

THE CULTURE OF TRANSFORMATION AT OUTWARD BOUND

EXPLORING THE CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF
TRANSFORMATION ON OUTWARD
BOUND COURSES: GOLDEN FEATHERS

By

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ABSTRACT

Outward Bound wilderness school uses experiential, adventure-based learning strategies to facilitate personal transformation for its students. While this process has been well-researched from an individualistic, psychology-based perspective, the possible influence of cultural factors has not yet been well-addressed. This ethnography explores the cultural dimensions of transformation at Outward Bound, using a constructivist, narrative-based approach, as well as employing theoretical notions such as: rites of passage, *communitas*, experiential education, generative education, and 'border intellectual' in the interpretation of the narratives. Self-narratives were co-constructed with twenty Outward Bound students at three points: before, at the end of, and three months after their courses. The research confirms that transformational learning was accomplished by 18/20 participants, in at least one of eight general areas that emerged from their narratives. A further eight cultural factors were identified which contributed to students' willingness and ability to undertake personal transformation in that environment: a culture of support for success and failure, intrinsic adventure, acceptance of diversity, open communication with others, improved communication with self, a culture of possibility, simplicity, and patience. Alternatives to the rites of passage model for post-industrial society are discussed. The overall learning is that it is possible to improve the likelihood of generating transformational learning, through managing the cultural factors indicated, in the learning environment.

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Chapter 1.0

INTRODUCTION

“We’re going to discover the North Pole.”

“Oh!” said Pooh again. “What is the North Pole?” he asked.

“It’s just a thing you discover,” said Christopher Robin carelessly, not being quite sure himself.

“Oh! I see,” said Pooh. “Are bears any good at discovering it?”

(Milne 1986: 29)

Expeditions and adventures seem to hold a sense of mystery and potential regardless of whether or not the object of discovery is clear. When Christopher Robin puts on his boots, Winnie-the-Pooh knows that they are going to do something different, learn something new, and so he wants to go along, though he does not know *what* will be learned. A broad range of intentions for discovery or learning emerged from the interviews I conducted with the students about to embark on an Outward Bound wilderness course. Some people felt that they had clear aims. Others knew vaguely that they would like to grow, but not how. Others felt the course was simply intended as an adventure. Like the stories in Winnie-the-Pooh however, the one looking for something does not always find it, and similarly, those who are not intentionally seeking something, often discover much.

At a basic level, the intention of this thesis is to use concepts and methods from anthropology to illuminate some of the cultural processes at work in outdoor experiential education courses such as those taught by Outward Bound. Specifically, I want to make an initial effort to articulate how the experience is culturally-constructed, and how that culture operates to facilitate personal transformation for students on the courses. This approach is intended to complement the primarily individualistic, psychology-based explanations that precede this study. The analysis is

grounded in experience through the self-narratives of research participants, and my own work with the school. The conclusion of the research is that the cultural environment of Outward Bound (OB) courses is akin to the liminal or 'threshold' period of rites of passage as defined by Arnold van Gennep, and as such facilitates personal transformation for participants. However, as will be discussed, neither the process nor the end-results of OB exactly parallel the rites of passage model. Before discussing the findings, a short background on the topic is necessary.

At this juncture, I will attempt to clarify the sense in which I use the terms 'culture' and 'the cultural' in this ethnography since the terms are polysemous in the field. A key theme which underlies my use of the terms, is that culture is emergent, and thus continually in motion (Rosaldo 1986). Another is that culture is improvisationally-produced and reproduced through the interplay of agency and structure, (*loc. cit.*) - a dialectic which should be evident throughout this ethnography. These notions contrast with past notions of culture as a static, self-contained, homogeneous system of behaviour or ideas.

I also follow Clifford (1986) and Keesing (1994) in attending to the historical-sensitivity of cultural processes and recognizing intra-cultural heterogeneity, as strategies for avoiding essentializing or reifying cultures. This approach has facilitated my analysis in allowing variation in responses to the experience to be seen as good indicators of where to question the models, instead of as bothersome outliers. Lastly, the ethnography reflects the contested nature of the cultural by showing the active role of all participants in the OB experience in resisting, adapting and accommodating aspects of the cultural. When people are understood as 'complex sites of cultural production' instead of 'vessels of culture', the dynamic processes of culture can become clearer (Rosaldo 1986). Overall then, I use 'culture' to refer to a dynamic, emergent, and contested process of knowledge and value-production that informs, but does not control, people's world-view and itinerant daily choices.

“The best teacher lodges an intent not in the mind but in the heart.
Athos’s lesson: to make love necessary.” (Michaels 1996: 121)

Outward Bound is a non-profit educational institution that has directed courses in the wilderness since the Second World War. It operates in dozens of countries using the same core mission and pedagogical model, both grounded in the principles of experiential education or ‘learning by doing’. While many ‘hard skills’ such as canoeing, rock-climbing, orienteering, and fire-building are taught, the real lessons of OB courses run deeper than this. The aims of the school are more primarily concerned with developing ‘good citizens’ than good rock-climbers, and as such these other ‘hard skills’ activities form the framework within which personal development can occur (see Chapter. 2.2 for elaboration). All students are put in the position of having to work through problems with the group and on their own, thus developing skills and qualities such as communication, teamwork, self-awareness, compassion, and leadership in varying degrees. While it is clearly a *group* process and experience, most research on these courses to date has been concerned with the individual, and how he or she grows, learns, and transforms, as if these processes occurred in a vacuum. It seems to me that a culturally-oriented analysis of these courses can provide an enriched perspective on how they operate.

Anthropological concepts and methods are essentially concerned with exploring and elucidating the complex, multi-layered, and pervasive influence of culturally-based attitudes, behaviours and patterns. Exploring the OB courses using an ethnographic approach, allows themes about the cultural and interpersonal aspects of the course experience to emerge that have not been considered by the individual-focused research. The method of eliciting self-narratives of the students’ lives and course experiences was grounded in constructivist notions of world-making, which lead me to interview a sample of 20 OB students to understand what meanings they were constructing from their experience on the courses.

To gain comparative perspective, I interviewed each student in their 'regular cultural environment' at home, before and after the course, and on the final day of the course. In addition, by interviewing them before the course, at the end, and then three months later, I could compare their understanding of various areas over time, such as self-awareness, and see what role the course might have played in the transformation, if any. Indeed, it is on these possible transformations that the thesis is focused. Through listening to the research participants' stories about themselves and their courses, I developed a clearer understanding of how the cultural elements of the course were experienced by them, and how this influenced their ability and willingness to transform aspects of themselves.

A key model which assisted my analysis was that of 'rites of passage'. According to van Gennep and Victor Turner, there are three phases to rites of passage cross-culturally: separation from one's regular life, a liminal period of 'initiation' rituals and learning, and reaggregation back into society in a new position. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, this model is useful in two ways. First, it outlines the culturally-conditioned way that we often 'frame' such experiences. Second, and more importantly, the liminal period, which is designed to be intrinsically transformational, contains cultural characteristics and processes that parallel many aspects of the OB courses. This helps in elucidating how the cultural operates to encourage transformation on the course.

For various reasons that are discussed throughout this ethnography, however, the rites of passage model does not parallel OB participants' experiences in all ways, and as such must be used carefully. The research participants' self-narratives indicate that many OB students have similar aims as people undertaking another genre of cultural event, for which the closest phrase may be a 'retreat'. Retreats can take many forms, from hobbies, meditation, a day at a health spa, a week-end reading alone at a cottage, or even extended travels, but they share certain traits such as being separated from the flow and responsibilities of regular life, which OB courses have as

well. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.1, but, for now, what is important is to note that under this more vague ‘retreat’ model of ‘time away’ versus the rites of passage model, the transformations undertaken are more difficult to sustain, as there is a lack of formal post-course ‘maintenance’ mechanisms.

Still, in Chapter 3.1, I show that the research indicates that the students do experience the course as three stages, just as the rites of passage model suggests. They use this frame to help them interpret events and expectations on course, as well as to interact with and modify the OB culture as introduced through their particular instructors. As will be discussed, all of the students felt that the experience was ‘*An* experience’, separate from the regular flow of life, and as such were more attuned to exploring new ways of being and learning, and as a result, most of them were more open to the possibility of transformation while on course. As will be discussed in Chapter 2.1, the transformation that is being considered here is on the level of personal development, not the critical or political level such as that advocated by Marxists or some feminists.

The main thrust of this ethnography is developed in Chapter 3.2, where I illustrate how the Outward Bound course culture is generally akin to the culture of liminal periods, and specifically how this serves as a catalyst for personal transformation. I use extensive ethnographic evidence in the form of full, dialogic self-narratives, as well as excerpted quotations from various students’ self-narratives, to share with the reader the feelings and evolving understanding of the research participants. I present direct statements to evoke a sense for how an individual might live this experience, so that that expression might resonate with the reader’s own experiences. In addition, by interpreting the patterns that occurred frequently throughout these self-narratives, I have developed a more general model to demonstrate the kind of cycles of transformation that many people on the courses appear to experience. The model is intended as an attempt to further theorize the anthropological notion of liminal culture, beyond our current grasp of it, and to do this in a grounded, ethnography-based way.

Personal transformation is most useful when it can endure beyond the initial, spirited moment of inception, but OB instructors do not normally have an opportunity to follow-up with students regarding whether they have been able to integrate those transformed aspects of self into their regular lives. To assess how effectively the transformations transferred over into regular life, I discussed the experience of the research participants with them again, three months after their courses. In Chapter 3.3, I discuss various students in the context of all three of our interviews, to give the reader a sense of the trajectory of their life experience and how the course, and its effects, fit into it. The students' narratives indicate that the experience-based, holistic way in which the course operates, is crucial to why many of the transformations last. However, as indicated above, the lack of formal social mechanisms for maintaining the change, such as those in a traditional rite of passage, make it difficult for these students to sustain their transformed perspectives.

In summary then, through this ethnography I will illustrate what the cultural environment of OB courses is like, what makes it intrinsically transformational, how this is related to other rituals like 'retreats', and finally, what transformations seem to last and why. An OB course is a good case study of a liminal sub-culture within contemporary Canadian society as it is bounded in time and geography. While it is often difficult to isolate the effects of particular changes in the experience or cultural environment on a group, in this case, the isolation is intrinsic to the experience. It is also an interesting case in that it taps into larger themes about change, 'progress', identity, and construction of self that are significant today for many Canadians. If the expressions of these students, and my interpretation of them, resonate with readers and move you to think in new ways about the cultural dimensions of how personal transformation happens, then the ethnography will be successful.

As with any sort of moral education, evaluating whether the aims have been met is difficult to accomplish through quantitative testing. The real test of whether the aims have been met must be in how the student re-emerges into society. Is s/he able to contribute now in a more

compassionate, informed, open-minded, and mature way than before doing the course? These are the kinds of indicators of transformational learning that I have tried to gauge through these interviews. I will define my use of ‘transformational’ in Ch. 2.1.

I recognize that any attempt to pin these somewhat intangible lessons down, much less to tie their development to one experience might be impossible, destructive to the holism of the notions, and perhaps even arrogant. In interpreting the self-narratives which follow, I tried to bear in mind how the students’ incoming experience plays a role in how much they learn. Similarly, their self-selection into such a course separates them from the ‘average’ person. This indicates that this analysis of how personal transformation is accomplished may not be as applicable in *other* contexts as I had originally thought possible. In fact, a scene from Catcher in the Rye inspired me to be more cautious in what transformations I attributed to the OB course alone. Regarding his private school’s commitment to mold boys into “splendid, clear-thinking young men”, sixteen year-old Holden Caulfield says: “Strictly for the birds. They don’t do any damn more molding at Pencey than they do at any other school. And I didn’t know anybody there that was splendid and clear-thinking at all. Maybe two guys. If that many. And they probably came to Pencey that way.” (Salinger 1945: 2).

Having said that however, I do believe that the research clearly indicates that significant and lasting personal transformation can be attributed to the Outward Bound course experience. I chose the title “Golden Feathers” for the thesis because I believe this. Song writer Robbie Robertson explains how in some Native American traditions, a golden feather, or a stone in the shape of a heart, are ultimate discoveries:

“I gave my love a golden feather, I gave my love a heart of stone.
And when you find a golden feather,
It means you’ll never lose your way back home.” (Robertson 1994)

The symbolic golden feather speaks to two aspects of personal transformation and growth that I have explored in this ethnography. The first is how many of us seek a simple answer to the

meaning of our lives, so a golden feather or heart-stone appeal to that simplicity. It conveys the lesson that if we live right, (however we define that culturally and personally), we will ‘live along into the answer’ as Rilke says, and find the feather. But finding the feather is not necessarily a passive process. There is room for us to be actively involved in uncovering what we need to know, in order to give meaning to our experiences. The stories of the Outward Bound students that contributed to this research indicate that the course experience has given most of them a symbolic golden feather of their own, one that they can, and do, turn to in facing new situations in their regular lives. Rather than being *the* answer, though, this feather is more like a flash of colour in the whole collection of feathers that they will find and grow to make the wings they need in order to travel well through their lives.

Chapter 2.1

Anthropology and Education Literature: *The Evolution of the Research(er)*

“The formation of hypotheses is the most mysterious of all the categories of scientific method. Where they come from, no one knows. A person is sitting somewhere, minding his own business, and suddenly-flash!- he understands something he didn’t understand before.”
(Pirsig 1974: 113)

Research problems seem to take shape over time, emerging from the pool of ideas one collects through a series of more or less solipsistic happenings. As Pirsig writes above, we are often not even sure of where the questions originated. There are, however, distinct aspects of the trajectory of my experience and study which have contributed to my ability to even formulate the hypotheses I have for this study. In this chapter, I will map out the path(s) that I have traveled in coming to these hypotheses, and the route-markers that have been constitutive of my particular, positioned understanding of the phenomenon of study. In this sense, the history of the project has been more an “improvisatory art”, a combining of familiar and unfamiliar elements, than a focused, single-track quest (Bateson 1989: 3). As an anthropologist beginning to study the Outward Bound experience, I understood some things but not others - terra incognita. Now, having listened to and reflected on the research participants’ expressions of their experiences, the ‘terra cognita’ is somewhat enlarged, and ready to be shared. In this chapter, I will lay the groundwork that assisted me in coming to a new, culturally-based understanding of the process of transformation at Outward Bound.

“I was like the men [sailors] in Athos’ stories, who set their courses before the invention of longitude and never quite knew where they were. They looked at the stars and knew they were missing information, terra nullius raising the hairs on their necks.”

(Michaels 1996: 19)

Outlining the progression of ideas that culminated in this research is a way to give the reader a solid foothold to enter into a critical dialogue with the explanatory framework that I propose later. I want the reader to be “experientially and spectatorially” involved in the interpretive process (Nussbaum 1995: 66). I will begin with how I came to be interested generally in the experience of transformation, and how this interest found a concrete manifestation in my work with Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School (COBWS). Exposure to various anthropological and educational theories began to transform my quotidian interest into more specific, formal hypotheses which I could explore through research. Continuing along this trajectory, I will show how a constructivist approach to this research, combined with narrative-based interviews, serves to draw together these ideas and experiences in a unified interpretive framework.

I. Coming to an Interest in the Experience of Transformation & Change

In order to provide a foundation for discussing personal transformation as catalyzed by Outward Bound courses, I will define how I intend to use the terms of this discussion. The dictionary definition of ‘change’ is: “1. to make or become different, to alter; 2. to replace with or exchange for another; 3. to transform or convert or be transformed or converted” (CED 1994). Transformation is defined as: “1. a change or alteration, especially a radical one; 2. the act of transforming or the state of being transformed” (CED 1994). Since the difference between these definitions is ambiguous, I will explain how I will differentiate between them in this analysis. I will use ‘change’ to refer to the actions or alterations in external, objective conditions in our environment that we must adapt to. I will use ‘transformation’ to refer to the personal adaptation which we may, and sometimes must, undertake in order to deal with changes in our environment.

In the case of Outward Bound, I will show how the ‘changed’ environment and culture of the course, leads the students to experiencing new ways of being and operating, and thus provides them with the opportunity to learn, and sometimes practice, how to ‘transform’ their existing approach, or aspects of it. In this ethnography, I will demonstrate how certain cultural and structural aspects of an OB course facilitate this kind of personal transformation.

