viewed the adjustment not so much of a transition but a whole new life. She commented, "It was almost as if I was in the Witness Protection program and was thrown into a new situation while still mentally knowing my previous life."

One explorer remarked that integrating the trip with her reality was much like bringing the expedition along on the journey through life while simultaneously coping with society. She admitted that the confidence gained on the expedition was the catalyst for getting her through the transition. Another traveler echoed her words:

But the person who I now was, helped the most. I gained so much from the expo and during this adjustment period I counted on myself to get me through it. For fifty days I counted on myself and the support of eight other people, but here was the personal challenge, can I handle it on my own. I reached down deep for the strength I needed to get through it. The confidence, the belief in myself and knowing that I would never lose the feelings, experiences, friendships and new appreciations and viewpoints that I gained from this expedition helped me cope with the adjustment.

A woman commented that she wished she had not had previous notions of what this process would entail, as it was so individual. She characterized her group into those trip mates that were devastated by the return and those whose transition was much like a small void in their lives. Another paddler felt this reentry was a lifelong process, one that she was obviously still contemplating. She conceded, "Ten and a half years later I'm still figuring things out... but I think that will be a lifelong process. That's also how I've come to think about returning from the trip...."

A woman, whose individual story of reentry was rife with years of depression and pain, noted insight unique to her alone. She offered the following:

I find that returning from an expedition is an amazing emotional and spiritual journey. To take all that you think about while in a simple livelihood and attempt to apply it in a complex setting requires a lot of soul searching. I often started postexpo entries with "I went to the woods to find myself..." Reflecting now I don't think I would have found myself in the woods, but instead in trying to return

from the woods, to build up from the raw that (which) the woods provided. This required much reflection in who I really wanted to be as I built up from the base.

Summary

Many women begin the process of returning from a wilderness expedition throughout the expedition itself as well as for months and sometimes years after that expedition. The return is a conglomeration of physical and social essences, unique for each woman, but a definite reality. There is poignant loss, sometimes heartfelt, directed at the full meaning of the expedition including the journey, land, and people. Women additionally describe a sense of healing from the wounds sustained on the expedition. Physical bodies, bruised and injured, became cured with time.

The expedition changed the women. These explorers reported new perspectives on life that needed to be incorporated into their newfound senses of self. Their beings in transition, their bodies healing, and their souls working through loss, returning women filtered through a social and physical environment perceived as periodically stimulating and overwhelming. The return from a wilderness expedition, as recorded by the women in their journal and Internet entries, was complicated and often difficult.

CHAPTER SEVEN - FINDINGS RESEARCH

QUESTION THREE

But these are just human things. The point of it all is Out There, a little beyond that last rise you can just barely see, hazy and purple on the sky. These pages are windows. And windows are to see through.

Terry and Penny Russell, in the opening of one of the participant's journals.

How do young women returning from a wilderness expedition express themselves using journals?

Introduction

This question was included in this study to ascertain if the journal entries acquired from postexpedition women captured enough data to answer the other research questions of this dissertation. Did women journal with full expression of themselves rather than employing a simple chronology of occurrences? How did they express their thoughts on paper? It was hoped that women did not merely recite the days' events much like a trip log but rather recorded happenings like a personal diary. Sharing feelings and stories in their written pages, therefore, enabled me to accurately explore the other inquiries of this paper. The data is thankfully plump with details concerning disappointments, fears, and successes of 11 expedition travelers. Every woman seemed to capture her essence very well within the pages of her own journal, consequently offering what I believe to be exceptional content from which to explore the research questions pertinent to this document.

Bluntly speaking, however, much of the return process of women was captured in the Internet entries and not the actual journals. Internet entries were pointedly directed at the phenomenon of returning home after an expedition. Women were specifically asked

to comment on this experience. Questioning the manner in which women expressed this phenomenon online, though legitimate, is honestly less of a concern since these words were specifically solicited as an elaboration on their return postexpedition as opposed to trip journals that were spontaneous divulgements of traveling women on the actual expedition. Only 3 women continued to record in their trip journal for several weeks or months following the end of the expedition. It remains unclear if women recorded more of the return process in another diary that was not shared with me. Concerning returning from a wilderness expedition, the content written in the journals themselves is clear, sometimes subtle, yet present throughout the journey. Moreover, the descriptions of the expeditions themselves are tangibly moving and unforgettable.

Journal Format

Nearly all journal entries began with precursor days at Camp Manito-wish YMCA outlining training events, feelings towards the upcoming adventure, and descriptions of food/equipment pack-out. Next, some mention of the “roadshow,” the very long drive from Boulder Junction, Wisconsin to northern Saskatchewan, is included. “Day 1” was written to be the first day of the trip. All journals then listed “Day 2” as the second day of the trip and so forth. Only one woman began a stream of consciousness recording of events midway through the trip that only lasted for a couple of days before she returned to the regular pattern of listing “Day...” at the top of every entry.

Most entries took up a page in length, perhaps two or even three depending upon the difficulty of the actual day. Long hard days were often evidenced by one or two sentences sloppily written over one page, recording the writer’s individual view of that day. Very few times were entries not made at all. Duff days, days in which no intentional

forward group progress was gained, often accounted for several pages of text, as writers seemed to expound upon the trip; their feelings, stories, and thoughts rambling a bit more freely with more verbosity than other days. A sample journal page is not included to better protect the confidentiality of each participant in this research study.

Most voyagers outlined each entry as "Day 1," followed by other relevant information such as mileage obtained that day, place-names associated with the route, number of portages encountered, number of rapids paddled, menu of foods consumed, and/or a favorite quote of the day. Everyone wrote in the first-person present tense. Some journals included entries up to 8 months postexpedition whereas most ended abruptly with the group's return to Camp Manito-wish after the adventure or shortly after the return to that woman's home and family.

Often journals either started or ended with lists. Lists included equipment brought on the trip, menu items, mileage accrued, storms encountered, paddling partners, books read, and flora/fauna visualized. Sometimes pictures or the actual plant was pressed into the journal to better describe the wildlife. Journals recounted poems, quotes used on the trip, and songs not to mention the actual recording of the thoughts and feelings of each participant. Several journals ended with a recounting of phrases poignant to each trip. These included phrases, colloquialisms, as well as relevant events that had occurred along the journey. Phrases such as sunset over Nueltin, rapids #4 Day 34, call of loon lodge, and so forth were tediously written over pages as a summary of the trip.

Journal Content

Women mostly recorded immediate trip events in the journal; something happened and then a recording of that event was written that very day. Typically, women

journalled every day of the trip. Sometimes paddlers were so tired that they recorded current events a day later as stated in their journals, but this was rare. Group members usually wrote about each other, such as funny trip happenings, paddle partners, or conflict with one woman or another. Only one journal in particular very rarely mentioned other trip members. This woman chronicled the concrete facts concerning the trip. She included miles, points of reference, some personal feelings, and small remarks concerning home. Little mention was included concerning possible conflict among the group members, happenings of the leaders, or created lyrics.

Journal content seemed to reflect women's personalities. One woman mentioned the following:

My journal is real rough and many times just a few words are mentioned of something or may be interactions completely omitted – but as I read, it comes flashing back as if I am there now. But the whole story is complete as ever in my clear mind. I can feel the dull, the thrill, the fear, the cold, the bugs or the sheer beauty and amazement of the day.

She continued to write that her reason for not including every detail of the day was exhaustion. She contended, "Exhaustion is the reason for such rough notes – It was hell on earth to find energy enough to think of writing in the journal and to actually do it." So much transpired during the day she wrote, that it was hard to keep track of all it, live it, and then try to record it. Her journal was extremely difficult to read due to poor penmanship. Often, she neglected proper sentence structure and just listed nouns or phrases randomly. Knowing her personality very well, this writing style is essentially reflective of the person she is: bold, "rough around the edges," and very matter-of-fact.

Several other expeditioners, in my opinion, reflected their personalities accurately through their journals. I believe they expressed themselves in their journals through the lens of their personalities. The woman who did not include many recordings concerning other group members, who stuck to the concrete facts of the trip, is very down to earth. During the course of our expedition together, she was neither interested in causing conflict nor engaging in it. She spoke freely, accurately, and pointedly in conversation much as she journaled.

Finally, one woman whom I accompanied on an expedition was very pensive at every trip decision. A mental battle concerning every 'what if' seemed to grip her through the days. She thought through nearly every action, or inaction, meticulously pointing out both the benefits and flaws inherent in our trip plan. Her journal reflected this debate. Articulate and verbose, her poignant descriptions of internal processing pass through the pages of her journal wonderfully.

It seemed as though women exhibited their personalities in their journals, expressing themselves on paper much how they did in person. I think in reviewing over 1,500 pages of journal entries alone, the data was rich, informative, and beautifully presented by all the women. Whether the writer majored in creative writing or recorded insight painfully concrete, each paddler journaled often and recorded much in her individual style.

Summary

It cannot be known if women expressed themselves within the private pages of their journals accurately and reliably, as it is impossible to gauge whether their feelings were rightfully and consistently recorded by hand. I believe, though, that the words and

concepts captured in the journals were descriptive enough to answer the other major research questions of this dissertation. I found bountiful, animated data enclosed within those hundreds of personal pages. The 11 women whose journals were scrutinized each possessed unique personalities that are fantastically mirrored in their extraordinary journals.

Women returning from wilderness expeditions did not record much about the actual return in their trip journals, but they did verbally express concerns regarding that return weeks before the event itself. Journals are rife with this return processing as covered in the preceding chapter. I believe this processing is well-stated, robust, and appropriate. Journals seemed to mirror their owners, holding the unique expressions of what it was like to return from a wilderness expedition relative to each woman's experience with that phenomenon.

CHAPTER EIGHT – DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter is divided into several elements: three sections that discuss the final results of each corresponding research question, a reflection of the findings upon the key concepts of chapter 2, a discussion of the limitations to this study, and finally, implications to future research, practice, policy, and education. Each section outlining the discussion of the research questions begins with a descriptive summation of the findings as is consistent with Stage 4 of the utilized research methodology of this dissertation, advocated by Giorgi and Giorgi (2003). General themes are identified in this summation as well as the related essences of those particular themes. This final descriptive synopsis serves as the impetus to possible meanings attached to the identified themes, though this is not the focus of this discussion.

Research Question One

How do young women returning from a wilderness expedition describe the expedition experience?

Connection to Journey, Land, and People

A canoe expedition of greater than 42 days in the Arctic is a well anticipated event. With a mixture of anxiety as well as great excitement, adventurers began a process of connecting to the journey, the land, and the people. These women sensed and enjoyed a simplicity of purpose and a simplicity in the pursuit of that purpose, such that the lack of encumbering material goods including technology did not threaten the basic task at hand. There was comfort in this linear tract of expedition canoeing: knowing what you

have and where you need to go were utterly simplistic and consistent on this fantastic journey that for some became a lifestyle.