The kind of transformation that is possible with an OB experience should not be confused with the way in which this term has been used by Marxists, deep ecologists, and some feminists. These latter groups are concerned with radical change in the sense that they are not concerned with improving the existing structures, but rather developing new ones which will ideally dissolve the systemic biases of the existing social structure. Cherryholmes offers clarity to this distinction by identifying pedagogical aims which are “critically pragmatic” such as that of the deep ecologists, and aims which are “structurally pragmatic” such as Outward Bound (1989: 151-152). That is to say that, an OB course is not designed to encourage emergent politically subversive behaviour, but rather to encourage students to think critically about how to best live in their world, which can lead to transformations in how they do. Thus, this ethnography deals with the ‘small -t’ sense of transformation at the level of personal development, while recognizing other levels of transformation as well.

The background of my interest in change and transformation comes from various life experiences. My experiential understanding of these notions begins with the fact that my family moved regularly while I was growing up, meaning that we all had to transform in various ways to a number of very different environments. Three exchanges I did to foreign places required similar adaptation. Later, the case studies I worked through for my commerce degree were guided by the meta-narrative of business that change and transformation are somehow intrinsically good or at least unavoidable if a firm is to remain competitive. A similar theme played out during my time working as a marketing manager for a multi-national corporation that was undertaking a 4-year

period of major internal restructuring. All of these lent a distinctly positive spin to processes of change for me. It is largely through these personal experiences that I developed an interest in the subject, and in the differing strategies people use to handle change and transformation.

While I will make the case here that OB courses are transformational, I should be clear that this transformation is only possible if the student is actively engaged in it. Most OB instructors argue forcefully that they provide opportunities for transformation, but do not, indeed can not, 'change people'. They hold that the student must be actively involved for the transformation to occur effectively. With this ethnography, I will show, however, that by providing the appropriate cultural environment and opportunities as they do, there is a significant, intrinsic push towards undertaking some form of personal transformation.

II. Outward Bound as a Concrete Example

Outward Bound has become a focal point for my inquiry into the process of personal transformation. As both a 'pedagogy' and an actual school, the Outward Bound approach is oriented towards transformation on various levels as will be discussed below. The specific mission, core values, course structure, and guiding models of OB as practiced in Canadian and American schools will be outlined below. For a perspective on what others have said about the school, I will also discuss a selection of critical and supportive studies on the OB process which are of relevance to the present research. There are many papers, theses, and books addressing a wider range of OB and outdoor experiential education issues which will not be discussed here for they are beyond the scope of this project¹.

¹ Although OB is only one possible solution to the epistemological prescriptions of experiential educators and specifically outdoor experiential educators, it has continued to stand as the leader in the field for its use of these ideas in practice at its schools. Experiential education is a dynamic field, with the majority of its educators being passionately committed to promoting and improving this educational approach. As

My own involvement with OB began in the spring of 1995 through a series of marketing and marketing research contracts at the Canadian OB Wilderness School (COBWS). Working mainly out of the Toronto office, I assisted with designing research projects, running focus groups with alumni (Cushing 1995), coordinating various small promotional events such as shows at libraries and malls, and instructing short courses for the COBWS professional development program. Through these interactions with office and teaching staff, alumni, and interested new participants, my understanding on what the school was all about improved.

The most important factor in transforming my understanding of the school, however, came only after I had experienced it for myself. I was a participant observer on two courses; a short winter-camping skills course in the Muskokas in January 1996, and a full-length white-water canoeing course on the Spanish River north of Killarney in May 1996. While I have done extensive camping and canoeing in other contexts, the courses were challenging in that both demanded new technical skills for me, in addition to the challenge of living, co-operating, and working through the inevitable conflicts with a group of unfamiliar people for extended periods of time. It was only through being a participant that I finally came to understand the real differences between ‘experiential education’ and the traditional ‘transmission education’ that I and most North Americans have grown up with. A key part of the difference was that we were not given standard or rigid solutions to our problems.

When we had some trouble on the course, my initial thoughts were that the instructors ought to intervene to “fix” what I perceived to be an unproductive dynamic so that we could ‘get on with having a good course’. It was only later that I grasped the point that I had been missing. The following is an excerpt from my course journal on that day:

“I think this morning I realized that OB courses are not about talking people through what group skills or processes are potentially about - it is about letting people stumble,

such there are a range of perspectives on what aspects should be emphasized (See Vokey 1987, Suchman 1992, Goldman 1996, Godbout 1988, Enright 1988, Bacon 1983, James 1980, Henderson 1995).

trot or gallop into that exact process themselves and at the end maybe to talk it out. That way we really experience what its like before we can try to take learnings from it.”
(Cushing 1996a)

The Outward Bound Wilderness School is grounded in the philosophy of experiential education. I will expand further on educational theory in the next section, but first I will outline the Outward Bound approach. The term Outward Bound is used in various senses:

“‘Outward Bound’ refers to a historical tradition, a number of related but autonomous educational institutions, the objectives and methods of the programs offered by those institutions, and the people who offer the programs.” (Vokey 1987: 4)

The aims, values and methods of Outward Bound Wilderness School have been variously articulated over time and in many of its countries of operation. There is not a commonly held order of priority to these explanations and it is not my purpose or place here to develop one. However, I will discuss the principal themes from the literature of the North American schools.

The OB mission is “To develop respect for self, care for others, responsibility to the community, and sensitivity to the environment,” incorporating the four core tenets of “personal, interpersonal, social and ecological concerns” (Vokey 1987: 6-7). Another articulation of key elements in an Outward Bound curriculum is that of the “Four Pillars”: physical training, self-discipline, craftsmanship, and service (ibid.: 8). The school has created a curriculum aimed at achieving its mission via the elements listed by applying experiential education theory on outdoor, adventure-based expeditions. A key aim is to facilitate an environment where participants can achieve “personal transformation” in these four core areas (Bacon 1983: 101-2). OB originated during World War Two in the UK as a means of transforming young, merchant seamen to prepare them for the stress of working in waters infested by German submarines (James 1980: 7). While today’s students face different kinds of hardships, the original vision and mission, as articulated in 1966, remain the same.

The longevity of the OB tradition is due in part to the continued relevance of the core values that underlie the school’s mission. In addition, the values are broad enough to allow for

interpretation according to new educational priorities and social conditions (Vokey 1987: 8).

These values were articulated by Kurt Hahn, the founder of OB who was an innovative educator in Germany, and a Jew, who was exiled to England in 1932 for publicly criticizing the Nazis (ibid.:

7). Hahn maintained a clear position on the values that formed his view of what education ought to accomplish:

“I regard it as the foremost task of education to insure the survival of these qualities: an enterprising curiosity, an undefeatable spirit, tenacity in pursuit, readiness for sensible self-denial, and, above all, compassion.”
(James 1980: 1)

His commitment to these values and to improving education lead him to found and inspire a variety of progressive schools and awards other than OB in Germany and England, most of which survive today. These include the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, and the United World College schools, which promote cross-cultural understanding, as well as the above values (ibid.: 5).

The mission and values are manifest in the courses. A standard course is a 3-4 week wilderness expedition involving a mix of camping, canoeing, hiking, campcraft, rock climbing, kayaking, and orienteering skills. These physical, or ‘hard’ skills, are largely a means to an end, since primarily, they act as the framework through which students gain experience in developing the ‘soft’ kinds of skills as outlined in the mission. This is not to underplay the importance of the physical training, but rather broaden its scope. There are usually 10 students, and 2 instructors. The instructors’ role changes throughout the course. They tend to provide more guidance and instruction (safety, paddling skills, initiating discussions) at the outset, and then ideally grow less central as the group learns, through the process, to organize, teach and lead themselves. This course structure is applied in essentially the same format for all courses worldwide, with local adaptation as per the priorities and cultural beliefs of the place. COBWS, the Ontario-based Canadian school, for example, tends to emphasize developing strong communication skills through de-briefs and working through decision-making issues. COBWS also seeks to attract a diverse population of students by offering special needs courses. As I have mentioned and will expand on

in the ethnographic sections, I believe that the course structure is itself part of the transformational culture on OB courses in that it fits with other frameworks that human societies have long used to signal ritual periods of change. The OB model is outlined below. For a more comprehensive outline, see Appendix A. Each group dynamic proceeds differently so there is no set time for moving between phases, however I have tried to indicate *roughly* the length of each phase. The final includes a day of ‘service’, and some groups do not do the unaccompanied final expedition if they are not functioning safely without the instructors.

Outward Bound Course Structure Model

Training Phase [3-4 days]

- *group ‘forming’, learning hard skills*

Expedition Phase [7-12 days]

- *group ‘norming’ and ‘storming’ through hard decisions, success and failure*

Solo Time [1-3 days]

- *reflection time during 2-3 days camping alone with minimal provisions*

Final Expedition [1-5 days]

- *group ‘performing’ (ideally) usually an unaccompanied trip to base camp*

Concluding Phase [2 days]

- *group assessments by peers and instructors; marathon, final banquet*

This model differs from the standard North American educational approach which presupposes learners as largely passive ‘recipients’ of knowledge. Effective participation in an OB course thus requires a substantial change in how participants engage in the learning process. This model was not created in a vacuum but rather grew as a response to other educational approaches which I will outline in the next section.

III. EDUCATION THEORY & RESEARCH

In order to situate Outward Bound's pedagogical approach, it must be seen in terms of contrasting and complementary pedagogies and schools of thought. In my review of the relevant educational literature, I came to see the multi-faceted influences on the development of contemporary experiential education generally, and the OB school specifically. In an effort to uncover what was already known about personal transformation at OB, I reviewed various evaluative research and found that the reports did not seem to do justice to the experience for reasons I will discuss below. As I was concerned with how the school facilitates transformational experiences in particular, I read wider afield in cultural studies and critical pedagogy to see what was understood about transformation in other educational contexts. I found that both offered interesting possible models for explaining the OB case. Educational theory thus provides the initial slats to our framework for understanding transformation at OB.

III A) Experiential Education

“Do not now seek the answers,
which cannot be given you because
you would not be able to live them.”
(R. M. Rilke 1904)

As Rilke warns the young poet, experiential education also seeks to slow down, and even problematize students' conditioned quest for being told 'the right answer' by some authority figure. Instead, experiential theory avers that students need to learn to construct their own answers through having experience(s), successes and failures, and reflecting on them as a basis for problem-solving and then acting in the world. Experiential education, often referred to as 'learning by doing', is a pedagogical approach which recognizes the value of *experience* as a basis for learning (Dewey 1938: 18). It encourages active learning on the grounds that "the most effective way to stimulate learning is to link it to students' own experiences and concerns" (Udall et al 1990: 3). It falls into the broader category of 'progressive education', which aims to provide

students with the ability to develop solutions on their own, spontaneously if necessary, in response to the continually changing environment in which they live. This philosophy contrasts with ‘traditional education’ which treats knowledge as a finished product to be ‘transmitted’ or fed to students who will ‘bank’ it, but not to encourage people to grapple with, or challenge, what they are taught (Freire 1985).

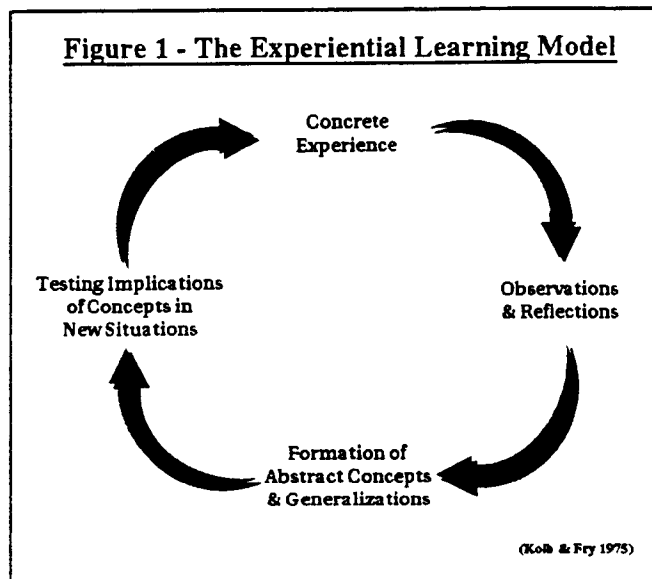
Critique of the validity of this ‘nutritionist’ or transmission model is not new, as is reflected in Sartre’s bemoaning it as a “*philosophie alimentaire!*” in the forties (1947: 31). Acknowledging that the labels ‘traditional’/ ‘conventional’ and ‘progressive’ are rather judgementally-biased and generic, I will still employ them for their utility in separating out the two broad schools of thought relevant to our discussion.

In defining the conventional approach, Dewey writes that the conventionalists’ vision of education is to have teachers transmit “bodies of knowledge that are worked out in the past... a finished product” to students who are imposed upon to ‘receive’ this data and “bank” it (1938: 17-19). This approach is a fast and efficient way to transfer information, and when teaching resources are short and the information is relatively non-controversial, (for example, adding integers or how to fasten a life jacket), this can be a valuable option. The weakness with this approach is that it assumes that the ‘right answer’ will never change, and that the student can not change it, and thus furthers a ‘passive’ learner role. Clearly, this kind of education can not usefully provide most learners with the analytical or intuitive skills and tools they need to independently solve different sorts of problems in the future.

Progressive educational theory, as defined by experiential educators, attempts to “acquaint” the student with a changing and changeable world. It advocates learning through experience, and from within, so that skills are learned as a means to a desirable end, rather than in isolation (Dewey 1938: 17-19). This idea contains three key assertions. The first assertion is that learning experiences are diachronically connected. That is to say that what a learner draws out of

an experience is in part a function of her prior experience and will also directly influence how she goes on to perceive and understand future experiences. Dewey calls this the ‘continuity of experience’ (ibid.: 35).

Building from there, the second assertion is that, since ‘authentic’ learning is an ongoing and dynamic process, students must be equipped with *skills* not answers in order to cope with new questions. Education is thus conceived as a permanently unfinished project. This idea is reflected in a popular model for describing how experiential learning works. The “Cycle of Experiential Learning” suggests that learning begins with personal experience, moves to reflection, abstraction, and re-application of this new understanding to a subsequent situation (Kolb & Fry 1975).



The third point is that progressivists assume an intrinsic *telos* to education that is directed toward practical action. They argue that education that is able to act as a referent for change, which the learner could actually use to transform their lived reality, is more meaningful and thus more likely to be learned and used (Freire 1985: xiii).

In summary, I have shown where the outdoor experiential education tradition, including Outward Bound, was originally situated amidst the main educational approaches of the mid-twentieth century. The OB mission is largely a response to Hahn’s belief that the ‘transmission’ approach could not generate the holistic and lasting learning that they saw as vital to nurturing

mature, thoughtful citizens who could adapt to the demands of their changing world. Historically, therefore, assisting students in developing the skills to adapt to change has been a key aim of experiential education. My next step was to investigate what kinds of research had been done to evaluate OB, and what criteria were chosen for evaluation.

III B) *Evaluating the Evaluation of Outward Bound*

The amount of literature pertaining to research on OB is overwhelming. There is a high level of interest in the pedagogical approach, how to improve it, and how to prove it works. I will outline the findings and recommendations of relevant studies, and identify the issues with existing research that I have tried to address in this project. Overall, the research uses various methods and course types and presents a generally positive report of the effectiveness of OB courses. There is, however, a growing impetus among recent researchers, to broaden the methods used to research OB and experiential education in general, on the grounds that the existing methods do not accurately convey how the experience is lived for students. I will outline these concerns and show how this ethnographic approach takes them into account.

Outward Bound Works

Even a cursory review of the existing evaluative research literature on Outward Bound will reveal that the results are unequivocally supportive of the effectiveness of the school and its experiential approach (OB Australia: 10). Historically, effectiveness has been defined in a range of ways, but is primarily focused on personal and interpersonal factors. These represent two of the four core elements of OB's mission. The 'social' and 'ecological' concerns have also been covered, but not nearly as thoroughly. Possible reasons for this will be discussed shortly. In terms of the research on personal and interpersonal effectiveness, rather than repeat the several thorough

reviews of the existing research that have been done, I will highlight the key themes of their findings².

One interesting pattern in the evaluative literature on OB is that authors refer to ‘change’ as both something the OB experience ‘does’ to students and that students initiate themselves. In fact, there seems to be little attempt to distinguish between the two at the evaluative level, other than to consider how much instructors should try to push this ‘transference’ of learning to students’ regular lives (T. James 1978). As outlined earlier, in this ethnography, I distinguish between the changed environment that OB exposes students to, and the personal transformation that students may undertake in response to this.

In assessing *personal* growth, some common factors include; self-confidence [as measured by empirical tests like Coopersmith Esteem Scale scores (Porter 1975, Price 1990), and Tennessee Self-concept Scores (Wright 1982)], self-concept (Godbout 1988), internal locus of control (Collingwood 1972, Wright 1982, Gaston 1978), achievement motivation (Schroeder and Leigh 1967), self reliance (Adams 1969), physical fitness (Collingwood 1972), and other related variables³. In researching expectations and experiences of OB students at COBWS, Enright alludes to the transformative power of the process itself in saying that it “is clear that the degree of personal change was greater than most participants expected or hoped for” (1988: 54).

While research on *interpersonal* factors is less common than that on personal ones, there are nevertheless a number including group dynamic (Katz & Kolb 1972), change in interpersonal factors (Enright 1988), interpersonal competence (Gibson 1981), and social acceptance (Porter 1975). While it is useful to think of personal and interpersonal as separate theoretical categories, the student narratives show that they are intertwined given the ongoing interaction among students and the influence of interpersonal relations on overall satisfaction (see also Suchman 1992: 81-2).

² For a more thorough review of these studies, see Vokey 1987, Suchman 1992, Godbout 1988.

³ See Godbout 1988: 11-23 for a good review of the literature.

A range of other factors are also discussed. Katz & Kolb undertook a critical review at the school's request, and outlined a number of fundamental concerns including degree of variation in instructional quality, degree of instructor training in counseling, and follow-up with students post-course (Katz & Kolb 1972). Their suggestions have been re-examined and utilized by the school, although many staff were opposed to the psychology-oriented 'counseling' slant to their review as they felt that this was not the purpose of OB. Most studies refer to OB's transformative potential (Enright 1988: 56), and two even use the notion of OB as a 'rite of passage' from youth to adult life, which is a key framework that I have used in this ethnography in interpreting the self-narratives (James 1988: 19; Andrews 1996). Others explore the need to balance action and reflection, as both are important parts of the learning process but the latter is often less 'exciting' for students (James 1980, Suchman 1992). Some critics have written that OB can not possibly have much lasting effect: "it may be pretentious to expect that OB can do any more than give its students ... a "short-term turn-on." (James 1980: 8). James addresses those critics by re-asserting Hahn's conviction "that it is possible, even in a relatively short time, to introduce greater balance and compassion into human lives by impelling people into experiences which show them they can rise above adversity" (James 1988: 20). I think the important link between these two ideas lies largely with the student and the extent to which they choose to adopt or integrate the new perspectives gained : "OB can provide the spark, as Kurt Hahn said, but it is up to others [learners] to keep the flame alive." (T. James 1980: 9). The literature is thorough insofar as it ranges, however, it does not range far enough outside of individualistic models to evoke, or explain the OB experience fully.

Gaps in the Research Approach

There are several interwoven reasons why the traditional evaluation methods, and the theory that underlies them, are increasingly seen as inadequate for testing and representing what the school does. My own research approach has been formed as a response to these issues.

Underlying most of the research is a concurrence with a mechanistic world-view (Vokey 1987) that justifies deconstructing the process to understand its parts as a way of understanding the whole. This is also the grounds for the primarily positivist, empiricist approach used which tends to be manifested in quantitative methodology measuring parts of the phenomenon to find out *what* the results are, but not *why*.

The existing research has done a good job of illustrating that transformation in various areas *is* occurring for students. These studies, however, miss out on three important factors: the causes or the ‘why’ behind the results, the holistic and irreducible aspects of the experience, and links between the individual experience and that of the group as a whole. These weaknesses are exaggerated by the fact that, increasingly, psychological models are being privileged as the key ways of describing OB, which serve to reproduce a distorted concept of OB as a primarily individual and cognitive experience (Vokey 1987: 35-37). This view of OB subverts the original, fuller notion of it which includes the many levels on which a student can experience the course: physical, cognitive, spiritual, communal, group relations, respect for the human and natural communities around them. Many of these factors also get left out because they are not well-suited to reduction and quantification (Enright 1988: 20, 14).

Several researchers have noted the need for innovative approaches to researching OB emphasizing qualitative research and even participant observation (Katz & Kolb 1972), in order to get at a wider array of experiential factors, and to begin to access the *why* behind the results (Goldman 1996: 32-36; Patterson 1996: 5, 8; Suchman 1992; Vokey 1987). As Godbout says in critiquing his own empirical, psychological study which found self-concept improvements; “The study does not provide an understanding of what exactly *causes* the positive changes in self-concept” (1988: 63 - emphasis mine). Klint also notes, “Future research needs to move away from identifying products associated with adventure experiences and toward understanding the process.” (Klint 1990). Others have recommended that any research intending to establish whether

change has been achieved must be structured diachronically to understand pre- and post-course states (Katz & Kolb 1972: 173; Enright 1988: 52). Finally, researchers have asserted that too little is understood about the influence of gender on course experience and effectiveness, and indeed, on the very criteria used to evaluate 'success' (Goldman 1996: 30-3; McDiarmid 1994, Patterson 1996).

Research Addressing the Existing Gaps

The most recent experiential education and OB research has begun to correct for the issues noted by employing qualitative methods, primarily phenomenologically-based, to evaluate OB. Examples include journal-based research aimed at evoking a sense of how student and instructor experiences and interpretations of wilderness intersect (Henderson 1995), phenomenological studies of the experiences of women at OB (Patterson 1996, Goldman 1996), women in outdoor recreation generally (McDiarmid 1994), and for all learners at OB (Suchman 1992). These reports are dialogical and attempt to present what emerged from discussions and interviews without imposing other analytical frameworks. Vokey sets forth a clear view of the paradigm shift from OB traditional values to the current psychology-based models both in research and practice, and argues for a re-adjustment back to the core values (1987). Suchman's research builds from there to emphasize the holistic process of learning and shows how the theories embedded in the psychology-based models are not commensurate with what students in her interviews had to say (1992). Additionally, both Suchman and Goldman point out that current explanatory models are biased towards a male-orientation to groups and leadership.

Accordingly, in designing the present research project, I aimed to address and overcome many of the issues discussed. The aims of my research are less to find out 'whether' or 'how much' the participants transformed themselves, but rather 'in what ways' they did and principally 'why' or because of what conditions. While designing the research plan, I employed various anthropological and pedagogical theories that provided new approaches to researching and

interpreting the OB experience. The sections that follow will present the origins of the design of this ethnography.

III c) *Alternative Models for Explaining Education leading to Change*

“ The purpose of education is to show students how to define themselves “authentically and spontaneously in relation” to the world.”

(Merton 1979: 4)

By casting a wider net into the fields of critical pedagogy and cultural studies, I found three additional themes that are relevant to my aim of providing a new, culturally-based perspective for understanding how and why OB is transformative. These themes are fundamentally different than the psychology-based models in that they assume that understanding “the dialectic of interaction between education, culture, and the learner’s individual life course” is crucial to knowing the process as a whole (Preston 1995). These ideas are beginning to be picked up in outdoor experiential education, such as in the work of Dr. Bob Henderson at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, who has advocated and used such critical theory to enhance his work in the field (1993: 30; 1995).

The first trope to be added is that education is not neutral in content, intent, or cultural environment (Freire 1985, Fraser 1994). This relates to transformation in that it assumes that cultural factors impact who learns what, and how they learn it, and thus why some people will be intimidated and others empowered by change. The second notion is that certain forms of education provide tools that can promote change in a learner’s personal and social self, as demonstrated in the ‘generative’ and emancipatory approach of Paulo Freire (1985). Finally, critical pedagogy provides an image of active, critical learners as having a new ‘position’ from which to view their own life and thus facilitate reflection on how they would like to be different (Janmohammed 1994,

Giroux 1994). I will briefly outline these concepts here and will expand on them in the ethnographic section.

Rejecting the “Culture-Neutral” Assumption

When Freire wrote “No education is ever neutral” (1985: 8), he captured the feeling of many people from subdominant groups like the poor, women, blacks, or native Canadians who have known this through their experience of trying to succeed in the euro-male-oriented culture of the North American education system. If education is not culture-neutral, and we know that people experience the cultural differently as it is differentially-shared, then it follows that the cultural will also play a role in any effort by the learners to transform themselves in dealing with change. Further, this logic implies that any pedagogical approach or explanation of the process that does *not* account for the influence of the cultural, is thus not neutral or objective, but in fact highly partial and systemically biased. It will reproduce by default the dominant views and explanations. Thus, to ignore the cultural is to support the belief in an “illusory common culture” (Grossberg 1994: 10). Along the same lines, Fraser argued that the traditional idea that “public spheres”, such as that of OB courses, are “zones of zero-degree culture” contradicts our lived experience in the west today (1994: 82). Instead, she reasoned that culture is intrinsic to any public arena, even to the very notion of a public sphere as separate from a private sphere (ibid.: 77).

These positions support my claim that educational environments will inevitably have a distinct culture. Each student will also import his or her own cultural beliefs to the course experience, so it would be useful for OB to clearly understand and articulate the cultural aspects of their courses in order to ensure a positive learning experience for the greatest number of students.

Learning that Provides Tools not Answers

For OB to be an education that lasts beyond the borders of its occurrence, it is reasonable to assume that it must give students tools for re-producing or reapplying the ideas they have learned in subsequent, new situations. Thus, it is not enough to learn ‘the answer’ to one situation

such as rock climbing in the rain, for it may not be raining the next time, and the learner may be climbing an emotional mountain instead of a granite one.

Paulo Freire worked in South America to develop a literacy curriculum with emancipatory aims for illiterate peasants there. Two of the principal tenets of Freire's approach, are that the content of the curriculum must be "relevant" and "generative", meaning that topics should address meanings and events that the learner can connect with and that learning about them can have direct consequences in their lives (Freire 1985: 22). Freire did not achieve this by "transmitting" answers and explanations to students, but rather, taught them to develop the skill of critical thinking, or "tools of inquiry" which have infinite re-application to new problems, in other circumstances (Freire 1985). New York city public school teacher of the year, John Taylor-Gato, has written of a similar need to awaken students' interest in learning, and make them active learners (1996).

Freire's work has been powerful at re-structuring literacy education. Rather than being about phonetics and memorization, literacy is seen as a fundamentally transformative process that gives the learner the tools to get beyond her oppression. As Janmohammed has pointed out, however, Freire's educational approach can be said to encourage "the inaugural moment", but does not solidify or guarantee the change, which is ultimately the responsibility of the student (1994: 250). Most of the participants in this ethnography indicated that they felt they *were* learning generative themes and tools, as well as the basic skills related to wilderness camping.

Learners as Border Intellectuals

Within the experiential learning cycle, there are stages of reflection on, and abstraction about one's experiences, as discussed earlier (Kolb & Fry 1975; Janmohammed 1994: 244). It follows, then, that a course which aims to facilitate transformation through this approach, must structure in time or 'space' for this. OB courses are designed to encourage this processing of experience in various ways. Journals are provided for writing down personal reflections, Solo is a 2-3 day period of solitude which is framed in part as a reflective time, and there are also regular

discussion circles or “de-briefs” where students are asked to share their thoughts with each other about a certain event or dynamic. Vokey and others have noted that in practice, these reflection periods are not always given as much priority as other ‘active’ components like climbing (1987; Katz & Kolb 1972). How to balance these two aspects of the course is a matter beyond the scope of this paper, however, most of the research participants I spoke with reported a certain amount of reflection and abstraction.

Critical theory provides a heuristic for understanding how ongoing reflection facilitates personal transformation. Giroux has suggested that liberating, transformative educational curricula like Freire’s position the student as a “border intellectual”, referring to their newly reconstituted position on the ‘borders’ of their lives (Giroux 1994). Janmohammed discussed how identifying the social, political and economic boundaries that have been imposed on a group or person by the dominant cultural group, helps a person to see how those boundaries are not ‘natural’, but rather contingent and constructed: “Freire’s pedagogic strategies introduce them to knowledge as power and to the possibility of agency.” (1994: 244, 242). The OB experience, similarly, helps to ‘reposition’ students at a new distance from their regular lives, allowing for critical reflection. Ideally, being an agent in one’s own transformation will follow in regular life, as will be discussed in the ethnographic section. Janmohammed paraphrases Freire as follows:

“The abstraction produces a distance between the mundane practices in which the peasant is immersed and the new awareness opened up by reflection ... This distance provides a space in which a new subjectivity can begin to articulate itself ... and the decision to begin the reflective process is not positively determined by the existing dominant social structure.”
(1994: 245)

Both the concepts of ‘border intellectual’ and a ‘new subjectivity’ lend insight into the way in which people can begin to transform themselves through, or as a result of their experience at OB. In the ethnographic sections, evidence of both ideas emerges in student narratives. Still, as indicated earlier, the kind of transformation that I am arguing is possible for these OB participants, is fundamentally different from these Freirian notions in that OB is less political. OB is more

concerned with transformed people than transformed institutions and power relations. That is to say again, that it is more a structurally pragmatic undertaking than a critically pragmatic one (Cherryholmes 1989: 151-2).

Through this review of educational theory and practices, I have shown how OB fits into the principal existing educational philosophies and how it is positioned within them. In the review of existing OB research, I indicated gaps in how the experience has been evaluated and represented. Finally, I presented three useful concepts from critical pedagogy and cultural studies for understanding how transformation occurs. These educational notions have been critical to my interpretation of the OB model and its cultural influence on students. The other important building block in this ethnography is the anthropological explication of ‘experience’ and its cultural dimensions.

IV. The Anthropology of Experience

The anthropological literature pertaining to the cultural dimensions of ‘experience’ are useful for enhancing what is meant by outdoor experiential education (OEE). The work that has been done to theorize how different types of experiences are lived, and how people make meaning of their experiences provides a solid foundation for researching and analyzing student perceptions of the cultural environment on their OB courses. Many anthropologists of experience argue for a direct connection between experience, learning, and transformation, which parallels my case for OEE as transformative. I outline the definition and three key tenets of this school of thought below, and will expand on them in the ethnographic section.

IV a) Defining Experience

While not necessarily linked to formal education, explanations of experience are almost always discussed in relation to learning, highlighting their didactic value. In asserting that there is “an organic connection between education and personal experience” (Dewey 1938:25), Dewey laid

the groundwork for experiential pedagogy and its supporters. As has been discussed previously, the ‘experientialists’ were creating a teaching philosophy in opposition to the traditional, formal, Western approach, which assumed that learning is a solely cognitive process.

Victor Turner, the anthropologist most closely associated with the inquiry into experience, looked to the etymology of experience for clues to how we might handle it as a concept. In brief, he found that “experience” has its linguistic origins in notions of “to attempt, venture, risk..drama...to do...peril...ex-per-iment” all of which imply that it was not originally intended to connote all the dailiness of living (1986: 35). In line with this, Turner explained Dilthey’s point about how, in our lives, we often distinguish between “experience” and “*an* experience”, in that we impute more significance and meaning to the latter, and are thus more likely to be effected or changed by it:

“Mere experience is simply the passive endurance and acceptance of events. An experience, like a rock in a Zen sand garden, stands out from the evenness of passing hours and years”
(V. Turner 1986: 35)

Abrahams pointed out that we do not always know in advance whether an event will become ‘an experience’, implying that there are two types of them: those which are planned, and those “arising directly out of the flow of life, with little or no explicit preparation” (1986: 63). I would argue that Outward Bound courses are ‘an experience’ and are, for most students, a combination of the two types in that they plan to have a special experience, and yet they usually end up having many more of these ‘experiences’ than anticipated. Importantly, the process of giving meaning to an experience often involves communication of one’s thoughts and feelings about it to others. As Turner put it, “experience urges toward expression, or communication with others” (1986: 37). One reason that the narratives in this research are rich sources of insight into this cultural experience is because our discussions were a way for them to satisfy this urge.