The concept of time on the expedition was difficult to grasp, as it seemed to fly past at exceptionally high speed. Not only were the hours of the day quick to fade, but the weeks themselves melted with astonishing and surprising quickness. The expedition itself, the journey, was perceived as a very fast, very intense adventure. Conceptually, time was altered.

Women formed a connection to the land that was respectful, multifaceted, and beautiful. Nature in the north was wild and raw, bewitching the travelers as both inspiring and challenging in her grandeur. Explorers, sensing the sheer magnitude of beauty in that world, paid particular homage to the physical tundra, trees, animals, water, and culture. The land, uncluttered, seemed to beg veneration of its notable wonder from those who passed through her. The unbelievable magnificence evoked from the women a spiritual response of respect and humility. These adventurers described this world with utmost admiration.

However, this esteemed land additionally held some of the most taxing creatures women had ever met. Their descriptions of the insects that inhabit this Shangri-La were heart-wrenching in their detail and passion. Women experienced expedition bugs as absolutely heinous, possibly from the sheer numbers the pests enjoyed, as well as the potency of their ubiquitous attack. Raw nature was not always nice.

The land was viewed as very unpredictable in both the forces it seemingly flung at the adventurers and those it withheld. Women battled changing temperatures, wind-speed, and ice formations. The constant flux of change, with huge variability marked

within those alterations, challenged the women to the fullest. Exemplary in its ability to vary widely from any challenge presented to the women, the Bay was experienced with as much admiring fervor as disappointing frustration. This body of water qualified the duality of nature. Hudson Bay was portrayed by women with not only respect at its vastness but also fear of its possibilities. The margin of error was unbelievably slight on the Bay. Women knew this, lived it, and wrote about it with particular emphasis on polar bears, high winds, massive swells, lacking fresh water, perplexing tides, and oncoming darkness.

Finally, the expedition was a marvelous connection among people and within the participants themselves. Undoubtedly, the expedition was visualized as an epic self-finding adventure wrought with corporal and mental hardships. In most cases, there was notable personal and physical struggle to actively complete the impressive route of over 700 miles by canoe. The demands on the body were palpable throughout the expedition. Pain and injury accompanied nearly every explorer. Mentally, some women battled the very honest feelings of inadequacy. Whether it was homesickness or trouble completing basic camping skills, travelers reflected on their pervasive feelings towards these difficulties, some even questioning their very presence on the expedition. Mentally, women debated with themselves through personal struggles that were very individual in nature.

Undoubtedly, women connected with the other members of the group. Whether it was with leaders or other participants, women portrayed group dynamics with the full understanding that trouble working together could spell future disaster. Expedition groups employed a variety of techniques to foster healthy group relations, and most

individuals were highly aware of these and obliging to them; however, conflict often ensued. Its effect was vast but not necessarily destructive. Descriptions of the enormity of group doings were often passionate, as frequently women wondered at the evolving relationship they had with other trip members and at their own dependence on this relationship.

Journaling women explored the effects of the expedition on themselves. They described these connections to the journey, the land, and people, and how such an event had changed both them and their group. By the end of the trip, explorers marveled at their own strength, respected the land for all its gifts, and gloried in the journey itself. They assessed their own personal growth, wondered who could not thrive in such an environment, and thanked the world for offering them that opportunity. Humble in their gratitude, women experienced the expedition as connections of love.

Discussion of Findings

Women wrote of their findings during an Arctic adventure, but can this be conceptualized an expedition? Did those essential indicators exist to provide women a meaningful enough experience to not only describe the experience, but also from which to return? The title of this dissertation is most concerned with the experience of returning from a wilderness expedition. Did these women experience an expedition? I set the criteria for these expeditions as being the time needed to foster group development, as well as the inner knowledge that somewhere around Day 42 expedition group members, in my experience, begin to solidify their unique culture by the retelling of stories from previous expedition days and the absence of stories concerning family back home. My

criteria, though based on personal expertise, is admittedly subjective and does not responsibly address the inherent consistencies among such experiences.

Ground-breaking research sought to find which elements of an expedition were critical in influencing its supposed end-product competencies (Beames, 2004). Beames acknowledged that research most often focused on outcomes alone versus exploring the experience behind those outcomes. He identified five critical components of an expedition in his study of 14 British youth during and following a 10-week expedition to Ghana. Using set interviews spaced over the span of 1 year, he followed a phenomenological styled analysis to establish these foundational five key elements that he viewed as being highly instrumental to a proper expedition experience. In other words, for the activity to be classified an expedition, the experience needs to contain these five factors. The expedition group, he surmised, must be exceptionally well isolated. Constantly interacting, nearly 24 hours each day, group members must live and cope with each other's company. They must change groups, mixing with whom they lived and worked. Groups should additionally be heterogeneous and undertake arduous physical tasks in a self-sufficient atmosphere. Beames's finding that groups should mix themselves up during the expedition may be related to changing a person's comfort zone through the progression of the adventure.

In operationalizing an expedition experience to five components, Beames (2004) articulated what he felt a true expedition was. His five components, intrinsic to an expedition, are mostly supported when compared to the women's descriptions of the expedition experience found in this dissertation. The women of this dissertation detailed the journey of an extended canoe trip of over 42-days' length. They poignantly expressed

the unbelievable physical and mental hardship of that trip while traveling through an extremely isolated region of the world, constantly in the company of only themselves. Arguably, these women did not switch groups, a requirement of Beames, but their environment distinctly changed thrice during the prescribed route, ruffling their survival sense. I would assert these women paddled in groups that initially seemed quite homogeneous yet following several weeks of travel, the apparent nuances distinct to each individual, fantastically appeared. I contend their Arctic experience is consistent to an expedition as prescribed by Beames.

Why is this important? In examining the question, "How do women returning from an expedition describe that expedition," I think it critical to clarify that this experience can be viewed as an actual expedition. Any writings expressing that experience are, therefore, legitimately describing an expedition, as opposed to a lesser trip or some other experience not consistent with an expedition. The reader can be confident that the descriptions of these women of their fantastic experience are the stories of a real expedition and consequently suitable to answer the proposed research question.

As this area of research, the detailing of expeditions, is in its infant state, it is difficult to find literature related to the descriptions of a greater than 42-days' expedition in the wilderness as written in individual journals. To compare the descriptions of the expeditions found in this dissertation to those people traveling 14 or even 21 days, as is often the length of more conventional outdoor trips, I find the literature irritatingly inadequate. Having completed many 14-day trips, I can vouch that typically this length trip is just about perfect for the average traveler. Just when people are beginning to get on each other's nerves, or the route challenges have been met, or the body filth accumulation

index just about complete, the trip ends. People go home feeling good about the trip, which, though it may have had plenty of hardships, does not become a lifestyle of survival. For most people, the trip does not shake the very essence of who they are. It is simply, in my opinion, not long enough to do so; furthermore, descriptions of trips from the point of view of the expeditioners simply do not exist. The literature does hold clues, though, if parallels can be drawn between expression and meaning.

It is possible to relate the findings of outcome based expedition research onto the descriptions of expeditions if a person assumes that expeditioners describe that which holds meaning for them. Beames (2005) interviewed 14 men and women, aged 17–26 years who had completed a 10 week expedition to Ghana from Britain. Using a symbolic interactionist approach, the researcher hoped to ascertain the meaning wrapped in the overseas experience for these youth. During the course of five interview sets and through the subsequent phenomenology-influenced data analysis, he uncovered three socially based categories in which the expedition affected the young explorers. These categories included young people's relationships with themselves, others, and the society around them (Beames, 2005).

As expected, a heightened self-confidence was espoused by the youth as was an enlightened process of relating to others. Additionally, though, and this relates nicely to the expedition descriptions of young women I analyzed, British youth commented upon the consumption and indulgence of Western society, as well as the appreciation of simple niceties such as a couch upon which to sit or running water. The British youth realized that sometimes less was best after witnessing many Africans' perceived happiness without modern amenities. The British young people practiced self-reliance and hard

work in Africa, and many of these young people connected with this, pondering the different pace they kept back home.

The findings from Beames' (2005) research compare nicely to the postexpedition women of this dissertation. These returning women, much like the British youth in Beames's study, commented in their journals upon the simplicity of lifestyle practiced on the trail. As one postexpedition woman wrote, "I came to love the simplicity of being on trail, the ability to live with so little and yet be perfectly content with that amount." Some returning women periodically longed for a good cup of coffee, but they appreciated the simplicity around them. One explorer to the Canadian north, whose journal was analyzed in this dissertation wrote, "It is simple. It is life stripped of complications. We work until our bodies are exhausted & go to bed with a feeling of accomplishment that is rare in our sugar-coated society." To immerse oneself in the journey, to appreciate the simplicity and basic lifestyle that the expedition offered, is to describe an expedition surrounded by few luxuries but boasting of well-being perceived from self-reliance.

Women described the expedition experience with unique emphasis concerning the land through which they traveled. Scholarly inquiry yields few such descriptions to which one can compare or contrast; however, the words of William Wordsworth (1770-1850) echo the powerful connections between land and self. A British Victorian poet, his writings reflect this deep reverence and connection between the environment and soul. In 1798, he composed the poem "Tintern Abbey" (Wordsworth, 1888). I have included an excerpt here:

For I have learned

To look on nature, not as in the hour

Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear, - both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. (lines 88-111)

This being has been likened to the true self. Being authentic is the manner in which one is true to oneself (Taylor, 1991). Chapter 2 described a concept analysis of the term self-concept, at the end of which I offered a robust definition of the word, detailing it as an internal, multidimensional map composed of multiple selves. I mentioned a core self that is not easily changed yet surrounded by other more shifting selves. I believe this core self to be identical to the true self.

According to Wordsworth (1888), nature acts like a catalyst upon people, potentiating the perception of their true selves. In accessing this nature, a person is bound to uncover that which is at the very heart of who that person is. The extreme last portion of the excerpt of "Tintern Abbey" by Wordsworth, which I chose to include in this discussion, mentions nature and people linked: "The guide, guardian of my heart and soul / Of my moral being" (lines 110-111). The poet reflects that the wilderness knows and holds one's true self.

I suggest that the wilderness unclutters us. Gubrium and Holstein (2000) contend that people have become a conglomeration of identities, propagated from an unending variety of possible selves. People are a hodgepodge of selves who, when placed in the rawness of nature, reveal their true selves. People are uncluttered, and the true person is visible. Somehow, nature unravels the discombobulated selves clinging to them, and the core is exposed. People are filled with the wonder of discovering who they are and pure bliss at themselves, naked in the wind: "A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime" (lines 94-95). The wilderness nurses this transition. The word "nurse" is poignantly mentioned in line 109 of "Tintern Abbey" (Wordsworth, 1888).