Some planned experiences have a particular structure, and Turner suggested a link of experience and rituals via it’s Latin etymological root in *perao* meaning: “I pass through”. The

idea of passing through parallels van Gennep's liminal period of a rite of passage where the initiand passes through a threshold in his transformation (V. Turner 1986:35; van Gennep 1960 [1908]). The framework provided by rites of passage is a central heuristic used in analyzing the OB experience and will be further explicated in Chapter 3.1.

IV b) The Continuity of Experience

“Present experience always takes account of
the past and anticipates the future.”
(Dilthey 1976)

Turner theorized that regular happenings become “an experience” when we can create meaning for them by connecting them with what we already know (V. Turner 1986: 36). Dilthey's quote above is another articulation of this idea and adds to it a notion of the influence of past experiences on one's future. Dewey has called this the “principle of the continuity of experience”, meaning that “every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences.” (1938: 35). This is important to the educational process because it argues that in order for experiences to be educative and meaningful, they must be connected to other experiences that the individual has had, or will have. This basic idea is echoed in Dilthey (above), Edward Bruner (1986b: 14-15), and Turner (1986: 36).

At Outward Bound, this notion has also been recently discussed in terms of its correlate in psychotherapy, the “Transderivational Search” which is “the recalling of concrete experiences from the listener's memory so that the speaker's abstract terms have literal references.” (Bacon 1983: 4-7). This model has been used to elucidate in abstract terms how the experience of OB should be “metaphorically” associated with events in the participants' regular lives (ibid.: 5). Instructors disagree on the extent to which they ought to pursue ‘transference’ activities like this (James 1978), but agree that there is always some linking of the two, whether it is aided through debrief

discussions or not. The idea of continuity of experience influenced the design and interpretation of my ethnography in its demand that past experience be taken into account.

IV c) The Active or Interactional Side of Experience

In addition to the continuity of experience over time (longitude), Dewey suggested that experience was also in dialectic “laterally” between the “objective and internal conditions under which experiences are had” (1938: 44, 39). He called this the “principle of the interaction of experience”, saying that “Every genuine experience has an active side” (ibid.: 42, 39). In contrast to traditional education which concerned itself only with the objective side, the material to be taught, Dewey insisted that a *student’s* experience matters to how they learn, and that educators must therefore assign equal importance to these internal conditions (loc. cit.). At Outward Bound, this idea is especially salient as students are drawn from a range of areas and social histories: they have a broad range of skills in terms of both technical skills like canoeing, interpersonal skills like leadership, and personal skills like self-awareness. As such, each person will be continually referring back to a different knowledge and experience base in order to interpret the given task or situation on course. My use of self-narratives as the primary means for recording participants’ thoughts and feelings about the course is, in part, a way of incorporating this principle into the research design, as it gives each student the space to explain their particular interplay of internal and objective conditions. In addition, where possible I interviewed more than one person from a course group in order to further highlight how each person’s ‘position’ influenced how they experienced the course.

The concept of involved or active learners is an intrinsic part of the Outward Bound culture. From the beginning, the wilderness setting, the minimal guidance from instructors, and the need to ‘keep warm’ all catalyze the patrol’s desire to actively learn what they need to do in order to stay safe. The active aspect of experiential learning was further clarified by Bruner who distinguishes between ‘*behaviour*’, which is passive or rote, and *experience*, which “refers to an

active self: to a human being who not only engages in but shapes an action.” (Edward Bruner 1986c: 5). Freire’s theory similarly argued that; “To study is to think about experience ... not to consume ideas but to create and re-create them.” (1985: 3-4).

IV d) The Effect of Framing on an Experience

The final thread that I will weave into outlining the anthropological concept of experience regards how experiences are framed, either directly, or indirectly through culturally- understood symbols, and how this exerts an influence on our interpretation of the experience. As discussed earlier, we make distinctions between more or less significant experiences, sometimes before and sometimes afterwards. Framing can thus also occur before or after. If, as in Turner’s rites of passage model, the initiand or learner understands that this is meant to be a time of change for them, then they are more likely to interpret the experience as transformational and even to enact this expectation (V. Turner 1986: 62).

Edward Bruner argued that we also frame things *after* experiencing them, through reflection and expression to others. He developed a triad of “reality (what is really out there)..., experience (how that reality presents itself to consciousness), and expressions (how individual experience is framed and articulated)” (E. Bruner 1986c: 6). In the present context, then, it is important to bear in mind that the jointly constructed version represented in this ethnography is but one of the three possibilities of “life as lived, life as experienced, and life as told” (loc. cit.).

One caution with this model, however, is that we must resist the temptation to see the first option, “reality”, as somehow more accurate in the positivist sense, or more authentic (and therefore more appropriate for ethnographic purposes) than the other two. Indeed, it is just the opposite. If my goal is to report on how the course is experienced by the students, then it is of less consequence what some ‘objective observer’ would relay about the details of ‘what actually happened’. In other words, whether a certain decision-making approach was ‘actually’ effective, is of only marginal interest to understanding how it influenced her own approach.

The final point I want to make about the framing of experiences is that framing itself is a lateral and iterative process. That is to say that a frame that works for an experience at the time is often re-positioned with a different frame later on, after either further reflection, discussion with others, or additional experiences. This became clear to me in listening to the OB students explain how, for example, at first they thought that it was a big deal to simply carry the canoe, but later this seemed insignificant compared with portaging 2.5 km through a washed out trail on the edge of a drop-off to a rapid. The former loses value, especially in terms of its story-value, only in contrast with the latter. Knowing that there would be iterations like this aided my analysis in that I was prepared for explanations to change between interviews, and knew that that would not mean they were any less 'true' in the sense of authentic representations of what they felt.

V. Drawing Together the Theories

Sartre is one of many to suggest that we live our lives with one eye on how we will tell of them afterwards (1964). Indeed, it is often through self-reflection and story-telling that we come to understand our experiences. As has been discussed in the preceding review, it is this personal interpretation of experience that I aimed to elicit in this research, as a way to explore the cultural aspects of the transformational process. In order to encompass these premises, and the existing understanding of experience explicated above, my research design needed to draw together the ideas in a cohesive approach to the problem. I will demonstrate below how the use of narratives, grounded in a constructivist approach, works to synthesize the ideas into an effective research design.

My research objectives were to understand if, and if so how, a culture of transformation is generated on Outward Bound courses and whether the transformations persisted after the course. I felt that anthropologists offered a new and interesting perspective on these common questions given their extensive work into the nature of experience in general, and ritual experiences in particular,

and their notion of culture as a dialectical, group process, actively constructed by people. In order to operationalize these theories, I needed a conceptual framework that would bring them together.

Constructivism seems most appropriate to the task given that it inherently recognizes many of these ideas as fundamental to understanding how we come to know the world, and in particular how we might research how other people know their world. A constructivist approach recognizes that the meaning of an event does not exist independently of our experience of it. As such, it puts the focus on individual experience as the basis for “world-making” (J. Bruner 1987: 11).

Importantly, this does not mean that knowledge of an experience can then only be idiosyncratic.

On the contrary, it is through individual experiences that we can begin to understand patterns of experience on a more general level. As Abrahams explains:

“Experiences happen to individuals and are therefore sometimes to be regarded as idiosyncratic; but these very same occurrences might, under other circumstances, be usefully regarded as typical ... Experience is, at one and the same time, illustrative of what individuals do and of the conventional patterns of culturally learned and interpreted behavior that makes them understandable to others.” (Abrahams 1986: 49)

In seeing the meaning of experiences as a dialectical construction between the individuals having them, and the broader cultural context in which they are members, constructivism also assumes that knowledge is itself continually in flux, as the ‘knowers’ constantly re-interpret and re-construct their understanding of their world. This is useful in a diachronic study such as this, as it allows for, (and indeed anticipates), that the students’ account of the ‘reality’ of the experience, and of themselves, will evolve between interviews, because they are differently positioned at each telling.

It was also necessary to choose a method of eliciting the research participants’ accounts of their experiences. This method had to be consistent with the understanding of the primacy of experience as a way of knowing, and had to allow me to move as close as I could to their version of the experience, as structured in their terms. Using self-narratives as the central form of information seemed appropriate for several reasons. The telling of one’s story inherently tells us

something of the teller's cultural context, since it embodies what he believes makes "a story, (and lived experience) compelling" (Rosaldo 1986: 98). Further, if the context of the telling is left relatively open to the teller's will, the self-narrative will likely reflect his personal (albeit culturally-conditioned) priorities and perspectives as well. It is important to note, as many anthropologists and feminists have, that the telling is a dialogic production as much as a monologue and, as such, must reflect aspects of both the teller and the listener: "Narrative form both reflects and occasions the interaction between the story teller and the interlocutor." (ibid.: 103, 129). These 'self-narratives' are thus more accurately seen as a joint-production between the participants and the ethnographer, (myself), wherein the information was brought forth and in a sense created as result of our conversation (Pool 1991: 70).

The question of 'accuracy' is often raised in connection with the use of self-narratives as a basis for a social scientific study, in that they are not easily subject to 'verification' of their objective facts. Jerome Bruner turns this argument around by suggesting that the very fact that self-narratives are shaped primarily by their teller makes them particularly useful at reflecting the "cultural, interpersonal and linguistic influences" which are part of what the anthropologist is seeking to understand (1987: 14). As Vokey put it, "personal narratives are part of larger cultural narratives" (Vokey 1997: 3). Self-narratives also contain various stories which animate, and are animated by, the larger life story of the teller, which helps to assess the continuity of experience.

Some have argued that what a person relays in their narrative, about a changed attitude for example, may bear no relation to their actual behaviour. Bruner has shown, however, that the way that we tell ourselves about ourselves is actually an excellent indicator of how we "organize memory" and thus how we will frame, and live our future lives: "In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives." (J. Bruner 1987: 15). In other words, what someone says they are, or will do, has *performative consequences*. At another level, McIntyre argued that we live our lives with a continual consciousness of how our actions fit into

our larger life story: “human living has a teleological or ‘forward-looking’ character ... people make choices based upon their desires to bring some possible futures to pass, and to forestall others.” (1984: 215-16).

In summary, then, I determined that the use of the narrative form, within a constructivist framework, was an appropriate approach to the research problem at hand. When combined, they draw together the variety of learnings from anthropological and pedagogical studies in a way that offered a potentially rich source of stories about the cultural dimensions of the Outward Bound experience and what could be known about how it facilitates transformation. This approach effectively explores the ‘bounded’ cultural experience of OB, as well as how that experience fits into the broader context of people’s lives.

Chapter. 2.2 Research Design & Implementation

“A [person] is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him in terms of these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it.”

Jean-Paul Sartre (1964)

Designing and implementing a research plan that would adequately examine the questions of culture and transformation in experiential education was as challenging as it was rewarding.

My understanding of the process, and even of myself, continually evolved throughout my discussions with participants and staff while living at COBWS base camps; Home place, north of Thunder Bay, and Chetwynd, near Burke’s Falls. Entwined into the structured research are hours of conversations with patient COBWS staff who generously shared insights and anecdotes about the Outward Bound experience. Listening to their stories about past courses has substantially enriched my sense of the variety of facilitational styles and group dynamics that are possible and how these influence the distinct culture of each course. This learning is infused into both my interpretations and the research design for the formal interviews with students. Below I provide a basis for, and then outline, the research design that grew out of my experiences and the theoretical notions described in the previous chapter.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL BASIS for RESEARCH DESIGN

In the preceding chapter, I discussed why constructivism and narrative represent useful theoretical frameworks to use in this ethnography. They are both linked to phenomenology, which acknowledges the value of using individual experience as a basis for understanding the experience in general. While this is not a phenomenological study, I accept the general premise that individual

experience has value as a route to ‘truth’ or knowledge about a phenomenon. Building from there, it follows that narrative, and self-narratives in particular, are an appropriate form through which to represent that truth. Self-narratives are our principal way of “describing ‘lived time’” and, as Bruner has pointed out, the way we tell our life stories has performative consequences in how we live them (J. Bruner 1987: 12-15). For the purpose of this investigation, this implies that self-narratives will be a useful indicator of how students experienced the cultural aspects of their course, how this affects, and sometimes transforms, their self-storying, and thus what concrete results will likely come of their experience. This culturally-oriented approach to understanding outdoor experiential education is relatively new, which made the flexibility and evolving nature of these theoretical frameworks ideal, in that they allowed enough space for the themes that were important to the participants to emerge.

On Constructivism and Interpretivism

Constructivism is useful, firstly, in that it provides a basis for acknowledging “the value-based nature of human inquiries” as opposed to the positivist presumption of the possibility of objective inquiry (Lincoln 1991: 15). Secondly, the primary sources of information in this research are the student’s self-narratives which are intrinsically constructivist, in that they are part of a process of individual ‘world-making’ (J. Bruner 1987: 11). That is to say that they represent lived and, through the telling, *performed* presentations of the student’s reality, rather than *pre-formed* ‘truths’ about the ‘nature’ of the OB experience that were ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered.

The research is also designed to facilitate interpretivist analysis on the grounds that the student self-narratives are attempts at meaning-making and thus can be examined for patterns in the individuals’ experiences that speak to shared meanings about the experience and about broader issues of culture, transformation, and education. In the sense that I am the catalyst for, and the recorder and analyzer of the students’ tellings, the research design intrinsically involves an interpretivist approach. This does not mean that the ethnography is inaccurate or unable to

represent the experience as told by the consultants. As Fabian argues in rejection of the claims of realist representation in ethnography, “praxis is doing [and] does not mirror anything ... Doing is acting on, making, transforming (giving form to), not regrettably so , or incidentally ... but inevitably.” (1990: 762-3)

On Feminist and Post-modernist Influences

The approach, and structure of the research have also been informed by the convergent prescriptions of both feminists and post-modernists that researchers must now seek to break down socially-constructed barriers between ‘us’ and ‘them’, interviewer and interviewee.⁴ Following their example, I have attempted to minimize, or at least become conscious of, the effects of the dichotomy between researcher and interviewee on the kind of discourse that is possible because of the tacit power dynamics that the boundary enacts. As Oakley has pointed out, traditional descriptions of how to interview use exploitation (of the interviewee) as a primary metaphor and ignore many of the interpersonal factors that we all know from experience can affect one’s ability to co-construct rich, veridical information in an interview (1981).

Oakley’s prescription is for feminist researchers to recognize “that personal involvement is more than a dangerous bias - it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives.” (ibid.: 58). While this idea is no longer radical in theory today, it was nevertheless tricky to practice, because in fact I *was* intending to use the research participants’ stories as the basis of a social scientific analysis. Perhaps the only distinguishing factor between exploitation and co-operation, (or a more balanced intersubjectivity), is that I intended to use the research for constructive ends, of which the students were made aware. By ‘constructive’, I mean that I am concerned with how the analysis might ameliorate that which it studies. This follows

⁴ Feminists, because of a history of being constructed as the ‘other’, want to reveal the intrinsic power imbalance to the dichotomy, and also seek to minimize exploitation (A. Oakley 1981). The postmodernists because they want to problematize all meta-narratives and blur constructed boundaries to allow for new interpretive possibilities (Lyotard 1979)

Lincoln's explanation of constructivist research as "openly action-centered and rooted in intersubjective and participant-modeled accounts of the world" (1991: 11). While it is clearly difficult to eliminate these unequal power dynamics, I have been mindful of these issues in all interactions with students and staff, and the research has been designed to account for it as well.

On Moral Ethnography

Although my experience with COBWS meant that I began the research project with a positive sense about OB, I aimed to be fair and open-minded in my research and analysis. In all aspects of the ethnographic process, I attempted to proceed along the lines of what Rodman calls a "moral ethnography" (Rodman 1987), following novelist John Gardner's "moral fiction" (1977). This means that the anthropologist must strive to be moral in her "way of looking" and to stay "radically open to persuasion" by the evidence despite any in-going expectations or hopes for what the research will show (Ferguson et al 1984: 404, 386). Gardner's prescription is a response to those who claim that the relativism of post-modernist theory sets social science research on a slippery slope leading ultimately to unsubstantiable, yet irrefutable (on the grounds of relativism) ethnographies.

The conclusions drawn from this research should be substantiable by other researchers, and should resonate with former students, rather than being an isolated set of narratives with no broader explanatory relevance. Rodman's prescription provides a possible solution. His suggestion offers a route to "interpretive completeness" that could replace our current options of either 1) a unitary 'truth-out there', or 2) the dark interpretation of post-modernism where all is pastiche, and nihilistic readings rule (1987: 4). He recommends that in post-modern ethnographies, anthropologists should aim to get "ever closer" to explaining the phenomenon through multiple, successive interpretations each of which tell part of the story better than the last (Rodman 1996). We can approach this ideal through rigorously moral (i.e. fair) investigations, and by "walking

around the problem” to gather many perspectives (loc. cit.). In this way, ethnography could “sneak up on the truth”, without having to succumb to delusions of extreme realism (Ferguson 1984: 403).

Clifford’s interpretivist theory of ethnography as the writing of “partial truths” has analogous elements and takes us the next step of acknowledging that every attempt at explanation is inescapably ‘positioned’ via its interpreter or author (1986: 7). Significantly, if we accept the inescapability of positioned analyses, we automatically reject the prescription of phenomenology that requires a researcher to “bracket one’s subjectivity” or biases (McDiarmid 1994: 31, 46, 60). Again, this does not reduce the veracity of the ethnography, just recognizes its explanatory limitations.

THE RESEARCH PLAN

1. Negotiating Access

Access to students and staff for interviews had to be negotiated with the Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School (COBWS). Having an existing working relationship with the staff meant that this process could be straightforward, and less risky for the organization since a basis for trusting me already existed. The research proposal was in line with the kinds of research that we⁵ had already established would be useful for the school, and so most staff were comfortable with its premises. Based on their extensive experience with outdoor experiential education, Hepsi Barnett, Stephen Couchman, Dr. Daniel Vokey, and Dr. Bob Henderson made various suggestions regarding method which were critical in tightening the research focus. It was agreed that, in return for having access to the students, I would share the results of the research with the organization for the purposes of staff training, external funds proposals and marketing, depending on the outcomes.

2. Ethical Conduct Requirements

⁵ I use ‘We’ to denote the people who were assisting in marketing and research plans at COBWS at the time when I was doing contract work for them in this capacity (1995-1996).

In order to conduct this research under the professional ethics code of anthropology and of McMaster University, I submitted to the University a “Request for Permission to Conduct Research with Human Subjects”, which included both the original letter sent to all students that I could potentially interview, and the Official Consent Forms that all actual consultants would read and sign. (See Appendix B) The request was approved, and all of the participants in this research have been fully informed of its purpose and likely applications, and have signed their consent to my using their self-narratives in the research.

3. Personal Experience

As discussed earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 2.1, a myriad of personal experiences have played a role in this research. In one sense, they are secondary to the principal research which revolves around the students’ stories, however they are primary in terms of their importance in allowing me to do an effective interpretive analysis of the student stories. My second OB course was white-water canoeing and was now officially ‘research’. My aim in doing this participant observation was to further develop my *experiential* understanding of traditional ‘outdoor experiential education’ at Outward Bound, since my previous courses had only been short ones during which the course dynamic is normally less intense or developed. During this participant observation I kept notes on my own growing understanding of ‘how OB works’. I did not, however, conduct any formal interviews with these students. The group was told that I was there as both a “researcher” and a participant, and to be treated as a regular member of the group. This stirred both interest in the research purpose, and resentment from a few students at my ‘intrusion’ on ‘their experience’ that ‘they paid for’. Thankfully, those tensions were isolated and, to the best of my knowledge, resolved

I also conducted Participant Observation during 4 days of Senior Staff Training, two 2-day staff skills workshops (white-water kayaking and rock climbing) and through the two months living and working at Home place, the northern base camp, as I was able to “share the rhythm of

co-residence” with other OB staff and students when they were not ‘on the trail’ (J. Okely 1992: 17). Again, this experience directly informs my perspective on the school’s culture and pedagogy. It is important to note however, that the people I lived with were not the ones that I was interviewing, except for a day or two when the students were in at base camp.

4. Selection of Course Type

Choosing participants began with selecting the course types among the many which COBWS offers. There are three types of courses: public, open-enrollment courses; community health services courses (CHC), which are subsidized; and professional development programs (PDP). My selection criteria were: to choose the course type(s) that are closest to the standard OB model as outlined above; to minimize inter-course and student variation; and to be conservative about the ‘personal change’ possible.

The normally short length of the PDP courses means that they do not have the time to follow the traditional OB model and thus were not appropriate for this research. The CHC courses are generally believed to incite more powerful effects on participants largely because the contrast with their regular lives is more dramatic. To be conservative, I chose courses geared towards ‘normal’ personal situations, since those participants would have less critical reasons to ‘transform’. The two public course types, Adventure and Voyageur, are essentially similar in that they are three weeks long, involve roughly the same mix and level of paddling, rocks, ropes, hiking, initiatives, and debrief structure, and are both targeted primarily at the 15-21 age range. All research participants were on June, July and August courses when weather would be fairly consistent.

5. Participant Selection

From these two course types, the participants for this study were chosen on a random basis. I selected two students randomly from the June courses as a way to test out my interview designs and the rest from July and August courses. Three people discontinued for personal

reasons. Two additional people were interviewed beginning at the stage of the second interview on the last day of their course. The final sample size was twenty. Approximately three-quarters of the research participants were in groups with other research participants which helped to provide multiple perspectives on the courses.

6. Interview Stages

A serious assessment of how the course was experienced by students required that I establish an account of the full trajectory of their experience, from prior to starting their course to later after re-settling into regular life. To accomplish this, I designed the research to be diachronic, including three waves of interviews with each student. All interviews were taped (with permission) and later transcribed into an information base manager for analysis [Folio Views 3.1].

WAVE 1

I conducted the first interview one month prior to the course instead of on the first day of the course given that I wanted a genuine sense of their 'pre-course mindset'. Once a student has left home, his or her state of mind is, in most cases, markedly altered and the course experience has really already begun (Hepsi Barnett 1996). The first interview was conducted over the telephone and lasted from one to two hours depending on the student's interest in continuing to dialogue. I explained the purpose of the research, my involvement with OB and my role in general terms, the expectations of them, and their 'rights' to anonymity, to withdraw at any time and to refuse to answer any of the questions as per the code of ethics. It was also explained that they were under no obligation to participate and non-participation would not effect their standing in the course in any way. All students agreed to participate and all but those mentioned above continued. The level of enthusiasm and interest in the research was high. I chose to answer all questions that the students asked me regarding the research and my personal situation, following Oakley's prescription that reciprocity in interviewing is more appropriate to feminist researching than

attempting to maintain the role of ‘neutral’ or ‘invisible’ researcher as per traditional interviewing practices (Oakley 1981).

WAVE 2

The second interview was conducted face-to-face with all students except the two ‘test cases’ from the June courses, which were done by telephone again (because of geographical distance). At this stage, all students read and signed the consent forms. The discussions were conducted at Home place (COBWS base camp) and fell generally on the last or second-last day of course some time after the students had completed the ‘marathon’ which represents the last major outdoor event for the groups. Their final banquet and pin-ceremony were the last events they would do together prior to departure for home. These interviews were roughly an hour and a half, and were conducted away from the group to minimize disruption.

WAVE 3

The third and final wave of interviews was again conducted by telephone and for most students lasted approximately an hour. After the interviews, I discussed with each student whether or not they would be interested in reviewing the ethnography, to which all responded affirmatively. I believe this speaks to their tacit approval of the value of the research.

7. Interview Topics, Objectives and Strategies

For each wave of interviews, I had pre-determined objectives (general research goals for that wave), strategies (general descriptions of how to achieve the objectives), and specific questions that flowed from the strategies. The interviews were thus *structured*, in the sense that I had specific objectives for the kinds of information that I was interested in eliciting, and had created guideline questions or scenarios for how to achieve this end. Given that my aim was to elicit the student perspective on what they experienced as important however, the interviews were also *unstructured* to the extent that I provided general guidelines for areas of discussion, but each

student largely directed the substantive emphases and structure of the telling of their self-narrative.

Below I outline the general topics covered, and the wave-specific objectives and strategies.

Core Topics List

- 1) **Self-description** - key personal attributes and discontents, values, main interests (school, sport, social etc.), current state-of-mind with regards to their life, visions for their future.
- 2) **Self-in relation to others** - typical relational roles, group role, family, friends, attitude to teamwork, leadership experience, concept of leadership.
- 3) **Cultural environment** - how did they describe it differently than home life.
- 4) **Transformation** -existence or amount/type of transformation in their lives; attitude towards transformation, perceived ability to deal with it; attitude towards risk-taking.
- 5) **Decision-making skills** - level of problem-solving ability; (experience or scenarios).
- 6) Experience with and attitude towards **nature**; motivations for taking the course, expectations; level of experience with **camping** and/or outdoor sports.

WAVE 1

My first objective was to elicit a self-narrative from the consultants in their own words and structure. It should be general enough to allow for patterns and motifs to emerge, yet focused enough to be comparable with future interviews. As a second objective, I aimed to ensure that the consultants feel comfortable with their understanding of the research purpose, and their option to participate or not.

The strategies I used included the following: framing the interview by explaining the purpose and establishing consent; starting with simple questions and moving to more personal or complex ones; trying to understand the motivations behind the choices they've made in their lives to date; use direct and indirect questions to approach the core topics listed above, and finally, to

work with the markers, or structure that the interviewee creates when possible. These strategies were followed in all of the interview waves.

WAVE 2

My objectives were to review how the participants describe themselves and their lives, with emphasis this time on the course experience, and what elements of it may have contributed to any transformation in perspective for the person.

My strategies, in addition to the ones stated above, were to use the narrative telling of Wave one to form questions about what role the person played or what things they experienced that were other than anticipated. I also used a list of emotions and reactions to elicit specific stories about times on the course when they may have felt each of these things.

WAVE 3

My objectives here were to establish how the course fit into the context of their lives and whether any of the transformative learning expressed in Wave 2 lasted, and if so, why.

I followed the same strategies as in Waves 1 and 2, and also specifically asked, at the *end* of each interview whether they feel that the course has transformed any of their beliefs or behaviours.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this qualitative analysis, I sought to obtain “insights into essential structures and essential relationships among these phenomena” by analyzing the narratives together (McDiarmid 1994: 34). Following the interpretive paradigm, qualitative analysis methods acknowledge that “reality is socially constructed, complex and ever-changing” (ibid.: 45).

Core focus

It is the *experience of culture which facilitates transformation* with which I am primarily concerned. Thus, the twenty self-narratives are useful because they are examples of this experience. As such, it is the *collective or shared* meanings that could emerge from the stories when considered together which formed the focus of this inquiry. This does not mean that the individual stories are unimportant or will be glossed over. The ‘truth’ or reality of the course as understood by each individual is important precisely because it can speak to the broader concern of a transformational cultural space *generally*.

Key Themes

In describing the process of my analysis, it is important to emphasize that qualitative methods require a continual dialectic between interpretive frameworks, in-coming information from participants, and reflection on how the two interrelate. McDiarmid calls this “*an evolving design*, in that the data guide the data collection and interpretive methods during the course of the research itself” (1994: 46; *emphases mine*). For this ethnography, I began with the set of hypotheses outlined earlier, that were informed by my experience and by the theoretical frameworks in Chapter 2.1. In combining these, I had four key areas of interest underlying my approach to the interviews:

1. Did any personal transformation occur? Was it detectable through the narrative form?
2. How was OB course culture distinct from regular life? Did they speak of it in terms that mirrored a rite of passage?
3. What aspects of the culture, if any, influenced their openness to transformation?
4. Do the transformations, if any, last? If so, why?

During the interviews, I listened actively for the play of these themes, while remaining “radically open to persuasion” by the evidence that these themes might not be fruitful, and that others might emerge (Ferguson et al 1984: 404). I listened for recurring themes, ideas and motifs within one consultant’s set of narratives. Later, in comparing the consultants’ narratives, I sought

to distill prevalent themes that would speak to their common experiences. “Synthesis” is one term used by phenomenologists to describe this process of pulling together the meanings extracted from individual narratives to look for shared patterns or structure (Colaizzi 1978: 56).

Self-narrative typology

In the analysis of individual self-narratives, Bruner’s constructivist discussion of self-narrative theory was particularly helpful. He recommends approaching self-narratives by understanding that they are essentially part of the process of “world-making” in which we all engage in order to make sense of our lives, and those around us (J. Bruner 1987: 11). As will be discussed in more detail later, he demonstrates how our self-narratives have ‘behavioural consequences’ in the sense that we become what we tell about ourselves (ibid.: 15).

METHOD ISSUES:

There are two issues that arise from this methodology which I will discuss briefly. The first is my discovery of considerable variability in people’s ability to tell their own story. Unlike various ethnographies which also rely on narratives (Abu-Lughod 1993, Cruikshank 1990, Narayan 1989), ‘storying’ is *not* in fact a ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ way of communicating for these informants. They can tell of their lives as we all do in some form, but both their youth, and their background in a mainstream culture (Canadian) which has not (in their lifetime at least) placed high value on oral story-telling, affect their ability to effectively express their sentiments in this form.

Secondly, there was undoubtedly some interview bias arising from my gender, age, and organizational status and that of the consultants. This issue is noted in Oakley’s insight that “how the interviewees classify the interviewer will affect the kinds of information given.” (1981: 53). It is difficult, however, to gauge the precise impact of this. Oakley’s answer to this is only that it is inevitable, and as such we need to make elements like gender that affect or ‘position’ our research, clear to the reader. I am a 28-year-old woman, and although I have altered the names of the

consultants for privacy, I have retained their actual gender and age. It should be clear in the ethnographic dialogue that follows that the research participants, male and female, both seem quite comfortable in our discussions as was indicated by both their serious answers and their regular use of humour. Although much more could be considered on the possible effects of this dynamic, given that it is not my primary research aim, for now it must suffice to simply note its existence.

The preceding outline should provide a clear idea of my objectives and intended strategies for the research. The best way to determine whether this research design was effective is to read the kinds of anecdotes that I elicited. In the following three chapters, I present the students' expressions about their course experiences and my interpretation of how those experiences help to explain the cultural and transformational aspects of the OB courses. As will be illustrated, the students have articulated many insights about the experience in their self-narratives.

3.0 ETHNOGRAPHY

Introduction

In this section, I present the ethnographic evidence from the students' self-narratives. The three core ideas that I explore in this thesis are: how students experience the cultural aspects of their OB course; how those cultural factors help students to be more open to transformation, and finally, whether that transformational effect is lasting upon their return to their regular lives. The anthropological notions of 'culture' and 'experience', and the model of rites of passage, (to be discussed in Chapter 3.1), have proven useful for illuminating how and why transformation can and does occur more frequently, and intensely on OB than in regular life. For the purposes of clarity, the discussion of the ethnographic evidence is divided into three sections which address each area of exploration. There is, however, inevitable overlap in that themes such as transformation, shared experience, how the cultural works, and how we learn, are all threads that connect the whole inquiry together, and thus recur through each section.

The Importance of the Cultural

The recurrence of these culturally-based themes as integral to the research participants' descriptions of their experience signals how necessary the notion of culture is to rounding out the existing understanding we have of how OB works. These anthropological heuristics thus provide a needed enrichment to the way we think about what cultural factors influence participants' experiences, and how instructors have a role in creating this culture.

In theoretical terms, this ethnographic case study should enrich the anthropological understanding of rites of passage; in this case in a contemporary, industrialized society. While the

course does not fit with all aspects of the rites of passage model, there are many parallels, especially with regard to the middle, 'liminal' period. I have expanded on how a culture of transformation is intrinsic to the liminal period, based on the first-person accounts from participants on the OB courses. Transformational learning is manifest in their narratives, and many of them are able to articulate some of the cultural factors that contribute to those feelings.