Conceptually, the complicated society of Western culture fragments people, as they are continually blasted with a multitude of self-conceptions. They become saturated, too full of possible selves, to actually know who they are anymore (Gergen, 1991). The wilderness, by contrast, encourages the opposite. It sees through the many-imaged perceptions of ourselves to that one true self. That which society seeks to complicate, nature serves to simplify.

Allison (2005) suggested that the true self must be viewed against a backdrop of perception. He wrote, "*Who I am* can only be meaningful if set against a horizon of significance, other people or places" (p. 18). Developing relationships with entities outside the self enables a person to discover ideas, process boundaries, and critique feedback, thus challenging and modifying aspects of oneself. Who you are is chiseled and framed by that surrounding you, like water continually shaping and molding rock. It was no surprise that 19th century Romantic poets gleaned the beauty of these connections, focusing on the couplet between nature and self. Taylor (1991) wrote, "...in the Romantic period the self-feeling and the feeling of belonging to nature were linked" (p. 91).

The dissertation findings of this study found a substantial link, a bond between the land and the women journeying through that land. These women respected and loved the wilderness around them. They forged a connection with nature that ultimately surfaced in a realization of themselves. Many of these women reportedly mourned the wilderness once they had left it. Somewhere, subconsciously, did they recognize that this nature, these Barron-grounds, was saving them from themselves? Did the women feel the wilderness uncluttering them, pulling out the very essence of who they were? Is this what

they mourned? Roy suggested that not knowing oneself could interfere with health (Roy & Andrews, 1991). Is the opposite true? Does uncovering your true self bolster your well-being? I believe it does.

Being authentic, true to who one really is, is about acknowledging at its most poignant point, one's identity (Taylor, 1991). One woman from the research of this dissertation, within sight of the Bay, wrote the following:

I like to come out here because it is a challenge for mind and body...A time to discover who I really am. What I like. What I want. ...Not having to worry about what you look like. What you smell like. What clothes you wear. Listening to the birds and wind in the trees, what few trees you hear in the tundra...falling asleep to the sound of rain pitter-pattering on your tent. Reading, writing, talking, Finding yourself.

This woman is describing what it is like to shed her many layers of selves and find out who she really is. She is experiencing authenticity, realizing and embracing her true self. She enjoys this, likes it, a sign that her well-being has improved if only for that short journey.

The Meaning of Connection

Briefly stated in chapter 3, I mentioned possibly exploring the meaning behind the descriptions generated by this research. I believe these descriptions, bordering on revelations as this is such fantastically new research, are very rich and emotional. Many of the describing themes and foundational essences of the phenomenon were wrapped in extremely powerful verbiage as indicative of the journal writings themselves. Women described this expedition with unbelievable candor and passion. They were moved to the

very core of their being, many exploring to the very reaches of who they were, what they wanted to do with their lives and how they wanted to live. As if stripped of all unnecessary infrastructure, women found themselves. They relished this opportunity and validated it by writing of its awesome concrete manifestation in the world around them. More importantly, their connection to this expedition process was individual, highly valued, and complicated. What did this expedition mean to them? It meant finding themselves.

Research Question Two

How do young women returning from a wilderness expedition describe the return from that expedition?

Expedition Returning: Connections and Homeward Glances

Women began mentally returning from an expedition weeks before the actual physical return from that expedition. Some of them wrote about returning even before the expedition had begun. During the expedition, women explored the themes of connection to both the world they left behind in the United States and to the world in which they now found themselves. Initially, travelers nostalgically reminisced about their homes with their family and friends to themselves, describing longings for often comforts of home. Eventually, this connection changed to become more of a meaningful, realistic pondering of what life was like back home. Women began to question how they would weave their expedition experience into home, asking themselves more difficult, pensive questions related to this. Such questioning evolved into an embrace of the new possibilities awaiting them at home. As the journey drew to a close, women returning from that trip

viewed home with excitement about everything they knew to be there, wonder at what they could do differently, but anxiety at actually going home.

This anxiety was rooted in the burgeoning connections women had fostered on the expedition. During the course of the expedition, women connected to the journey, the land, and the people in a manner that was described as being unbelievably intense and swift. Roughly speaking, they had fallen “head over heels” with some of the actual components of the expedition and had begun to ponder their lives without these relationships. Their journal descriptions evolved over the trip from casual questioning of how to live without the people, or the land, or the journey itself, to actual contemplation of this pending reality. Journal entries contained an almost palpable, ripening tension when deliberating over life after expedition.

Simultaneously, as the debate lingered, women retrospectively glanced over the trip. During expedition introspection, they compared how far their group had evolved or how much they themselves had changed and then wondered how this would fit into the new journey: the transition home. A dialectical dilemma emerged within women, as they reflected upon these changes: their love affair with the expedition and the civilization before them. Explorers were excited at the prospect of going home yet terribly bewildered by it as well.

Connection Interrupted

Upon reaching the end of the physical journey, women enjoyed some of the niceties they had missed while journeying for several months, yet they longed for some of the essences of the expedition. Overstimulated and sometimes confused, women endeavored to grasp both the social and environmental newness of their predicament

while mourning that which they had left behind. Their loss of the Arctic land and journey was real, immense, and painful. Sights and sounds, sometimes in sharp contrast to the Barren-grounds, surrounded them, tugging at their attention like mosquitoes. Some women reacted negatively to this stimulation with more physical complaints, such as headaches, or mental obstacles, such as feeling overwhelmed.

Self-concept Alteration

Women returning from wilderness expeditions manifested a changed self-concept. Not only did they embrace an augmented sense of self, respect for the land, and savvy for group dynamics, but their bruised physical bodies had to heal while missing a way of life often experienced just once in a lifetime. Women wrote of strength and self-confidence following the expedition that assisted them with the difficult transition home. A reverence for the land, mostly the Arctic, stirred within them. They additionally described a keen knowledge of groups, professing how to communicate in them and/or how the inner workings really evolved. Women returning from wilderness expeditions hurt not only from the pain of physical ailments obtained over the course of 700 miles but also from the inner sorrow generated from mourning that which they truly loved

Home Newly Realized

These returning expeditioners came home to a world very odd to them. Environmentally and socially, they were immediately and acutely confronted with a barrage of stimulating elements, which ranged from enclosed buildings, trees, and darkness, to schedules, plans, and crowds. Having enjoyed the serenity of expedition travel, these elements were described as confusing; furthermore, articulating this confusion or even components of the trip itself was difficult for explorers. Women

constantly remarked that those people closest to them did not comprehend the expedition. Not only were the returning women unable to fully describe the trip, but those to whom they could try to describe it were reportedly not able to understand it.

Connections Merging

Eventually, with time and reflection, women returning from wilderness expeditions experienced a change in perspective. Pointing out the triggers to their nostalgic overview of the expedition as well as helpful tips to those going through such a transition, women reflected differently on the life around them. Repeatedly, they espoused that the world held a different essence for them, a kind of altered aura from that which they held before the expedition. Women viewed their friends differently and cited that that which was important to them before the expedition was not now. Overall, this transition time was difficult and very lonely for the postexpedition travelers.

Their experience with returning from a wilderness expedition was confounded by multiple factors impinging upon their integration of the trip into their lives. Many women reported that coming home was more difficult than the expedition itself. Some women admitted that their integration was an ongoing process, a lifestyle of remembering that which they held most dear. They applied the lessons of that trip and the strength that it provided into their ordinary lives, but some did so with real hardship and pain. Not one woman, though, regretted her experience of returning from a wilderness expedition.

Discussion of Returning Home

Repeatedly, literature focuses upon a change in self-concept as an outcome of expedition travel (Allison, 2000; Beames, 2005; Whittington, 2005). As previously discussed in this chapter, the focus of this change in the self seems to be that concerning

the true self. I identified this as one's sage presence in chapter 2 of the concept analysis of 'self-concept.' Very recently, several nurses contended that "self-concept encompasses all affective and cognitive descriptors of the self" (Cowin & Hengstberger-Sims, 2006, p. 60). The core self would logically be included in this definition of self-concept. Women returning from a wilderness expedition described a marked shift in several components of this self-concept, the most poignant and immediate being one of loss.

Allison (2000) described the return from an expedition as a grieving process. He questioned the postexpedition traveler who did not grieve as perhaps that person who had not experienced certain facets of loss to grieve, such as the following:

grieving of the environment, of the people and the community, of time alone or most likely a combination of these and other aspects of the expedition experience.

Rather than being a negative it appears that it is actually an indication of personal growth and adjustment, even though it can be difficult. (p. 34)

One of the returning women remarked that it wasn't so much her journey through the tundra that instigated personal growth but rather coming home and processing that return. She wrote, "I don't think I would have found myself in the woods, but instead in trying to return from the woods, to build up from the raw that (which) the woods provided." Returning home solidified the self through a difficult period of transition, a transition which was already confounded by grief from loss.

Arnett (2000) referenced the importance of social systems, especially for emerging adults. Lose this social support, and the maturing person who is already in the throes of great transition, as is indicative of this stage in development, may have an even harder time coping during this period. The process of transitioning, as is noted in Selder's

Life Transition Theory, is indicative of temporal displacement, a feeling of being disconcerted, and lack of a language to articulate the experience; returning women recorded all of these in their journal entries (Selder, 1989).

Which elements within the return from an expedition create such distress? It can be inferred from the many descriptions of the expedition itself, covered in more detail in chapter 5, that a specific culture is formed on that tremendous journey. As Ettin (1992) described, groups create their own culture, telling stories, jokes, and poems that only they truly understand. Forming this culture on the expedition simultaneously occurs during the phase of adjusting to that expedition. Fabrizio and Neill (2005) suggested that some outdoor programming lends itself to creating a kind of culture shock for its participants:

Outdoor participants often face similar adjustment processes to foreign students, immigrants and overseas workers. The environmental and cultural differences require considerable adaptation on the part of a participant; Normal behaviors and expectations do not necessarily apply; Participants need to learn new skills, establish new relationships, and redefine self-identity. (p. 44)

Although women journaled extensively that they reveled in returning to their “second home,” the northern wilderness, there was still much to be learned and processed on the trip itself, much like the process of living overseas in a new country.