Chapter Objectives

The following three chapters will be structured to achieve two core objectives. The first is to present the results of my analysis of the student narratives, which show that the course is transformational, and that the transformations are lasting.

The second core objective is to sufficiently evoke the experience so as to allow the reader to take up a position from which to evaluate the accuracy of the analysis. In order to open this position for the reader, my strategy has been to include various direct, dialogic passages which should provide a sense of how closely the students' words come to fitting the theoretical categories into which I have sifted them. I have attempted to minimize the decontextualizing effect of having only parts of the participants' comments included in the analysis by beginning each chapter with an essentially full account of the narrative of one student at all three stages. For perspective, I have also included both supportive and contradictory evidence from various students for many of the points.

Structure of the Chapters

Each of the following three chapters will begin with an extended passage on one participant's self-narrative which illustrates the theme of that chapter. The passages are direct quotations of our conversations, edited for clarity as indicated. These passages will give a diachronic perspective on that participant over the three discussions that we had together. It is hoped that these more complete self-narratives will provide the reader with insight into how a few students experience the course as a whole.

Throughout the rest of the chapters, I provide extensive anecdotes and direct quotes from all of the 22 research participants' narratives. Again, I feel that including direct quotes is useful in that the reader can engage with the material and evaluate my interpretation of what the student meant based on the reader's own experience. The same course, even with the same instructors, can be experienced very differently by each student, and as such, parts of the interpretive models used do not apply for them.

Central Chapter Themes

The focus of Chapter 3.1 is on how the participants' expressions of the course experience before, at the conclusion of, and after the course reflect the same kinds of notions traditionally associated with the three stages of a rite of passage. Also, I discuss why the course does not precisely mirror a rite of passage, and suggest what other genre of experience it might be compared with. By revealing students' frames of mind at three different stages, the dialogue helps to create a sense of the *context* in which students experience the middle or 'liminal' stage of the course itself. This context should be useful for helping instructors to imagine how the course *actually* fits into the ongoing flow of the participants' life experiences. I argue that this context is instructive in terms of how to increase the chance that the course is a valuable transformational opportunity for all students and not just those that grasp these ideas intuitively (as not all do).

Chapter 3.2 focuses on how the course itself is like the liminal phase of a rite of passage and uses ethnographic evidence to show that the participants feel open to a high degree of transformation as initiated through new experiences, and to illustrate what cultural factors are key in influencing this process. Turner identifies *communitas* as a key factor in facilitating transformation but does not expand on it enough to usefully indicate how one might reproduce such an element in our culture today. I elaborate on the idea of *communitas* and the special culture of the liminal period by drawing out threads from what these Canadian students said made them more comfortable, and more open to transformation on their courses. Using these threads, I have

developed a cyclical model to represent diagrammatically, how the culture of *communitas* infuses the learning process on OB courses.

Chapter 3.3 demonstrates the influence of course learning beyond the context of the course, and discusses possible culturally-based explanations for why the transformations last. In this chapter, I discuss the evidence from student narratives about the effectiveness of experiential learning. The narratives indicate that learning on an OB course is a holistic process, operating on many levels, which contributes to students' ability to sustain their transformed perspectives and behaviours in regular life. I also discuss the variation between students in terms of their ability to make these links between course and regular life, as well as some of the reasons that it is more difficult for OB students to sustain the transformations than for typical 'initiands'.

It is hoped that the following chapters will provide a rich description of this contemporary experience. This ethnography contributes to the anthropological understanding of the cultural dimensions of this kind of ritualized transformational process, and to the pedagogical effort to understand how best to evaluate and understand outdoor experiential education.

Chapter 3.1

Kirin's Story

Wave 1: Pre-Interview

Kirin is 17 years old and has grown up in a medium-sized Canadian city. She attends a school for the arts part-time, while carrying a full course-load at her high school as well. The year leading up to the course had involved various changes in her life including switching high schools, having to take a break from the arts because of an injury, and finally, a 3 month exchange overseas. She told me that she was excited to participate in this OB research project since she felt she was different after her exchange but wished she had a better idea of how.

Legend: Regular = direct quotes of students; [words] = my questions; *italics* = my thoughts
[# 1234] = indicates record number in data base

We've moved around a few times because my dad is a pilot for the air force. PEI was awesome. Anyway, now I'm at a new high school and don't really like it mostly because I don't know anyone there yet. In the summers we go to our cottage, and I have camped in Algonquin too. I'm really into the arts and stuff; singing, ballet, jazz. My arts school has pretty intensive training. **[Do you really want to do it?]** Well, last year it was everything to me - I was this ambitious little freak and really wanted to do it - then I dislocated my knee and had this big let down- 'Why me?' So now I'm more into looking at my life in total; different interests and options, but still want to do it. **[What about school interests?]** I like history, law, ancient history, and English. For me, teachers are really important. [#910-912]

[What role do you normally play in groups?] Personally, I don't go much for group work at all. Maybe you need one person who's really going to make it work and have fun - mostly you end up with a a lot of deadbeats. If I look up to the other person, I'll sit and listen ... give them respect, but if it's a deadbeat group, then I'm the one who leads people. **[How do you handle problems in the group?]** Depends on what - if someone is lazy, then I ignore them, but if they're

disappointed then I try to encourage them. Like at my arts school, I'm the comic relief - I cheer everyone up. It's needed there because people get really stressed out. [#914-915]

[How would you rate your willingness to do new things?] Ah - well for adventures- I really like to do things so I'm a 10 out of 10. But with big decisions it's hard to say - I'm in the minus numbers- I can't make decisions. I always get my friends to make my decisions for me.

[What is the difference?] Adventure is like adding to your life - always good; but with choices there is always what you could have had. *Kirin continues talking about her attitude towards risk and change which seems pretty bold and carefree - something to note for later.* [#917-20]

[If you had to live on an island for a year, what albums would you take with you?] I'd take books because CD's would drive me insane. A book you can read and it's always different ... I like classics; Jane Eyre, Great Expectations, Return of the Native, Shakespeare, maybe my dad's psychology book. **[Any people?]** someone who wouldn't get on my nerves. I can't think of anyone I could live with for that long! (laughs) **[If an alien came down today wanting a description of you, what would you say?]** Fun, lucky, wacky, wild, crazy, happy. **[Great! Is there anything that you'd like to work on?]** Oh tons - I'm a huge perfectionist ... critical of my self and others... I'd like to work on my patience, for one, though I changed a lot from the exchange. [#922-923]

This discussion provided me with what I was ideally looking for in the pre-interviews: a sense of who the person is, and a sense of their 'life context' going into the course. Kirin was fun to talk to, and a quick-thinker; the down-side of which is her self-assessed impatience. Her overall tone at this stage was confident, which was refreshing given that most of my initial discussions with women were peppered with self-deprecating remarks¹. She did indicate later how hard she is on herself - no doubt exacerbated by her arts school environment. Her motivation for doing the course seemed to be primarily for adventure.

¹ The self-deprecating remarks of the other women however, do not necessarily indicate lack of confidence on their part. Tannen's research into the genderization of socio-linguistic patterns has shown that when women do not know much about the person they are talking to, (ie- in this case- interviewer) most of them will play down their own skills and accomplishments (eg -grades) in an effort to ensure balance between speakers as opposed to creating a hierarchy by showing off. (1990).

Wave 2 - Post-Interview (final day)

Kirin was energetic during our interview and some of her comments may sound extreme. Rather than modifying them, I have left them as is, and suggest that in reading them, you recognize that she is a playful speaker - the performance of her story is fun for her.

(in discussing initial stages) ... some people had introduced themselves on the plane - a little too forward for me ... I used to be like that when I was little, but I grew out of it. So I'm doing the 'Be cool, sit back, watch, pretend I'm so into myself' thing! (laughs) The instructor who picked us up had this look of "Great! City slickers!" ... we get on the truck, it was cold and overcast. People were getting in last cigarettes, except me because I don't smoke. I was talking to Jason (*instructor*) - he was cool. The girls I didn't talk to much because they're people I wouldn't hang out with. Then again I am one of the most judgmental people in the world - I find myself alone a lot (laughs). ... people come off in a completely different way at the beginning than after, when their character shines through. (Still), on the bus I was thinking I wanted to go home because I had my hopes up that there would be cool people ... I know it's terrible but that's what I was thinking. [#935]

I've gone through different phases with different people. At first I was totally with this one guy Christopher ... then I'd see how he was really competitive and I don't like that. Or someone else I didn't notice for the first week and then we'd start to be friends ... you (have to) switch canoe partners everyday, or for washing dishes ... and you share stories and stuff. **[What kinds of phases did the group go through?]** For the first part of course, everyone ... needed to learn to paddle and all so there were real 'instructor roles', but when we went on our expedition ... the instructors really hung back from the group. Then we did solo and after that it was our 4 days to ourselves where we make the decisions and the instructors are way back there. I did find that in certain situations, the other students didn't know how to handle it- can't make decisions for themselves. They always want to turn to the instructors... but we have full capability to make

these decisions! ... people were complaining saying ‘They’re (instructors) supposed to do this’; and ‘Where’s all of our money going?’. And I’d be saying (*sarcastically*) ‘Guys -this is supposed to be like a teaching thing- learn about yourself’. [#937-938]

When I asked about the mood of the group, Kirin discussed at length how she was frustrated with how people (including herself) acted differently when the instructors were around -partly to please, and partly to have the instructors give them ‘the answer’.

We (*participants*) never got time to talk to each other because there was always something to do, and they (*instructors*) led our group discussions and we were all quiet, listening. Some people were complaining about that ... (*later during*) our big adventure by ourselves, that’s when people really acted themselves. ... *discusses how people were concerned about their high school credit so they didn’t always say what they felt. This point came up in about a quarter of the interviews.* When the instructors are around, because I hold them in respect so I guess I wanted them to think me cool too. [#940] *While she was one of few to admit this, it seems quite widespread.*

Instructors often talk about having to discourage this ‘acting to please’ behaviour and reinforce for students that it is their course.

On our ‘big adventure’ (4 day ‘*final expedition*’) it was chaos, well not chaos, but it became chaotic because everyone started getting in fights... See, I thought that just because the instructors were gone, everyone slacked off, and I didn’t like this. So myself and another girl, we would basically be the leaders of things ... I was the bitchy boss who said ‘OK everybody get your paddles out of the canoes, we want to do this portage in 10 minutes, to get to the site, so everybody haul ass and get out of here.’ People started to get really mad because they just wanted to have a good time because the instructors were gone. But if I did that too, then nothing would get done. We had a special circle discussion and someone said “I will do it and I don’t need to be told 5 times by 5 people!” but when you’re running on a time limit, you can’t do things at your own pace,

you have to work for the group. I was getting frustrated that they thought I was trying to pick a fight, but I was just doing it for the group. [941] *Notice the shift in her attitude towards groups and insights on how to make them work once she has a concrete experience on which to base her understanding.*

[What were circle discussions like?] Circling up was actually a good thing because it was a time when one person talked and everyone listened, and that was very important since in the day, you don't have time to think. The instructors thought we should do more of a consensus thing but you waste so much time doing that for every decision. But it was good that those shy people got to talk in circle. ... *(also in evening circles ...)* you could relieve any stress that you didn't get out during the day ... everyone's in a total neutral state, nobody's in a hassle or has to do anything, and everybody just takes it in. **[Were people honest?]** Yeah - especially near the end ... most were, and not feeling really stupid about it. They realized that their ideas wouldn't be shunned or whatever. **[Is that different than normal?]** Oh it was completely less judgmental here. **[Except towards Jim? (unpopular guy)]** Yeah but that wasn't judgmental because they knew him and they didn't like him *(explains how he didn't do his share and would slack off on set-up)* ... I actually prefer if people make fun of things they do know. [#947-949]

[Any good group vibes?] At community service, when we did our skits for the old folks - we laughed a lot. **[Did community service fit into course?]** It was fun -gave us a way to show how capable we are of doing these things ... putting everything that we learned in our group into action - taking our goals and relating them to the community, rather than just being at Outward Bound for 3 weeks and then going home and slipping into your old ways. [#955-956]

On course I was me in my purest form, nothing else. Not my alternative side, my artist side; I wasn't anything - just me ... I felt that I didn't have to act differently ... **[Why do you think that was?]** A lot of it was the nature - the fact that we didn't have to get up and put make-up on

and dress in our fanciest outfits to see everybody ... if I'm feeling grungy I can be more myself - more laughing and teasing - just me naturally. I find I really do change when I go to a city environment ... we were all pretty much equal - you don't really have the background. So it integrated well. [#956-957]

[Did you learn from anyone?] Everybody taught me something - maybe not directly but subconsciously by comments they said - I'd notice and think - 'Oh they really had a point there.' You know putting me in line when I was too bossy. It taught me about myself. [#961]

[How was your solo?] I was actually not looking forward to going on solo - I thought 'I'm not good by myself, I don't like being with myself! But I got out there and actually had a good time. I really really liked it - I spent 8 pages in my full-page journal writing. I had a lot of time for contemplation - for just sitting there and I really appreciated a lot of things... I looked at this tree growing in the crevice of a rock and all the taller trees and I'm thinking this tree wasn't given what the other trees were. I wrote a whole passage about how this tree might never bear flowers or fruit or even seeds for another tree to grow - but the fact that it did so much with what it had - you have to look at this tree and really appreciate that it is a better one than any other one in the forest. And I was relating that to my art in a way, because since I dislocated my knee, it showed me that ... I have still done a lot with what I have ... [#964-965]

[What were you most proud of from the course?] We were climbing at Claghorn and I was trying Solstice, which is the most challenging one. Talking to my instructor was inspirational - it made me calm. He said like how rock-climbing is like the vertical dance- that was cool. So Steve made it up easily, but the another girl, Carolyn, who I'm competitive with, couldn't do it. So I thought I probably won't get up ... but after about 6 falls, I finally made it up - Steve was there and proud of me ... and my friend Carolyn was crying because she was a little bit disappointed that I made it and she didn't ... I just totally knew where she was coming from because

it could've been me. And I said how I admired her being able to congratulate me anyway and for all the other things that she's done. [#967]

[What will you miss from course?] I'll miss just being in a caring and comfortable environment that was created by us... like even when we laughed about stuff, no one got offended ... I usually get frustrated and give up on things, but now I think I'll stick with things more and push myself ... out here I just did it. *(Also, I learned that)* the biggest thing I have to deal with is my conceit ... *and she explains how someone pointed out how she was trying to get all the attention...* it really put me on the defensive, I guess because it was true. [#974-976]

At this stage, Kirin was more relaxed and beginning to show different sides of herself-polished and not. She can be quite hard on others but also on her own weaknesses. Regarding communitas within this group, I noted that there seemed to be some empathy for others- like the woman who was competitive with her, but not for all, like Jim. In Ch. 3.2, I discuss more how people get to certain stages of transformation, but can obviously only move so far in a few weeks.

Wave 3 (3 Months Post-Course)

The three months since we last spoke seem to have given Kirin a chance to assimilate the experiences of course and sort things out in her mind. Her insights go deeper than they did in the second talk, which seems to come partly from reflection and partly from putting some of the things she learned to the test in regular life.

[Where are you at now?] I'm totally bogged down at school - really behind... I have a performance on Friday, that's taking a lot of time. I like to take lots of time to read just for me, and I'm decorating my room. I'm sort of involved with someone but I don't get to see him often.