After adjusting and embracing the new culture of the expedition, women returned to a world that had little knowledge of that culture. Those women, who perceived the expedition experienced culture as truly foundational to their self-concept, created meaning from that perception that few non-expeditioners could comprehend. In exploring phenomenology in nursing research, especially those tenets of Merleau-Ponty that were

previously explored in chapter 3, Thomas (2005) offers that “All knowledge takes place within the horizons opened by perception, and all meaning occurs through perception” (p. 69). This expedition meant the world to women because they perceived it that way. They created a language and a cultural comprehension so intertwined with that experience that few people outside that adventure could ever understand that journey. Consequently, women returning from wilderness expeditions voiced difficulty in applying language to their experience as well as problems with no one’s comprehending that experience.

These women valued a culture unique to them alone, and because most people did not share in that culture and did not contemplate the intricacies of wilderness travel as they had, the adventure was mostly incomprehensible to those who did not journey 700 miles through the Arctic summer. Many non-explorers have a difficult time finding meaning or value in a way of life perceived as being very odd. Subsequently, they cannot begin to understand that which they do not perceive as meaningful. Women returning from wilderness expeditions fall prey to a cruel double-edged reality. The very essence of the expedition—its magical, addictive enlightenment—was exactly that which crippled the paddler’s voice as well as quashed any hope that someone might understand what voice was mustered.

As women grappled with finding personal meaning in this perceived earth-shattering experience, they returned to a home newly realized. Components of this world were described as extremely overstimulating. Some women reported a sense of environmental and social disconnectedness to their American homes. Having spent approximately 7 weeks in the rustic elements away from mass communication such as advertising, television, telephones, and radios, some participants viewed the world upon

their return as too busy and excessively noisy. The pace and purpose of such a world was incompatible with the expedition mentality of simplicity. Everything needed to survive was carried along on the trip. From waking up in the morning to sleeping at night, the aim of the adventure was painfully obvious: consult the map, identify the route and paddle to the endpoint. Returning women became overstimulated by the constant input of social and concrete infrastructure, as there was much reference to their avoiding crowds or buildings. Physically, some women felt restless as if their bodies wanted to keep moving or uneasy and plagued by lesser physical complaints. Such feelings may serve to potentiate negative health outcomes.

Socially, a disconnection emerged between women and many of the people encircling them at home. Not only was the social input of planned activities and swarming well-wishers sometimes exhausting and confusing to returning expeditioners, but there was something else brewing: a changed perspective. Women returning from wilderness expeditions almost unanimously proclaimed a difference in how they viewed themselves and the world around them. They looked upon their homes with eyes imprinted from weeks of pure, unbounded living and a lifestyle that many still mourn. These travelers met their true selves and returned with a new vision. As Furukawa (1997) pointed out, people living abroad often return to a world populated by peers who have never experienced anything like what the traveler has lived overseas. Returning women who had incorporated new selves and new perspectives interacted with persons at home who were perhaps perceived identically as they had been several months previously. Allison (2005) found a similar change in postexpedition adjusting British youth aged 17 to 20 years of age following a 6-week expedition to Greenland. Using a

phenomenological approach, he studied the meaning and subsequent structure of the expedition experience in 19 young people from this British Schools Exploring Society expedition of 1997.

Allison (2005) noted of returning expeditioners, "While it seems that for some there is a degree of grieving various aspects of the expedition experience, on initial return, many seem to go through a period of adjusting their perspective" (p. 19). He reported that this perspective alteration was dually evident, directed at both materialism and social relationships. One returning woman adventurer from the Arctic wrote of her friends at home:

They admired the statistics of the trip and admired the ability to live in the wilderness for so long, but they could never understand how an experience like that can change one's perspective on life. I returned and often felt that "real" life was so trivial in many ways....what life was really about, or should be about, was being completely responsible for your actions and decisions and being able to challenge yourself physically and emotionally every day. I felt that somehow I had matured more than the kids around me and that they would never understand exactly how I felt or how I perceived the world.

The cause-effect relationships, the immediate feedback of action or inaction, as well as the real, obvious purpose so indicative and painfully abundant in expedition travel are often counter to the Western pace of fantastic complexity (Allison, 2005). Such a discrepancy in perceived societal reason may additionally explain the proposed change in viewpoint of those returning from a wilderness expedition.

Meaning of Returning Home

As noted in chapter 3, a brief, interpretive statement of the meaning of returning home is offered, as I think I am able to reasonably provide such a construal. I believe the web of sense of self and environment was altered in women returning from a wilderness expedition. Perception of a change occurred for this population such that there was an experienced disruption of either the sense of self or the sense of environment or both, but the two entities were no longer immediately compatible with each other. Women returning from wilderness expeditions were illuminating a new sense of self to an old environment of everyday home.

There was an awareness of disharmony. The transition experienced was this disharmony. The view women held of themselves did not work with the environment to which they came home. The perception of the disruption dictated the severity of the transition. There was an intrapersonal phenomenon characterized by feelings of uncertainty and disconnection. Women returning from a wilderness expedition experienced disorientation, restlessness, and anxiety. They may have perceived something was amiss and might have felt temporal lapses, as time did not pass normally for them. Returning women perceived being environmentally disconnected from the physical, concrete aspects of their surroundings. There was a social disconnection from family and friends and culture; furthermore, there was an inability to articulate the problem. Women grappled with describing their present reality of experienced disorientation as well as the fantastic adventure which predicated it. They had no words, no language, to convey their unique transition to people generally incapable of understanding not only the expedition itself but the experience of returning home. This

transition is a journey of merging their perceived sense of self, molded from weeks of wilderness travel, with the environment in which they found themselves.

Research Question Three

How do young women returning from a wilderness expedition express themselves using journals?

Frankly, women returning from wilderness expeditions expressed themselves passionately in journals throughout the expedition experience, meaning from their arrival at the send-off camp facility to when they had physically completed the journey. Some of these women recorded personal thoughts and feelings for weeks and months thereafter, and they continued to do so in a very rich, personalized manner indicative of who they were as people.

Whether these records are truly complementary of actual thoughts and feelings is impossible to know. But the words captured in those journals were descriptive, haunting, emotional, and memorable. Their expression of events, interpersonal relationships, and individual triumphs and failures were poignantly alive and beautiful. Poems or lyrics were sprinkled throughout journals as were pressed flowers and small cherished trip items, such as drawings, recipes, wrappers, and labels. I firmly believe that each word and picture very accurately recorded what the expedition was like for each woman. These journals were not guided in their purpose; no one asked the authors to write a certain way or focus on a certain theme. These journals were the unbiased, unsolicited language of women returning from wilderness expeditions.

Summary of Discussion

The primary premise of this dissertation was that nurses frequently tout the outdoors as nature's cure: a remedy for some of the hazards of life. It was argued that nurses ought to know the sequelae associated with the cure, since a vast majority of this country's population are doing just that: accessing the outdoors in record numbers. Admittedly, most Americans are not joining extended canoe expeditions, but some sections of society are heading off into the wilderness and ultimately returning from it. The experiences of women returning from wilderness expeditions, as provided in this dissertation, serve to enhance the understanding of some of the difficulties these returning adventurers may face. Women describe their wilderness expeditions passionately within the pages of well-traveled journals. They chronicle a story of connection: to the land, the people and the journey. Following this expedition, returning women transition slowly to a newly realized home complete with a new sense of self and a new perspective on life. Their transition, never regrettable, is life changing.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this study, the most notable being that all phenomenology is grounded temporally. It is a study of people's experiences as captured at a particular moment in time, a slice of recorded life. Whether this recording is an accurate portrayal of the current experience of returning from a wilderness expedition cannot be ascertained with this study. Similarly, these captured events are individual stories written under very fantastic conditions, party to a multitude of influencing factors, not the least of which is that all participants were from a single outdoor agency.

There are methodological limitations inherent in convenience sampling from one organization. Study participants may have been subjected to experiences so pertinent to that facility that the recorded experiences were somehow abnormally influenced above and beyond that expected in exploring personal stories from a smattering of outdoor agencies; therefore, the findings from the analysis of these stories should be generalized with great caution to the larger population of outdoor enthusiasts.

Additionally, I admit the process of bracketing is entirely new to me. After more than a year of working with this concept, developing my own personal style of it and implementing that style upon this dissertation, I am sure all bias on my part was not completely assuaged. I did use some of my previous knowledge with expeditions to interpret the journal writings and Internet interchange. Women used a variety of “camp lingo” while writing, and I understand this very specific language. I also believe some women may have participated with this study because they knew me or my name. It was impossible to entirely bracket out all previous notations of returning from a wilderness expedition, but I believe I have succeeded in bracketing out much of my earlier perceptions with these phenomena

Implications of the Findings

Several major concepts related to women returning from wilderness expeditions were explored in chapter 2 of this dissertation. It is critical to reconceptualize those key constructs in light of the major findings of this research. A systematic examination of each concept through the lens of these findings is now presented in the order put forward in chapter 2.

Emerging Adults in Small Groups

Women returning from wilderness expeditions as reported in this dissertation remarked heavily about their specific role in the expedition group. These groups contained significant cohesion, as well as the admitted tension; however, these groups were highly functional. The women of this dissertation not only connected to their fellow trip members but became astute at intricate group dynamics. Cretzmeyer (2003) offered that adolescents exhibiting attachment among family members may be more successful in college due to increased social competence and less loneliness. Women returning from wilderness expeditions in this dissertation self-reported their augmented aptitude for group behavior and their reliance on personal connections to the group. I operationalize the terms connection and attachment to be interchangeable. The expedition was an environment that promoted group work even if a person was highly individualistic. It may be that implementation of structured group work among peers that specifically aims at increasing the attachment among group members and may promote socialization of emerging adults.

Paralleling heightened socialization is the idea that emerging adults are involved with a fantastic journey of self discovery. These dissertation findings suggest that women returning from wilderness expeditions have an evolved sense of self and that the process of finding that self was challenging, yet pleasurable. Finding oneself on the expedition did not seem to be a conscious activity for most women, but they realized it was occurring, and they enjoyed its development. Do all emerging adults enjoy the quest of finding themselves? Women in this dissertation, however, returned home with a new self-concept. Reportedly, this coming home, sensing their new selves, took considerable

adjustment; the process was not nearly as enjoyable as building their new selves had been. Could it be that emerging adults enjoy the adventure of self-pursuit but that the incorporation of this self is what takes so long and is so time-consuming?

Arnett (2000) argued that from the age of about 18 years onward one decade or so, a person is wrapped in the throes of a new developmental period, distinct from both adulthood and adolescence. This maturation period, termed emerging adulthood, is an active time of self-exploration. Gubrium and Holstein (2000) simultaneously reported that people today are constantly under attack from a multitude of possible selves. They are at risk of losing their true identity, or true self, in the midst of this onslaught. It may be that emerging adulthood is a combination of the search for oneself in the midst of many possibilities. A young person must navigate through all of the potential selves and might even enjoy trying these hats on for size until he or she decides on one that fits. This takes time, more time than it took for individuals several generations ago, as those people did not have the host of today's possibilities available to them.

Attachment to others may enhance the search for self. Emerging adults rely heavily on support systems founded by good friends (Tokuno, 1986). If an emerging adult has trouble attaching, does he or she also have trouble finding him- or herself? It is difficult to ascertain on an expedition, as studied in this dissertation, which occurred first: the finding of self or the connection to group. It seemed as though these occurred simultaneously, almost symbiotically, as if the person sped through a portion of the process of emerging adulthood rapidly. Women of this dissertation, almost unanimously, reported finding themselves, arguably, a process which for this developmental period usually takes several years.

Could it be that emerging adults when confronted with enhanced attachment opportunities, such as those found under expedition conditions, actually navigate through the host of selves available to them more quickly than those persons without these opportunities? Does this added social support of the small group allow an emerging adult to maneuver quickly through the myriad of self possibilities faster and more easily than those people without this support? Research reports that friends of emerging adults serve the role of sounding board for each other; bouncing off and accepting each other's different self without criticism (Tokuno, 1986). Emerging adults completely encased in this support system may find themselves faster than those not so enmeshed in a similar support system. The promotion of group process with the emphasis on social attachment is a needed activity for emerging adults. In potentiating a characteristic strength, reliance on social supports, of this developmental group, emerging adults are facilitating their often lengthy quest for themselves by steering through the sea of possible selves more quickly.

The Self

The dissertation findings specifically mention that women on wilderness expeditions uncover their true selves. Previously in chapter 8, I elaborated upon this process with reference to the great poet William Wordsworth. On reflection, however, to the construct of self as presented in chapter 2, an interesting conceptualization occurs. These dissertation findings lend credence to a complicated theory only briefly presented in chapter 2 concerning self-schemas. Originally developed by social psychologists, it argues that people seeking to organize or even explain their behavior in a particular domain do so according to previously established or burgeoning cranial processing

systems (Markus, 1977). These systems are like tiny imprints upon the brain that are created or strengthened depending upon incoming information perceived as being related to the self. This self-knowledge is then filtered into the various imprints, or different schemata, explaining why some information people notice because they have a place to store it, and other information they selectively do not notice as they have no schemata in which to file it (Markus). Self-schemas are the structural basis for the active self-concept, that self-concept which is currently employed by the individual at a particular point in time. "The working self-concept, or the self-concept of the moment, is best viewed as a continually active, shifting array of accessible self-knowledge" (Markus & Wurf, 1987, p. 306). It is like a catalogue system: a series of self-images accessible to the person at any one moment.

Stein (1995b) used this schema model to guide her nursing research concerning people with mental illness. She sought to quantify a person's number of attributes associated with his/her self-concept and the interdependence among those attributes. It was hypothesized that those people with fewer self-concept attributes or very intermingled self-concept attributes experienced more instability in their lives than those people reporting larger, more independent self-concept attributes. Her findings dictated that "when the self-concept consists of a collection of independent self-conceptions, a threat to any single aspect is contained within that domain" (p.412). What seemed to occur was that when a person's highly independent self-concepts were solid enough, those self-concepts acted like a buffer for that person's affect. The individual's cranial catalogue system possessed such breadth and depth that it consequently allowed it to handle any onslaught against one image of the self. Conversely, those people who did not

have a diverse array of self-concepts, as filed in their self-schemata, were perhaps more vulnerable to outside threats to the self; furthermore, this catalogue system may actually dictate behavior.

Stein proposed, following her work with adolescents, that these young people actually engaged in risky behaviors depending upon their view of themselves at that particular point in time (Stein et al., 1998). If their self-schemata allowed for a set of behaviors consistent with their current view of themselves, they were more likely to engage in that certain set of behaviors. The point is that a person's self-schemata, their self-knowledge catalogues, may dictate their actions. Markus (1977) advocated this very point:

The concept of self-schema implies that information about the self in some area has been categorized or organized and that the result of this organization is a discernible pattern which may be used as a basis for future judgments, decisions, inferences, or predictions about the self. (p. 64)

In this dissertation, it was found that women returning from a wilderness expedition held a deep respect for the land. Some of these women claimed to have fostered this respect into actively rallying for the environment upon their return postexpedition. According to the self-schema view of self-concept, these women respected the land because they both experienced it and found meaning in that experience enough that they catalogued this meaning into a part of themselves. They created a self-schema for filtering information congruent to respect for the land into their network of self-schemata. Who they were became enmeshed with their view of the land; therefore, this schema of respecting the land allowed for actively pursuing proenvironmental

activities. Without the schema ingrained in their brains, they may never have acted this way.

Additionally, this dissertation found that women fostered an augmented self-confidence following their expedition. Conceptually, the expedition may have amplified their self-confidence in that the trip constantly filed related self-knowledge concerning confidence into the earmarked schema. As this schema grew, it became distinct and a source of strength for the women during their transition home. Their self-concept was augmented exponentially during the expedition by the proliferation of their self-schemata. These, in turn, offered them guidance and power.

The true self can be viewed as a schema. It is just one component of a multidimensional self-concept. In chapter 2, I offered a definition of self-concept. I maintain that definition as a very accurate description of what self is. I would add, though, that one's self-concept is a potential prescription for well-being. Stein's research correlating strength of self with increased variability and independence of one's schemata is intriguing (Stein, 1995b). It adds a dimension of outcome to my definition I had not contemplated previously. In suggesting that experiences that serve to augment a person's self-schemata may actually potentiate a person's strength in their ability to buffer insults upon their affect is fascinating. It lends credence to expeditions, highlighting their importance in the lives of emerging adults. These emerging adults are vigorously pursuing self-exploration through an activity that conveniently formulates a multitude of self-schemata for them to incorporate. The very act of finding out who they are serves to foster more possibilities of whom they may become.

Transition

The molding and discovery of self-schemata with the integration of them into one's own sense of self exemplifies transition. This dissertation found that women returning from wilderness expeditions underwent a vast transition, which not only meant changed self-concepts but also perceived changes to their immediate environments, social systems, and overall perspective. Their symptoms of transition remarkably paralleled those described by Selder (1989). Eerily, this dissertation noted women returning from wilderness expeditions reported a temporal displacement during the entire expedition experience. Similar to Selder, this dissertation research suggested women postexpedition had the odd sensation of no voice to their experiences. They had the actual words to articulate neither the experience of the expedition nor the homecoming from it.

Chick and Meleis (1986) reported that people undergoing this kind of transition are vulnerable. I noted in chapter 2 that these authors did not define the term vulnerability but that it was assumed that vulnerability could lead to changes in health. More recently, Meleis, in working with two groups of Asian-Americans and their experiences with caregiving, explored the ramifications of vulnerability from transition (Jones, Zhang, & Meleis, 2003). This research found that some Asian-American women when care-giving for their parents underwent a transition that increased their vulnerability. Jones et al. interviewed 41 recently immigrated women who were either Chinese-American or Filipino-American and who were currently providing activities of daily living toward either their parents or their parents-in-law. Through grounded theory, it became possible to suggest that these Asian-American caregivers were actively involved in a transition that increased their vulnerability in the form of complaints of fatigue, anger, guilt, social

isolation, and unexpressed personal needs. Caregivers underestimated the enormity of providing care as well (Jones et al.).

Some of these transitioning care-providers, though vulnerable, were able to transform their vulnerability into a sense of positive well-being using certain strategies. Interestingly, those people who were not able to transform their vulnerability positively did so negatively into a compromised sense of well-being. These people experienced real health complaints of insomnia, hypertension, depression, and emotional distress (Jones et al., 2003). This is very reflective of the findings of my dissertation in that women returning from wilderness expeditions reported feelings of headache, emotional distress, unease, and overstimulation. The transition of the expedition theoretically made these returning women vulnerable, which may have compromised their well-being enough to manifest into several physical ailments. Of the 11 women in this dissertation, at least 1 reported battling major depression in the months following her expedition.

Transition is a major component of most women's lives. It is argued that globally women are at the forefront of such transitions as moving into the computer age, into new health care systems, and into new educational systems (A. I. Meleis & Im, 2002). Women not only facilitate their move but that of others' transitions as well. Yet, I have found the notion of how these transitions may negatively affect women's health woefully underdeveloped. Conceptually, how vulnerability translates to enhanced or compromised well-being is lacking.

Nurses have long considered a focus of their efforts to be assisting persons undergoing transition (Meleis & Trangenstein, 1994). Common knowledge in nursing asserts that people transitioning are more apt to be unsettled, which may or may not

translate to emotional or physical complaints. Although studying transitions and their effect on people is a rightful ambition, conceptually more effort needs to be exerted on the actual idea of vulnerability. It is surprising that this component of nursing remains relatively underexplored. Transitions are an absolute part of all people's lives, which theoretically increases everyone's vulnerability. Are there quantifiable measures of this vulnerability? Are nurses able to contradict this vulnerability, so changes in negative well-being do not occur? The findings of my dissertation suggest that women returning from wilderness expeditions experience compromised well-being, at least during their transition home. Unfortunately, the nursing literature offers no general strategies to transform that compromised well-being into one that is positive.

Cultural Studies

The women of this dissertation undoubtedly experienced a transition complicated by cultural dynamics. It was previously discussed in this chapter that women on an expedition develop a unique culture that they alone may understand. The expedition environment crafts this culture, as the women connect to the land, the people, and the actual journey through nearly 7 weeks of travel. This dissertation found that women returning from this culture experienced a kind of reverse culture shock as they entered the United States. These women experienced episodes, both socially and environmentally, disconcerting to many of them. The findings parallel much of the cross-cultural literature that reports returning sojourners succumb to social and environmental discrepancies when these sojourners compare the culture of the United States to that of the culture they just left (Wang, 1997).

Theoretically, returning sojourners from a transcultural experience undergo a sort of cultural identity crisis in that they must combine their cultural selves to a new identity (Sussman, 2000). This cultural identity model postulates that while overseas a person becomes more aware of the components of his or her own dominant home culture and simultaneously, incorporates new aspects of the culture in which he or she is residing into a new cultural identity. The person returns to his or her home culture and must integrate this new cultural identity with one that is compatible with the home culture. According to Sussman, this sojourner readjustment may go awry if a person cannot consolidate the conflicting identities. This dissertation revealed that some women returning from wilderness expeditions may have had significant difficulty in consolidating their cultural identities. Repeatedly, this research explored how women found their friends or social supports to be inadequate after they returned home from the culture of the expedition. Sussman, in her research with cultural identity, asserted that those people who very much identified with the new host culture and who did not wish to be like the friends they had left at home, would have a harder time coming home.