[How's school?] A new principal is enforcing new rules and cleaning up school. My attitude has been adjusted now that I'm back into the arts and on track... everything seems okay. I've gotten to know more people at my school ... I still mostly hang out with arts school people ... last year I felt out of place with them because I wasn't performing. [#994-998]

[What role do you have at the arts school?] It's better now ... I don't have so much pressure on myself to decide if that is my future- I just enjoy it now. My mom always says if it wasn't meant to be, it wasn't meant to be. But I was really in a confusing time about it all last

year. *Note that when we spoke in the first interview, this did not clearly emerge. It is interesting that in retrospect then, that was her mindset coming into the course.* [#999-1000]

[Is there a 'core' Kirin?] People are comprised of more than one person ... I care a lot about school but socially I'm also extremely outgoing. **[How would you describe yourself to the alien now?]** I'd show him I'm serious and dedicated and I get frustrated, that's my serious side. Socially, I like to make jokes; I'm confident, fun, kind of loud, take pride of my immaturity and maturity ... sometimes I don't take the time to consider others- lack of compassion sometimes. [#1006-1007]

[Any group work in school?] In English, most assignments are in groups- it's more interesting and more of a challenge- when working with myself I get bored with me. **[That sounds different than before, no?]** Before it felt like I was doing all the work, but now ... it doesn't. I'm more laid back now about it- it's more productive than assigning jobs. **[Why?]** uh- maybe at OB you couldn't say 'do this or that', because it wouldn't work ... I realized that there's only so much yelling you can do before people get bored and want a new leader, someone who won't dictate. Half way through OB I realized that dictating wasn't working but Carolyn, who was also dictating, didn't realize and kept dictating and didn't know why it wasn't working. Now I'm more mellow in groups. [#982-985]

[Is there anything you would have done differently on course?] I think I would have had more fun and not worried about being marked on it ... worried about doing the right thing; it's too bad they had to mark [#1003]

[What kinds of things did you learn about leadership on course?] ... The definition of leader becomes questionable to me after OB because leadership is found in so many different forms and ways ... like through being example. ... I think also a leader can provide a new outlook for others, maybe they lead someone to something as a friend and an equal not in a hierarchical way as

I thought before. A leader in one area is also a follower in another area, not an ultimate leader ... you aren't really a leader if you're trying to be a leader. It goes back to Taoism; wise in simplicity. People who try to be wise are not. **[Did anyone on course act like that?]** Carolyn and I maybe, I wanted to be that leader and look good for being evaluated. **[How did others lead?]** ... everyone had their own way: Shane was quiet and got things done, Patricia the little Switzerland- neutral, Tracey was a leader in the sense she was sick a lot but kept her strength ... Before I always thought in black and white... I guess I'm questioning everything I thought about before and took positions on. [#986-989]

[Was thinking about home different while on course?] Definitely! Home is so uptight- so many things to think about. Now I'm a bit more laid back because of Outward Bound though. I didn't really appreciate things before because I'd worry so much. Now I don't let myself get so torn up inside ... on solo I thought about how it's bad to be so caught up in things so I vowed to try and be more laid back. I still get stressed out, but not as much as last year. [#1019]

[What would you say the point of OB is?] ... it teaches you things about yourself, you also helped me with that through these interviews. It was such an incredible experience... it's really applicable to daily life... it's really transforming.

[There were also a lot of things that frustrated you on course- how do you think about those things now?] (laughs) That's such a small part of my memory now I'd probably just laugh at it. At the time I thought about it - might have been an issue for half a day then but not now ... it was chaos- no one was in charge- it was so funny. Fun to break the rules. [#1031-1033]

It is interesting to see how experiences and the cultural aspect of it are remembered- the emphases of the second interview have shifted to the background, allowing space for an emergent crop of thoughts to make new meaning of the same experience. Her discussion of leadership is a good example of this. It reinforces the idea that our public narratives are continually shifting,, improvisatory endeavours.

Chapter 3.1

Outward Bound as a Rite of Passage: *Evidence of the 3 stages as a lived reality*

“Revelation is the primary characterization of the process of knowing.
The traditional theory of education is to secure youth and its teachers from revelation.
It is dangerous for youth and confusing to teachers.
It upsets the accepted coordination of doctrine.”
(A.N. Whitehead 1967)

I chose this quote to begin the chapter because I want to underline the political dynamic implied in the contention that wilderness experiential education at Outward Bound is like a rite of passage. It implies that, unlike traditional ‘banking’ approaches to education, OB is creating a space in which people’s existing world views are problematized, thereby disturbing the status quo. As Whitehead duly notes, this is not an entirely comfortable notion for us. Yet it is widely-accepted in Western philosophy, from Nietzsche to G.B. Shaw, that to question is to grow into a fully human state. Further, as van Gennep notes, these periods of socially-sanctioned questioning and learning can act as social “regeneration” devices, necessary for the growth of the individual and the culture.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate that : I) the notion of assisting people to gain a new (transformed) perspective on their lives and to move forward from this new understanding, is intrinsic to the OB model; and II) regardless of what life-stage participants are at, the majority leave the course feeling that the structure of the experience made them more able to transform their perspective than would have been possible in regular life. The focus of this chapter will be on explaining the rites of passage model, and how it can help to illuminate these transformational processes. I will also discuss how OB courses are dissimilar from rites of passage and as such

need to be considered in light of other genres of experience as well. I discuss how rituals like this course rely upon culturally-constructed understandings for part of their effectiveness, and on how the OB participants' narratives suggest that the structure of the course experience parallels a rite of passage for them in various ways. In the next chapter, I will expand further on the kinds of transformations that participants undertake and, more specifically, the cultural aspects of the course itself which facilitate them.

Rites of Passage

Van Gennep's original work in 1908 examined rites of passage as one type of ritual among many others that he was studying at the time. He was particularly interested in rites of passage because of the interplay of the 'sacred' and the 'profane' which he felt was enacted in them² (1960 [1908]: 3). His aim was to explain the *function* of the various sorts of more or less formalized rituals of pre-industrial societies which were performed for individuals or groups who were in transition between stages or positions in their society³. At the time, a plethora of reports were being compiled on the practices of pre-industrial peoples, and van Gennep's analysis was a cross-cultural synthesis of these reports. He argued that the function of the rituals surrounding these transitional periods - 'rites of passage' - was essentially to "cushion the disturbance" of the transition (1960: ix). He believed that the disturbance which was created when a person was in transition from one 'position' to another in their society affected both the individual and the social group into which that individual had to be reaggregated post-transition (ibid.: ix, xiii). I will

² He uses 'sacred' as a category culturally-constructed in opposition to 'profane' or regular life (secular). The state of being 'sacred' is thus relative: "The person who enters a status at variance with the one previously held becomes 'sacred' to the others who remain in the profane state." (van Gennep 1960: viii). He held that it was through these temporary passages through the sacred that social "regeneration" (one of his main theoretical concerns) could, and must occur (loc. cit.).

³ Solon Kimball, who wrote the introduction to van Gennep's Rites de Passage, noted that 'rites of transition' would have been a more appropriate translation from the French, given van Gennep's meaning. 'Rites of passage' was, however, used in deference to the common usage of this phrase in English (van Gennep 1960 :vii).

discuss shortly why this aspect of transition between structural ‘positions’ makes the model less appropriate for the case of Outward Bound.

A rite of passage is, according to van Gennep’s model, an intrinsically transformational experience. Indeed its function is like a framework that facilitates personal or group transformation to occur smoothly in society, despite the general predisposition of people in society’s regular or profane mode, (what Turner later called ‘normative mood’) to stability or stasis. He demonstrated the simple structure evident in rites of passage cross-culturally which make this transformation possible: 1) to separate the transitional person (liminar, initiand, novice) from their regular ‘place’ in society; 2) to create a space (physical and symbolic) for the transitional period in which the novice learns what is needed to transform into their new place in society; and 3) to attend to how the initiands are reaggregated into their new position in regular life without substantial disturbance. As van Gennep puts it:

“I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *post-liminal rites*.” (van Gennep 1960 [1908]: 21)

This model assumes various culturally-constructed premises for its effectiveness. Firstly, it assumes that the novice’s society approves of the novice’s transformation and thus allows the functioning of this transitional device. This is significant given the preceding description of rites of passage which pointed to their potentially subversive outcomes, or at least the disturbance that questioning the status quo can create.

Secondly, the creation of these socially-sanctioned rituals to ‘cushion’ transitions is, in effect, a way of controlling the process, and thus the initiand. I point this out in order to highlight the balance between the political subversiveness of a rite of passage and the way in which cultural elements are used to ensure that the positive or ‘socially-beneficial’ regeneration of which van Gennep wrote is achieved, rather than encouraging anarchy. For example, Outward Bound’s founder had a specific moral objective of fostering ‘good citizenship’ through the experience, as

opposed to encouraging participants to reject society and embrace minimalist life in the woods.

Turner also noted how this sanctioned period of dissent actually had somewhat “narrow limits” as the liminar must eventually resubmit to the social norms of their community (1979: 241).

Thirdly, creating a “symbolic and spatial area of transition” (van Gennep 1960 [1908]: 18) separate from regular life is a strategy which essentially allows for a dynamic dual-cultural model. The normal or ongoing culture can thus benefit from being in a dialectical relationship with the transformational culture of the liminal period, as the liminars grow substantially in that time and import their transformed perspective into their regular lives.

It is of note that this model of rites of passage may be experienced differently by different sub-groups of the population, (not to mention the intra-sub-group variation as well). For instance, in the West, the meaning or experience of ‘separation’ from one’s regular social setting may be different for females than males, as females have been shown to place higher value on their network of social relations (Tannen 1990, 1994). While gender-based differences are important, proper treatment of the gender issues involved in such an analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis and as such will not be taken up in detail⁴.

The structure of the rites of passage model clearly relies on specific cultural elements, for its effectiveness. In Chapter 3.2, I will expand on the culture of the liminal period specifically, but for now, I will move on to showing how the OB model reflects some aspects of a rite of passage.

Outward Bound as a Rite of Passage

“There’s real life involved in it ... it’s interesting because you’re removed from your life, but it’s totally about your life kinda thing ...there’s an underlying motive for sure - there is a connection. That’s what I think the whole point of Outward Bound is.” (Jeremy #699)

There are two ways to illustrate the ways in which OB parallels the rites of passage model. Firstly, I will compare their structures, and secondly, I will share how the participants expressed

⁴ Various differences were noted between the experiences and expressions of males and females, and will be addressed at a later date, in a separate analysis.

their experiences. Jeremy struggled with my question about the purpose of Outward Bound, and had given two cliché answers before he came up with one in his own words (see above). I find it useful because of his candid tentativeness about making the connection between the course and his life. The degree of connection or transference of course learning to regular life varies between students and across different areas for the same student. This is important to bear in mind through this chapter as I introduce multiple perspectives from the participants.

Various people who have written about OB have suggested the parallel with the rites of passage idea, (Katz and Kolb 1972; Andrews 1996), and it is a useful heuristic. There are, however, distinct points of difference which must be taken into account. Chiefly, OB courses are voluntary and thus not part of a socially-required set of rituals such as most of those studied by van Gennep and Victor Turner. Thus, the motivations for undertaking the course are varied and often do not include a ‘desire to transform’ per se. Most students did report a desire to get away from regular life concerns, relax, have fun, and learn new things ranging from physical skills, (such as canoeing), how to handle personal development issues, or interpersonal skills like leadership.

These motivations seem more linked to the type of experiences that could be called “retreats” in contemporary Canadian society. A retreat is defined as “a place ... to which one may retire for refuge, quiet, ...care” and likely stems from the Latin verb “retrahare” meaning ‘to pull back’ (CED 1994). I include a broad range of experiences under this metaphoric umbrella such as: a day at the spa, a week-end at a cottage, longer periods of travel, or even an hour spent meditating at home. Like the OB students’ motivations, the common threads through these experiences include: time and space away from the responsibilities and routine of regular life, activities which take one’s mind off of daily concerns and pressures, or even a feeling of stepping back from one’s life in order to examine it, and consider what direction to move forth in next.

Retreats and rites of passage can both act as an outlet for frustration with one’s current situation, but the difference is with what happens to the initiand upon reaggregation. In OB and

most retreats, the participant does not undergo a transition into a specific new ‘position’ in society whereas initiands in most rites of passage do. This difference lends insight into how and why some transformations initiated on the OB course last back in regular life, whereas others may not. In a rite of passage, there are more ‘built-in’ mechanisms to encourage the initiand to maintain the transformation: they are in a new ‘position’ and are expected to behave accordingly by their peers and other members of society; the people around them know that they have been through the ritual and thus expect different things of them, whereas with OB students, most people would either not know about the course, or at least not have a clear idea of how one ‘ought’ to behave after doing it. It is likely that the scale of the society plays a role here as well in terms of how aware people are of who is doing what.

Lastly, the OB students do not have the benefit of having either their peer group of initiands, or their instructors around them in regular life for ongoing support and encouragement. Most liminars will return to living with the people they experienced the rite with, as well as the elders who facilitated it. For this analysis, I interpret ‘position’ broadly to mean a perspectival position as most students indicated a degree of transformation in their perspective on some issues.

The OB course experience thus parallels many aspects of a rite of passage, but does not follow all of the classic aspects of that model. I employ the model here for its use in illuminating the cultural dimensions of the transformational framework of OB courses.

The Phases of Rites of Passage Illustrated

[How would you describe the feeling on course versus regular life?] “Like the aura? Being out here is kind of like being in a different world ... you forget about everything out there and this is the new one. ... gets more comfortable, independence, freedom definitely - being away from everything.” (Colin #587)

Colin’s explanation above echoes the sentiment of most of the participants in this ethnography. He notes the separation phase, as well as the special culture or ‘different world’ of the liminal period that is ‘away’. Van Gennep noted that: “Often the indigenous term for the

liminal period is ... the locative form of a noun meaning 'seclusion site.'" (1960 [1908]: 237). The name Outward Bound was originally intended to represent the journey 'away' that those students would soon make on the British naval ships during the war. I will show below ways in which students explain OB as separate or 'away', as well as how they contextualize the course into the flow of their life-story afterwards upon reaggregation with their regular social groups. Turner's explanation, cited below, of the three phases of a rite of passage expands upon van Gennep's model:

"The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'); during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject ... is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state; in the third phase the passage is consummated. The ritual subject... is in a stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and 'structural' type." (Turner 1979: 235)

Turner's eloquent synopsis of the rites of passage model provides further insight into what happens at each of the stages. By 'social structure' his specific meaning is not a system of unconscious categories but rather "the patterned arrangements of role-sets, status-sets, and status-sequences consciously recognized and regularly operative in a given society." (Turner 1988: 507). It is from their position in this structure that the initiands are separated.

Separation

The students' comments help to illustrate how they felt about the separateness of the course from their regular lives: "*it's kind of taking you away from it all- from all you know and are comfortable with*" (Esme #193); "*I also wanted to get away and be with new people, and bring myself together.*" (Chloe #1114); "*I was kind of nervous when I got there because I wasn't sure if I'd be able to live in the middle of nowhere for three weeks.*" (Jeremy #679). Others will explain how their behaviour changed once they entered the new environment, such as Kirin's

description above about not wanting to talk to people at first because of sense of awkwardness (#935). Some of them had 'send-offs' before their course to mark the significance of the course, and almost all of them indicated that they had discussions with someone close to them about going on the course. In all cases, the separation seems to cause people to shift gears into a more cautious mode, at least at the outset.

Henderson cautions that too much of an emphasis on separation of the course and regular life may be counter-productive though, in that people will not draw the links between their regular lives and the course experience (1995: 82). The people I interviewed varied greatly in terms of how well, or how much they were able to recognize and explain the metaphoric similarities between problems or situations on course, and their lives at home. It is possible that some kind of 'initiative'⁵ at the outset which could get people to think about their lives and themselves would increase the likelihood of people connecting regular concerns and course experiences. This, in turn, could help them in making those 'transference' connections better.

One example would be an initiative developed by the New York City Outward Bound School through which people create an increasingly deeper record and performance of their life story. It includes writing about what one has done, the illustration of a family tree, and oral components in story-telling and sharing insights about oneself with the group. This kind of undertaking at the outset could provide the opportunity, or space, to assist students who are not normally reflective to attempt to be so. As James states, turning the learning into a future resource is the point of the course: "direct experience is key, but there must be some way to help the student beyond the immediate consumption of experiences to the greater challenge of improving their lives back home... transference." (1980: 6)

⁵ In experiential education, an 'initiative' denotes an activity or exercise, usually short (less than 2 hours) which is used to generate discussion and reflection on a certain area such as communication, trust or team work. One simple example would be the blind or trust walks where people are partnered and while one is blindfolded, the other must lead them safely around a route.