There was at least 1 woman included as a participant in this dissertation, whose journal portrayed her as wanting to be so much more than her family and friends at home wanted for her. She discussed living a lie or two lives in one, which may have been her cultural identities in conflict. This woman, whose journal meticulously outlined her delving into depression, constantly wished to be that person she had become on the expedition. She desperately clung to that identity, born in a culture unique to her and her expedition group, which tragically clashed with the identity her social supports at home held of her.

The dissertation findings in general agree with much of the work of the cross-cultural researchers. Unfortunately, those researchers agree there is a dearth of research specifically outlining reentry, that experience of coming home. Every single study I found in the cross-cultural literature related to sojourner readjustment, sometimes termed reentry, was quantitative in nature. Interestingly, most of this quantitative research concerned people falling within the developmental age group of emerging adulthood. My dissertation findings lend another dimension to cross-cultural research in that the stories of these women as they left one culture for another are powerful, explicit, and individual. Their experiences with reentry justify further development of the conceptualization of this phenomenon to include, among other areas, which strategies may actually help a sojourner to mesh cultural identities. The women of this dissertation reported that reading over their journals, talking with expedition friends, confiding in understanding parents, and other strategies seemed to help them during reentry. Could these same tactics assist someone returning from a stint living overseas?

Arguably, this dissertation found that women on expeditions spend some time getting used to the culture of that expedition. Like a kind of culture shock, they must adapt to the new host culture before returning home from it. This adjusting to the culture was not very reflective of the literature on cultural shock. Most of that literature reports that travelers have a sort of honeymoon stage or euphoric phase at the start of their experience abroad (Adler, 1975; Oberg, 1960). It seems that this early stage is spent with the traveler's gleefully contrasting all of the very noticeable differences between the host and home culture. Subsequent stages ensue when the traveler may reject many of these

differences, so eagerly embraced at the beginning of the overseas jaunt, and then eventually accept them with reservations.

My findings are very different from this. I think the differences lie in that women of my dissertation who found themselves on an expedition had been to that initial tree-covered environment previously. There is some similarity if one compares the women of my research with their first experience with the tundra. Then, a kind of euphoria mixed with concern seemed to grip the expedition members that is consistent with the early stage of culture shock as outlined by Adler (1975) and Oberg (1960). Real adjusting to a culture, however, occurs mostly with adjusting to the social components of that culture. Social components of an expedition are not foreign to women going on expeditions for the most part. The women of my research were familiar with the basics of trail life; they needed to adapt to just a heightened level of those basics. The culture that developed among the women on the expedition contrasts with a culture one normally construes when considering the word culture.

The expedition culture is one predicated on the social dynamics of its individual members and their experience with the wilderness around them. Group members have a strong role in creating and manipulating this wilderness culture, at least the social aspects of it. They are active participants of this culture. Culture as operationalized by most cross-cultural researchers is very different from this. It is consistent with the idea of culture most people construct when contemplating the term: faraway monasteries of Buddhist monks, rice paddies of Hindu rat-worshippers, and New York skylines that never sleep. Most travelers do not create the culture they visit nor are they capable of any dramatic manipulation of that culture. They are passive observers. I think comparing my

research findings with culture shock as discussed in chapter 2 is difficult, as the two experiences are dissimilar though the return from these experiences, as previously discussed in this section, is quite similar.

Wilderness

As noted during the discussion on cultural studies, women of this dissertation formed a culture unique to themselves and their experience with the wilderness around them. Much of the findings of this study are paralleled in some sort of literature body, except wilderness studies. Admittedly, these dissertation results nicely mirror my own thesis findings such that women returning from wilderness expeditions reported in their journals (dissertation) and in interviews (thesis) an augmented sense of self, feelings of loss or disconnection to the environment or social support system. Additionally, some aspects of my study correlate well with Riordan's (2002) unpublished dissertation on the transformative points of adventure as influencing everyday life. She noted that people following adventure change their perspective on life to better incorporate their new sense of life. Although my dissertation found this as well, it is a late stage in the actual transition following an expedition. Pohl et al. (2000) reported one of their outcomes associated with wilderness travel as change in perspective as well. I repeat that this is a late outcome. A person needs to work through the transition before an integrated change in perspective is reached. Current wilderness research just does not address the immediate return from a wilderness expedition. My findings should enhance this area of research.

Borrie and Roggerbuck (2001) contend that research accurately describing the wilderness experience is much needed. In chapter 5 of this dissertation, I have

successfully described the conceptual relationship of wilderness travelers in terms of their connections to people, the land, and the journey. Imbedded in this connection to people is the undeniable concept of physicality; a web of self, body image, and agency (McDermott, 2000). McDermott sought to explore the meaning of this concept in an age where women, especially women in the emerging adulthood developmental age group, are barraged with public depictions of women's bodies as warped, super thin objects of fancy. She stressed that any activity that increased a woman's meaningful image of her own body should be encouraged.

These dissertation findings support that expeditions do increase a woman's sense of physicality. Several women noted how impressed they were with the amount of work their bodies could handle. One woman from this dissertation was acutely aware that bodies were quite different from one another and that she, seeing the flaws and seeming imperfections of her female tentmates, was more comfortable with her own body. I would assert that on the expedition, for the most part, my dissertation findings show that most women appreciated an enhanced positive physicality; however, upon the return from the expedition, several of these women remarked that they were unhappy at gaining weight on the trail. One person reported that she struggled with this weight all school year and was disappointed when her current American lifestyle did not allow her the same physique as attained in the Arctic. My research did not specifically ask participants about their physicality after the actual expedition. I only sought to clarify both the description of the expedition and the return from it. Whether a woman with a positive expedition physicality actually retained that physicality over the months and years following the expedition remains unknown.

Implications for Nursing Research, Practice, Policy and Education

The implications of these dissertation findings are both timely in their relevance and far-reaching in their significance. Additionally, the methodology of this research in terms of using journals as a source of data is innovative and begs further replication. Points such as these are examined with particular emphasis on how this research could benefit women returning from wilderness expeditions as well as associated populations.

Methodological Innovations

Using journals as a data source is not new. Historical research has employed this technique for centuries; however, the use of unsolicited journaling to explore phenomena is much underused. I had significant trouble finding research that analyzed the unstructured contents of journals. My experience with reading and analyzing journals for this dissertation is unbelievably valuable, and I think it important to briefly point out the methodological implications of using journals as a data source.

Labeled diaries or journals, these collections of thought, are commonly presumed to be a hard copy assortment of a person's written recordings. Generally speaking, these recorded descriptions range from concrete categorizing to ranting about private secrets. Their topics are as varied as the handwriting they contain. The pages within hold unsolicited content in that they are free from prescribed formatting; no one directed the author on what to write. For this reason, their value to the reader is priceless. In reviewing over 1,500 pages of journal entries, I can attest that unsolicited journals are unbelievably rich in content. The data is raw, unhindered by preset limits or themes. Authors of these diaries freely write what they want, and they write how they want.

Sometimes the reader must sort through grammatical obscurities or penmanship atrocities, but the product is well worth the effort of deciphering pages of script.

The implications of using this as a data source are exponential. Many people keep journals which could hold the answers to a multitude of research questions. Consider the issues surrounding sojourner readjustment. In chapter 2, I asserted that some quantitative research had been completed exploring the experience of returning home following a stint living abroad. This concept of reentry, of coming home after immersing oneself in another culture as in the case of Peace Corps volunteers, needs further research to better articulate what this return experience is like. Couldn't journals or diaries hold the very data capable of bettering the understanding of this concept? I have lived overseas for an extended period three times. Each time, I kept a journal as did most of the young people with whom I was traveling. I believe these pages could possess rich data on a variety of topics including both the transition to and from cross-cultural experiences as well as the developmental period of emerging adulthood.

Furthermore, other health-related venues where people have documented their experiences should be explored. Personally, I periodically read Web-based blogs concerning women who multi-task raising several young children while working and going to school. These words are a source of comfort to me as I empathize with the authors' plight. But they are also rich, usually succinct, in their recordings of the descriptions of experiences such as motherhood, sibling relationships, self-care, and child nutrition. Blogs differ slightly from journals in that they are often meant to be read by an outside source, but they are unique, depicting an untapped data source for further

research. Written words, without prescription, are extremely powerful, holding insight and wisdom. Researchers must seek out and use these unused resources.

Further Research

It is known that persons undergoing transition are vulnerable to changes in well-being. This is the reason why nurses care about persons experiencing profound transitions. This particular dissertation offers a glimpse into the world of outcomes following adventure recreation. Certainly, not every person ventures out into the wilderness for months at a time, but the experience of these women following their wilderness expeditions does raise some concerns about coming home from outdoor adventures.

These dissertation findings strongly suggest further elaboration of which measures could lessen the difficulty women returning from wilderness expeditions seem to experience following an expedition. Which components might influence the transition of these women? The idea of vulnerability becomes pertinent and needs further conceptual clarification. Vulnerability may be able to be manipulated to promote well-being in women returning from wilderness expeditions. Jones, Zhang, and Meleis (2003) noted in their study, previously discussed in this chapter, that certain women used specific strategies to transform their affect positively while vulnerable during a difficult situational transition. Additional research, whose primary objective is to explore the relationship between these strategies and well-being, should be conducted. Related to this construct is the exploration of why some women are more vulnerable than others. Why do some women manifest a compromised well-being during transition? Are they more vulnerable to this dysfunctional outcome initially when compared to other women who,

though vulnerable, transform to a well affect? Additional research examining both the predictors of a stressful transition as well as the instigators to decreasing that stress is needed.

Overall, more research must be completed on the broader, more comprehensive construct of transition in which vulnerability is a key player. There is support for health care being based in a transitional perspective versus a biomedical model, as this may provide a more complete view of the health experiences of women (Meleis & Im, 2002). These authors advocate the following:

It is imperative to develop models that reflect women's own experiences, that uncover women's hidden voices and invisible experiences, that do not reduce women's health-illness experiences to a pathological and/or physiological condition or event, and that integrate research findings to transcend fragmentation inherent in women's health research. (p. 208)

People need to understand the bigger scope of transition and health, and they need to do this through further exploration into those experiences that seemingly interrupt that health. Women returning from wilderness expeditions report a variety of disconcerted mental and physical symptoms in the immediate postexpedition period. Are these symptoms inherent in every transition experience of women or just those women who have returned from wilderness expeditions? Further study promoting the understanding of transition will ultimately enhance the understanding of women's experience with all transition, and therefore, the comprehension of corresponding female health issues inherent during that transition.

Most particularly relevant to women undergoing transition is the social support required of these women during their transformation. More poignant is the consideration of emerging adults who characteristically rely heavily on the social support of family and friends during their navigation of that developmental period. Are there parental strategies to assist emerging adults during this transition? Some researchers assert that studies exploring the specific parenting tactics of emerging adults lag far behind those focusing on young children or adolescents, even though the emerging adult developmental time period in years greatly exceeds that of young children or adolescents (Gitelson & McDermott, 2006). Further study must explore enhancing the social support, already being used by emerging adults, namely parents and friends, to assist these young people as they meander through transition.

As was suggested by these dissertation findings, there may be a heightened need for such augmented social support during a postexpedition transition of emerging adults. This group of women is not only finding their way through emerging adulthood but also transitioning following a most profound expedition experience. These research findings point to this postexpedition experience as being neither easy nor quick. In a sense, emerging adults postexpedition heap upon themselves another transition experience, one which is noted to be quite difficult. How do emerging adults, already transforming, handle another transition? A person is reportedly vulnerable during transition, reporting a feeling of disconnection from both people and the surrounding environment (Chick and Meleis, 1986; Meleis et al., 2000). How much disconnection can one person handle? This question begs illumination, as it is critical to assess just how much simultaneous transition a person can accommodate before he or she becomes hopelessly vulnerable.

Emerging adults involved in a massive situational transition as well as an inherent developmental change are already prevalent in large numbers in this country. I previously justified my choice of not exploring the literature related to returning service personnel in chapter 2, but this does not preclude me from discussing my findings as to their possible impact on and need for further research with this population. The nature of these dual experiences in terms of women returning from wilderness expeditions and people returning from overseas combat are extremely different; however, their transitions as emerging adults may be similar. As noted in my dissertation findings, the transition event following a profound, cross-cultural experience is not easy, sometimes taking years to fully navigate.

Americans may disregard a group of returning expedition travelers as adventure-seekers who willingly venture hundreds of miles and can just as willingly transition from this voluntary, profound event. The same cannot be said of many of the emerging adult service personnel who return to the United States following sometimes involuntary duty of a possibly violent nature. They must transition through a cultural reentry with subsequent new self-concept, often without the support of friends acquired during deployment, under the guise of mixed political tensions concerning their military operation overseas.

My opinion is that this population of returning service personnel is extremely vulnerable to compromised well-being, and it is paramount that nurses further explore their experience with this transition, most especially noting which if any strategies may assist them in this confounded process. Additional study must try to comprehend their transition to becoming vulnerable and the associated experience of transforming to either

a positive well-being or a compromised well-being. Perhaps there are wartime diaries kept by military personnel that may illuminate this experience? There is a responsibility of care that begins with sound research into this complicated event. Many of these young people may manifest symptoms of a struggling well-being such as insomnia, depression, even hypertension, and nurses owe it to them to focus on and expand this area of research whether it is with returning service personnel directly or related populations of transitioning emerging adults.

My dissertation, therefore, should be replicated with a broader population of persons both male and female, who perhaps journey into the wilderness for lesser amounts of time. Is the difficulty transitioning after an expedition time-based, as in only those individuals on trips over so many days have trouble with coming home? Or is the destination of the journey, the remoteness of the adventure, an important variable with regard to outcomes? These findings raise a variety of questions, all of which require further inquiry.

My personal experience speaking with men who have completed a greater than 42-day expedition is that they too report considerable difficulty coming home. I have actually been asked, "Well, when are you going to look at our stories?" Unlike women, who may be more prone to chatting to their trail friends about issues with the return and who congregate in cozy, social meetings as part of normal, stereotypical female life, civilian men may not be privy to the same, socially acceptable outlet of intimate discussion and gatherings. On the trail, such male explorers may have enjoyed the exclusive social company of other guys for 8 weeks; however, men in Western society do not typically communicate their concerns as readily or as often as women do and may

therefore be more secluded and lonely following an expedition than women. This is conjecture as no solid research supporting this exists. It is only my experience speaking with such men that I can begin to envision the return process for them.

Obviously, dissemination of the findings would serve to educate the very people who could immediately apply this information to the affected population. I expect to present as well as publish portions of this dissertation to both wilderness and nursing professionals. Wilderness personnel can use some of this information in planning de-orientation sessions following their longer expeditions. Nursing personnel can be alert to the signs of transitional distress in clients returning from any meaningful wilderness event.

I envision exploring several conceptual terms found in this dissertation such as environmental and social disconnectedness. I believe there may be a broader application to these words, but first they must be further examined for their potentially far-reaching implications. Concept analysis of these terms may yield more accurate definitions and possible usages of them. To me, many patients are environmentally disconnected as their surroundings wreak havoc on their senses such that the smells, sounds, and sights bombarding them are both confusing and overstimulating. While working as a physical rehabilitation nurse, I frequently enacted low-stimulation orders to persons suffering from head injuries in an effort to decrease the fantastic array of input to them. These protocols, not unusual in the nursing world, do make a difference. I think a better conceptualized term behind this practice might actually increase the likelihood of its application to a variety of populations at risk.

Theoretically, it was suggested that a disharmony may have existed for women returning from a wilderness expedition. Components of this disharmony included a sense of self and the environment in which returning explorers found themselves. I believe there was an incongruent equation of these variables that yielded transitional turmoil. I do not think this is an event isolated to just returning adventurers of wilderness expeditions but also to such populations as returning study abroad participants, longer adventure leadership course members, and persons traveling extensively overseas. Wherever a person's sense of self is compromised and their environment fluctuates, I believe there may be concern. Nurses must continue to expand their understanding of the concept of transition, as its implications may be far-reaching in this age of increased globalization.

Practice, Policy, and Education

As more people travel extensively around an ever-more populated and technological earth, a recent American phenomenon has materialized. The high paced and wired lifestyle is changing the way in which offspring enjoy day-to-day downtime. Increasingly, younger members of the family are romping indoors as opposed to going outside. As children play outdoors less, the link between themselves and nature grows weak just at a time when preliminary research, such as this dissertation, are suggesting a strong bond between health and nature (Louv, 2005). The unfortunate sequence of young children's not enjoying the immediate green spaces near them is that may neglect entwining nature as a part of themselves, thereby overlooking the gentle balance of earth and humanity. This may be disaster for everyone; for that which people do not notice, they often do not respect.

Louv (2005) argues that extensive public policy has been directed at decreasing children's access to the outdoors. "Our institutions, urban/suburban design, and cultural attitudes unconsciously associate nature with doom –while disassociating the outdoors from joy and solitude (p. 2)." My dissertation findings suggest that while outside, people may develop a complicated and awesome relationship with the natural world around them. This relationship becomes a defining component of who that person is and may well predict what that person does in terms of advocating for the natural world. As a society, people should closely examine this relationship and the suggestion that this culture may somehow be alienating the earth from the future caretakers of that earth.

Although Americans may be interfering with the location where young children play, it cannot be denied that people are attempting to expand the places concerning which they and those older than they discover culturally. Internationalization is the current policy at my particular institution, Northern Michigan University. Across the United States, it seems that educational facilities are trying to increase their consumers' understanding of the world, often through study abroad programs or lengthy service activities overseas. As with some outdoor programming, the outcomes associated with these cross-cultural experiences may not have been fully realized. In exploring much of the literature on reentry issues following studying abroad, much of that content is quantitatively based. I think there should be more qualitative exploration of the experience of studying abroad and coming home from abroad much as this dissertation attempted to explore the experience of both the expedition and coming home from that expedition. It is a generalization to assume that postexpedition travelers have many of the same issues with transitioning after the adventure as persons experiencing a kind of

reverse culture shock. I do not think the experiences are identical, but after writing this dissertation, I believe they are similar. In speaking with a nurse educator who recently began taking students to Honduras on a service project, I highly recommended that she include some sort of reentry discussion for her population of students.

What should be mentioned in a reentry discussion? In terms of arriving home after an expedition, however that expedition might be qualified, I would begin by acknowledging that some people have trouble coming home. Postexpedition travelers undergo a kind of transition which may or may not be difficult. This transition is a time in which people seem to integrate the experiences of the expedition, including the very essence of who they are, into their present reality. It can continue for years or really not bother a person very much. It is characterized by periods of loneliness, confusion, overstimulation, and mourning. Some people have an exceptionally difficult time with this transition and should seek professional help. Other people seem to seek condolence from talking with good friends who may understand the travelers' process of integrating the experience or who are just good listeners. Sometimes, just looking over photographs of the experience, journaling feelings, or meeting persons who were on the expedition itself might help. Taking time to experience the transition is important. I think educating people that there may be certain triggers that make them feel worse is critical.

It is imperative that nurses actively participate in this sort of health promotion. Typically this may fall to the actual camp nurse or to the wilderness leader of the expedition. Such teaching should start even before the expedition begins and should concern all people involved, not just the explorer alone but also friends and families. Teaching should be followed up with hand-outs to be accessed once the explorer has

returned home. It could be helpful to extend check-ups over several months to see just how well the return expeditioner is doing. If several postexpedition women live in a similar locale, it would be prudent to have support groups for this population. Overall, I think just talking about this most recently described phenomenon may serve to assist people who may be experiencing it.

Nurse educators can carefully generalize some of these dissertation findings to certain populations. Faculty teach about certain red flags associated with travel to different parts of the world. For example, a febrile business traveler 10 days following a trip to Hong Kong should raise concerns for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome. The postbackpacking young woman who presents with complaints of suggested depression may be experiencing a kind of postexpedition transition that at the very least deserves exploration of her situation.

Summary

This dissertation is preliminary research in a burgeoning arena of inquiry focusing on outcomes associated with extended wilderness travel. I view it as a cornerstone from which to further explore the unique link between peoples' well-being and their access of the outdoors, as well as their simultaneous developmental and situational transitions. Professionals, such as nurses, advocating wilderness travel as a cure for Western living, must also be able to describe the side effects associated with that cure. These sequelae, consisting of a new self-concept, disconnected view of home and changed life perspective may be quite difficult for the returning adventure traveler to negotiate but eventually melt into that person's life experience. The wilderness traveler may never finish weaving the lessons of the trail into his or her life as the expedition itself becomes

a welcome reflection; a kind of respite from daily life. This dissertation has provided a description of the experience of returning from a wilderness expedition.

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APPENDIX

IRB Protocol

- Title:** The experience of returning from a wilderness expedition
- Description:** I understand that I have been asked to participate in this research study that will explore what my experience with returning from a wilderness expedition was like.
- Procedures:** I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary. I understand that to be enrolled in the study, I must first read the introductory letter and agree that my journal contents from the expedition fit what the researcher is looking for. I understand that people whose journals do not contain the necessary information will not be included in the study. I will then need to read, understand and sign both copies of the informed consent form. I understand that this should take about 30 minutes to do. One copy of this form I must mail in the enclosed envelope to the researcher.
- I understand that once the researcher receives my signed copy of the informed consent form I will be officially signed up in the research study. Once the researcher has included me in the study, I will receive a second packet of materials. I understand that within this second packet of materials I will find the directions concerning my journal. This directions page will also contain a code name for me to use when sending my journal or copies of my journal to the researcher. I understand that I am to use this codename when e-mailing the researcher as well. I will also receive special sticky paper to place on certain areas of my journal should I wish to hide certain portions of text from the researcher. I understand that if I use up the special sticky paper provided by the researcher, I am free to get and use more until everything I want hidden is covered. I understand that only the researcher will read the text. I understand that the researcher will cover up my name from the text and any other personal marks that could be tracked back to me before possibly sharing the text with the supervising professor. I understand that all information obtained from me will be kept in confidence. I understand that I can either Xerox the journal entries myself and then send them to the researcher or send the entire journal to the researcher for her to Xerox. I realize that if I choose her to Xerox the text, she will immediately Xerox the journal once she receives it, package it carefully for return shipping and then quickly send it back to me. I understand that sharing my journal entries with the researcher could take up to 2 hours.

I understand that I will also be invited to fill out a form asking for some information about myself including my e-mail address. I understand that filling this form out and sending it to the researcher should take less than 15 minutes.

I understand that after the researcher has received my journal or copies of its contents she will e-mail me using the address I gave her. I understand that she will use my assigned code name only and that she may ask me about journal contents at this time and that this may take a total of one hour of my time over several e-mail sessions if necessary. I understand that if I wish to share more about my expedition return experience, I may do so during the e-mail exchange as well. I understand that she will let me know via e-mail when my direct participation in the study is done. I understand that all e-mail responses I send to the researcher will be printed off and treated confidentially and that the e-mail response will then be deleted from the server.

I understand that between 12–17 women, aged 18–33 years, will participate in this study. I understand that my total time commitment to this study will be no longer than 2–4 hours and that I will not need to leave town to be in this study.

**Risks and
Benefits:**

I understand that there are certain risks involved with reading over my expedition journal. I understand that for some people this could be emotionally exhausting as the written pages describing stories of the expedition might stir up difficult memories for me. I also understand that just thinking about the experience of returning from an expedition could be stressful for me. The following phone number is for me to use should I encounter any difficulty or stress over this project. It is a toll free national hotline phone number with a service to assist me personally: 1-800-273-8255. I realize there are certain risks associated with sharing information over the Internet. As an online participant in this research, there is always the risk of intrusion by outside agents, i.e., hacking, and therefore the possibility of being identified.

I understand that if I enroll in the study, I will receive a cashier's check for \$50 U.S. funds to cover the cost of certified postage and Xeroxing expenses. I understand that once the study is done, I will be given the results of this study should I ask for them. This study will provide no other direct benefit to me. I understand that I will not be charged for being in the study.

Safeguards:

I understand that any information about me will be treated in confidence. The data collected and the following results will be used for scientific

purposes only. My name and initials will never be used to report any results of the projects. I understand that the records and data files related to this project will be kept in the researcher's care for a period no longer than 5 years and that only the researcher will have access to these data.

**Freedom to
Withdraw:**

I understand that I may refuse to participate in this study or withdraw at any time without penalty. I understand that I may be withdrawn from this study by the investigator if I submit journal entries of less than 4 weeks from my last "trail day," send a journal that is not from my initial expedition experience with Camp Manito-wish, or jumped into another expedition/overseas assignment within 8 weeks of my last "trail day." I understand that, should I withdraw or be withdrawn from the study, any information that I have provided will be destroyed. I understand that once I have received my cashier's check, I will not be asked to return it.

**Voluntary
Consent:**

This study has been explained to me in the paperwork provided. If I have additional questions, I may contact the principal researcher using e-mail or regular mail:

Helen "Bitsy" Wedin MSN, RN

hmwed@uwm.edu

Complaints: I understand that if I have any complaints about my treatment in this study I may call or write:

Chris Buth Furness
IRB Administrator Human Research Protection Program
Department of University Safety and Assurances ENG 207
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
P. O. Box 413
Milwaukee, WI 53201
414-229-3173
chrisb@uwm.edu

Although Ms. Buth Furness will ask my name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

I have received an explanation of this study and agree to participate. I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Filling out this informed consent document indicates that I am at least 18 years old and am giving my informed consent to be a participant in this study.

Name: _____

Date: _____

This research project has been approved by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of Human Subjects for a 1 year period.

I understand that if I have any further questions regarding my rights as a participant in a research study I may contact Dr. Cynthia Prosen of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee of Northern Michigan University at 906-227-2300 cprosen@nmu.edu.

Invitation to Participate

Introductory Letter

Potential subject's name
 Potential subject's street address
 Potential subject's city/state
 Potential subject's zip code

Month, day, 2006

Dear "subject name":

My name is Helen "Bitsy" Wedin and I am conducting a research project through the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee. The title of my project is "The experience of returning from a wilderness expedition." You have been contacted as a potential participant in this study because of your involvement with the canoe expedition, the "expo," you completed through Camp Manito-wish YMCA. That facility is in no way connected to this research project; however, your name and address were obtained from a past issue of the *Astonisher*.

I myself completed three such "expos" ten years ago through Manito-wish and I noticed that sometimes it seemed as challenging to go on the expedition as it was to return home from it. I am interested in your experience of coming off of the expo, of your return experience as might have been captured in the pages of the journal you may have kept at that time. I hope to analyze journals from approximately 12–17 postexpedition women and attempt a scholarly description of what it was like to return from a wilderness expedition.

To be enrolled in the study you must:

- 1) Be a female of 18-33 years of age
- 2) Have completed a canoe expedition through Camp Manito-wish YMCA of at least 42 days in length between and including the years 1995–2005
- 3) Have journaled during the expo and for at least 4 weeks afterwards
- 4) Not have jumped into another expedition or gone overseas for a period of eight weeks from your last "trail day"
- 5) Send only your initial Manito-wish expo journal or a copy of it

I hope to obtain entire journals of not only this time after the expo but also of the expedition itself. Note: You will have the option of covering up certain areas of text you do not want to share with me if you so desire.

I realize that journals are extremely personal items having kept several journals myself of my expedition experiences. Your journals and the contents within will be treated with respect. They will be shared with no one but me and, after any identifying mark is removed, the contents may be read by my advising professor only. Your enrollment in the study is confidential. You will receive a compensatory monetary payment of \$50 U.S. funds to be used for copying and postage charges. If you are not interested in the project please disregard this letter; you will not be contacted further. If, however, you believe you meet the study criteria and would like to participate, please read and sign the enclosed informed consent letters and mail one copy in the enclosed envelope. If you have any questions at this time, please use my home or e-mail address below to contact me.

Thank you,

Helen "Bitsy" Wedin

E-mail: hmwedin@uwm.edu

Demographic Information

Participant Information

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. I very much appreciate it. Please fill out the rest of the information on this page and include it with your journal or Xeroxed copy of your journal that will be sent to me.

Name:

Current Age:

Current Mailing address:

E-mail address:

Did you provide journaling from your first expedition (canoe trip greater than 42 days in length) with Manito-wish?

Year of expedition:

Route completed (name rivers involved):

Length in days of expedition:

After the expedition itself, what did you immediately do with your life? School, employment? Both?

If in school, what is your current field of study?

If employed, what is your current field of employment?

Instructions Concerning Journals

Thank you for enrolling in the research project entitled: The experience of returning from a wilderness expedition. Your code name for this study to be used during e-mail/journal exchange is _____.

I realize that sometimes journals are full of maps, drawings, pressed flowers or other artifacts and poems. Please include these or Xerox them as well.

Option one: Send me your entire journal including your entries during and after the expedition. You may use the enclosed sticky picture paper to cover up portions of the text you would not like me to read. You are free to acquire more sticky picture paper from me to cover up text if you need to. All portions of text will be kept confidential. I will Xerox your journal and send it back to you promptly as stated in the informed consent document.

Option two: You are free to Xerox your journal including your entries during and after the expo. Please Xerox the entire text but feel free to cover up portions of the text you would not like me to read. You are free to acquire more sticky picture paper from me to cover up text if you need to. All portions of text will be kept confidential. Please then send me these copies by post.

Note: You may consider sending the journals or their contents through certified mail to better ensure their delivery to me. The \$50 money order should cover the cost of certified portage.

Please send journal/Xeroxed copies to:
Helen "Bitsy" Wedin

Sample E-mail Contact Message

Dear "pseudonym"

I have received your expedition journal, Xeroxed it and returned it to you via certified post. I appreciate your participation in this research study. I do have two questions concerning the content found in your journal. "question #1" and "question #2". Could you please provide me further information regarding these two areas. Also, if there is any other information you would like to share with me about what it was like to return from your expedition, please feel free to do so now.

Thanks, Bitsy Wedin

CURRICULUM VITAE

Helen Mueller Wedin

Place of Birth: Milwaukee, WI

Education

B.A., Smith College, May 1991

Major: History

B.A., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, December 1993

Major: Nursing

M.S.N., Northern Michigan University, May 2001

Major: Nursing

Ph.D., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, December 2007

Dissertation Title: The Experience of Returning from a Wilderness Expedition

Teaching Experience

Assistant Professor of Nursing, Northern Michigan University, Marquette, MI

August 2004–present

Fulbright Scholar, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Presentations/Grants

Sigma Theta Tau International, 18th International Nursing Research Congress
Focusing on Evidence-Based Practice, Presentation “Mentoring in Nursing
Education” Vienna, Austria Summer 2007

College of Professional Studies, Northern Michigan University, \$2,500 research
grant for the support of research entitled “Mentoring in Nursing Education,”
Fall 2006

Midwest Nursing Research Society Annual Conference, Presentation “Returning
from a Wilderness Expedition,” Milwaukee, WI April 2006.

College of Professional Studies, Northern Michigan University, \$2,500 research
grant for the support of research concerning young women returning from
wilderness expeditions, Fall 2005.

Optimizing Global Health through Nursing Science Conference, Presentation
“Health Implications Post-expedition,” Chicago, IL November 2005.

Service

Superior Edge, Northern Michigan University Campus-wide program committee

Camp Nurse, Camp Manito-wish YMCA, responsible for community of approx. 300 persons including children. Greater than 190 hours. Administered first aid, medications, and chronic care monitoring; consultant to wilderness expedition leaders for long-term care needs while in remote regions. 2006, 2007.

Major Professor

12/10/07
Date