Liminal Period

Experiences during the liminal period are usually the basis for the reflection and learning that will ideally lead to personal transformation. The initiand is positioned as a learner of cultural knowledge and skills, some of which may only be applied later when they return to regular life. Turner describes this paradoxical situation of the novice during the liminal period: “It is not a mere acquisition of knowledge, but a change in being. His apparent passivity is revealed as an absorption of powers which will become active after his social status has been redefined in the aggregation rites.” (1979: 239). This idea was verified in my discussions with OB students by the manner in which their ability to articulate their experience and learning improved substantially by the third interview. By the third interview, they had moved out of absorbing, and been able to act out the transformed beliefs in their regular lives.

Kirin’s narrative above outlines several key aspects of the structure of the liminal period. One is that she ‘liked everybody’; still another is how the participants were all “pretty much equal” and another is how interpersonal relations weren’t as oriented towards judging and categorizing people because everyone saw each other “at their worst” with ‘no make-up or fancy dress’. Similarly, Lea told me “*You can’t wear make-up and look better than the other person, your hair ... all the little things that mean so much in the outside world are changed- they’re gone.*” (#1914). Both of these statements concur with Turner’s description of neophyte relations as “complete equality”, (Turner 1979: 238); however, both are more statements of an ideal than of reality. This difference can be seen in Kirin’s narrative where Jim is the scapegoat for many group issues and thus is not treated equally. While the lack of equality diminishes the idyllic image of ‘bonding and community’ during the liminal period, it need not cause a rejection of the idea of *communitas* altogether. As discussed earlier, Fraser has shown that it is rather better to concede that full ‘bracketing’ of social status is not achievable and move on from there (1994).

Identity is another topic that comes up frequently in discussions about the course, and I was struck by how all but two of the students felt that they had multiple sides to their personalities. Some, like Kirin, felt that the course had a ‘distillation’ effect that meant they did not have to use these other ‘faces’: *“I was me in my purest form, nothing else ... I just felt I didn’t have to act differently.”* (#956). Others seemed to feel that the side of them which emerged on course was different than who they are at home, but also recognized that while they preferred the course ‘self’, there were obstacles in regular life to accomplishing this. Bill explained to me that while he was less shy on course, he can not yet consistently replicate that at home: *“Usually I’m pretty shy, and up there (OB) I just got involved with everybody and had a great time. My shyness pretty much went away up there. I liked that feeling so now I go to the park to feel free ... free of all the constraints”* (#520). Chloe also told me that while one of her goals after the course was to maintain the ‘relaxed and together’ feeling that she felt she cultivated on course, she knew that her school life was busy and more full of things likely to cause stress. She admitted that in spite of the stress, she did not want to give up those activities from home either, and that the two persona would somehow find a middle ground in her (#1130).

It is interesting that these descriptions of self lend a new perspective to Turner’s suggestion that the liminal period is a time and place to “act out” social dramas and conflicts and to redress issues - the ‘subjunctive mood’ (1986: 39-43). His theatrical metaphor suggests that people get ‘on stage’, shed ‘their regular selves’ and take on a new persona, which some did concur with. But ‘acting’ also implies ‘unreality’, and as we see with Kirin, students commonly talked about their course, or liminality, as a time to ‘just be me’, ‘be real’ and hence *not* to ‘act’ according to social expectations. The key point here is that students did not see the course as a completely fantastical time. Rather, they felt that who they were on course, how they ‘acted’, was as ‘real’ as how they act in regular life, just different because the cultural and natural environment were different. The structure and culture of OB facilitate this difference by mediating cultural factors, which I will

discuss in Chapter 3.2. Because of this, it is important for OB instructors to recognize the role they have in executing the structure and co-creating the culture.

The final point I want to make about the structural aspects of the liminal period is about how it provides students with a new perspective on themselves and their lives. Earlier, in Chapter 2.1, I discussed the Freirian ideas of emancipatory education; one of his aims was to help people to break down the borders or limits that are imposed on them by others. Freire taught that stepping back from your life facilitated a new, critical perspective on it. This newly-reflexive mode provides the learner with a “position” on the border of his life from which to look in on it. Janmohammed uses the term ‘border intellectual’ to describe that new state of mind and position (1994).

The structure of OB courses provides students with this same kind of spatial and symbolic distance that allows them to take a fresh look at their lives. A good example is Kirin’s reflection on her art that were catalyzed by observations she made about the forest. Another example is the new perspective she gained on her previously narrow understanding of ‘leadership’, based on seeing how others’ styles played out on course. It seems that from the border position, it is less stressful for people to examine issues with their lives, perhaps because from this perspective, solutions are also clearer.

‘Processing’ or thinking about the issues raised by course experiences is encouraged throughout the course through writing journals and discussion circles, which, as Anthony said, helps one to “*talk and share ideas - to look at things differently*” (#2019). The Solo period is also particularly well-structured to facilitate reflection and processing because one is free from distractions. The students comments explain this well:

I think solo is good because it gives people time in the middle for a break to think about everyone, and what's going on and to deal with it- you get a chance to step back away from it. (Chloe #1137)

When you're at home, you can't really look at it- but when you're far away you can look at your home in a different perspective ... solo really made you think about what's going to happen when you go back and how you can use everything you've learned on OB in the city and in your normal life... when you're at home, you don't appreciate everything you've had. But when you're away from it and you're out there, and you don't have very much, you think about everything you've got at home... (Maria #1544)

[Why did you think solo was a neat time?] I just liked thinking about stuff on your own. (It was a) nice break and rest ... without others' influence on your thoughts... (Liz #1642)

It was definitely easier for me to think out there ... so much time on my hands, and there's nobody around from the city. I'm thinking about those people, but they're not there, so they are so easy just to think about." (Joseph #784)

While this discussion on the parallels between OB courses and a liminal period has focused on the structural aspects of the culture, I will expand on the transformational aspects of it in the next chapter. Next, I will show the way in which the 'reaggregation' period is manifest in student experiences and narratives about OB. These student comments will address how the course fits into their larger life context, but the main discussions of its transformational power are found in the next two chapters.

Reaggregation

"[Will this be relevant in your regular life?] Well for work it is very big. Working on the phones (*internet service provider*) I get very frustrated with certain people who think they know so much. This course will give me the patience and self-restraint ... I learned that sometimes it's better to just let things be" (Jarred #1705)

Jarred's comments above should help the reader to resonate with the way people make meaning of their experiences on course by weaving it together with their everyday knowledge and experience. This is the part of reaggregation that occurs once people have left the course and have returned to their everyday life. Before expanding on that though, I should note that reaggregation actually begins towards the end of the course when certain structural elements are included to ease that transition back by re-introducing aspects of regular society, such as: showers, community service, a banquet indoors, and returning to the larger community of base camp. The structure aims to bring closure to the course by celebrating successes and discussing the experience as a

whole. Examples of this are: a 'marathon' where all students undertake an extended, multi-skill exercise as a culmination of the skills and fitness they have obtained, a special ceremony where the Outward Bound pin is awarded to each student and the whole group shares a key learning, and comments on a fellow student, and the clean-up of all of the equipment before putting it away.

Kirin noted how the community service project gave them a first chance to apply course lessons outside of the group, which she said helped to ensure that they would not just '*slip into their old ways*' again at home (#956). Reintegrating what has been learned is not always easy, of course, but as Geoff explains, it is easier once you have been around a living example of it: "*I kind of want to learn how to interweave my comfortable behaviour (with people he knows) socially, with when I meet new people. I know that's what some people did in the OB group- they just came right out as if you'd known them for ages.*" (#890).

One of my aims in explicating the elements of this process, is to help make the process more replicable in other contexts, such as in an organization that needs to restructure. The preceding elements are the kinds of things that would ideally be included at the end of the experience - they are like the 'exit' of the experience and are essential to the process. Wade Campbell, a senior OB instructor, tries to emphasize to the instructors he trains how important the end of the course is. He suggests that often instructors can feel exhausted by the end of the course and can slip into allowing the course to just fade to an end (1996). Instead, he feels that by making a conscious effort to review and debrief the course experiences with the group, the instructor can help to ensure a greater degree of transference and, in particular, a lasting sense of the supportive culture of course.

Talking to the OB participants three months after they had finished their course yielded another perspective on the reaggregation period as they talked about what it was like to go back home and how they have used (or not used) lessons from the course. Above, Kirin talks about how she missed the caring environment that they had created on course which had helped her to push

herself in a good way. Joseph and Isabel explain the difficulty of leaving, saying “*now that I’m leaving tomorrow, there is part of me that just wants to stay here - not necessarily with those people, but just the atmosphere up here is so different.*” (Joseph #761); “*You know like Beth, (instructor) when we were leaving, giving a hug to everybody, all these hugs, you know you don’t find that in the city.*” (Isabel #399). As I will discuss further in Chapter 3.2, each person takes something different from the experience and adapts it to their own needs. As Lea put it: “*I think we go in as individuals and we come out as individuals and because of that we get something different out of it.*” (Lea #1953).

“Of course, like the initiand in tribal society, the novelistic hero has to be reinducted into the structural domain, but for the ‘twice-born’ (or converted) the sting of that domain- its ambitions, envies, and power struggles- has been removed.” (V. Turner 1988: 521)

Reaggregation with the structural domain is never simple as Turner points out, but the novice should be well-prepared to meet that challenge having now examined his or her life from a new angle. In Kirin’s narrative cited above, she talks about how the lessons from OB are useful after the course because ‘you can apply them to everything’ (#1022). Oakley’s discussion of how her approach to working with a group changed, is a good example of this. Deon also talks about how the course experience of teamwork helped him in his new job at home - “*I learned that at OB and it applies in the real world.*” (#1428).

Again, the reaggregation phase is different for OB students than a rite of passage because there are not formalized rituals once they get home to reintegrate them. Most of the students feel that they have grown, yet they will return to the same ‘structural position’ that they occupied prior to the course. This diverges from typical examples of pre-industrialized society where other people in the social group know that the initiand underwent this ritual, since people in the OB student’s life will likely treat them the same as before. It is thus up to the student alone to make the transformations that they have undertaken last. Both Liz and Maria explain how certain things

trigger them to remember how their perspective was transformed on course: *“By going to OB and having them say all that, it puts it in your mind and you think about it more; now when I do things I remember things they said.”* (Liz #1634); *“There’s not a day goes by where I don’t think ‘oh I did that on OB’ ... you think about what you learn at home.”* (Maria #1548)

Currently, there are no follow-up mechanisms between the Outward Bound School and the participants for the majority of the regular, public-enrollment courses used in this study. Youth at Risk courses, which do implement a form of follow-up, have been shown to increase the effectiveness of the transformational impact of the courses as was discussed in Chapter 2.1. Given the variability that I heard between different students’ ability to continue to make use of the experience as a tool for personal transformation, it is likely that adding a follow-up component to the courses would be highly effective for many people. This may not be as relevant for a school like OB where participants are not connected after the course, and follow-up would be difficult to co-ordinate. However, where it would be possible and effective is in the kind of situation I believe this learning could be re-applied to, such as organizational restructuring, where the people involved will continue to work together. In this case, a follow-up session would act as both a refresher on what they learned, and a forum for people to express either satisfaction or frustration with their ability, or the ability of others, to enact that learning in the regular life setting.

Closing

My aim in this chapter was to establish that the OB course experience parallels that of a rite of passage in a number of ways, and as such, potentially has the same intrinsic transformational influence on participants. I have shown the ways in which students perceive the course structure and how it is separate from regular life and yet also contextualized within it post-course in various ways. Clearly, an OB course differs in specific ways from the classic rite of passage model however, meaning that other explanations should be sought for how the experience

fits into larger genres. Further work needs to be done on the common threads which link experiences like OB and other types of voluntary rejuvenating undertakings like retreats. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine it fully, it seems clear that this urge to retreat and redress one's balance is part of broader Western cultural themes that would be useful to explore.

There are clearly a range of culturally-based rituals and understandings that contribute to the course's effectiveness and which could be used in other contexts to facilitate positive transformation. In the next chapter, I will explore further the cultural elements which facilitate transformation during the quasi-liminal period of an OB course.

Chapter 3.2

Esme's Story

Wave 1: Pre-course

Esme is 19 years old and had just finished her first year of university. At school, she enjoyed living in a new city, and the social life, but she felt that her courses were boring compared with her friends' in another program. She decided to switch for the next year. During our discussion, I found her both open and articulate about the passage of her life, and changes she had undergone. Her response to most questions were candid, though she often laughed saying 'I haven't thought about that!'.

Legend: Regular = direct quotes of students; [words] = my questions; *italics* = my thoughts

[If you had to describe yourself to a complete alien, what would you say?] I'm interesting, fine being alone. I feel good about myself, though I do want to change. I have a good imagination, write a lot, a creative side. I can be selfish... don't always give all I could of myself to people; can be very generous with others. I guess I'm stubborn, like in admitting I'm wrong. It's because I do not assert myself often so when I do - I want to stick to it; I don't usually have strong opinions. ... I used to not talk because I thought no one cared about what I had to say ... I had more walls socially but (my friend) Ananda helped reduce this. (Still, my boyfriend,) Dave does not like that I don't say what's going on in my head.

[What about in groups?] I'm the person who does what they're told. I don't like, or I'm not good at taking charge, or telling others what to do ...

In my life, a lot of the changes have been precipitated by friends/ other people. *Esme goes on to explain how various decisions or attitude shifts were linked to certain people. For example, a group of her brother's friends who were laid-back, helped her to feel more*

comfortable with herself. Later, when she reconnected with a group of girls from her old, 'alternative' school, they started her thinking about women's issues. It was the same with Outward Bound:

[Why did you want to do this course?] It just clicked for me - I had a lot of friends who did it when I was 15 and my current boyfriend did it then too. I wasn't happy with school and wanted to do something that would be fun, and everyone who's done it said they loved it. I don't know much about camping and hiking etc.- but I like it. **[What do you hope to get out of it?]** Well- personal growth is an important part... I like to be pushed but have a hard time pushing myself.... I want to see my own limits physically and mentally ... making a decision (to go) on my own without asking everyone, was important for me. Like, I realized by going to university that it was my life and I had a lot of choices. But still, it is unusual for me to put myself into a place where I don't know anyone.

[Are you someone who usually likes to make a lot of changes?] I waver a lot and do not just jump in eagerly. I hesitate often but eventually end up doing it. I think about things for a while though. ... Like with my exchange; it was just something different - not just doing the norm. I made a personal decision to start doing things that I want to do and not worry about whether I 'should be doing it'. I have an image of the 40 year old housewife who is miserable and bored and this is not where I want to be - no offense to housewives.

After the first discussion, my impression of Esme was that she was someone who seemed to be open to seeing herself in new ways, but who didn't have the 'tools' for making sense of the changes that she clearly felt she underwent. Still, she subtly marked out her life referring to phases and shifts from quiet and serious to a little more social and laid-back.

Wave 2 - Final Day of Course

Esme's course was unusually intense in that the bugs were particularly bad, and they had to evacuate a student who was ideating suicide (related to previous trauma).

[What was it like in the beginning?] ... So we all made a fool of ourselves ... in our little 'adjustment period'; there were some people not speaking at all, and then there were others who were speaking way too much (laughs). So I guess at that point I was pretty much worried that I wasn't going to get along with anyone, I couldn't imagine how any of us could get along.

[Discuss the early phase for the group] ... we had a talk that night about why people were there and stuff and it was pretty weird - I was completely blown away that people were so open ... usually with a new group it takes forever to break down walls and then here people were willing to do it on the first night - so I thought maybe this does work ... we were all around the campfire, and a long day, then a good supper; and the instructors were- well, just a feeling of everyone in the circle and the instructors were all pretty comforting and saying that they wanted people to say what they wanted to say- and they go around the circle and you realize they're going to keep doing it - and so you just do...

[How would you describe the teaching style?] It wasn't like they'd stand up there and say 'O.K., this is the right way to do it' (rock-climbing) ... they more showed us the basics, then took us right to the cliff ... there weren't any rules about where to put your hands, no rules about the *specific* way to do it ... **[How was this different than what you're used to?]** For me, if someone tells me how to do something, I'll listen very carefully and then make sure that I'm doing it exactly like they said ... but since they didn't give us any specifics, so I had to figure it out for myself - and this definitely made a big difference for me in the way I did it- I was much less worried about whether I was doing it right or not, because they seemed to make it sound like there were a lot of ways to do it right. Then when they'd encourage me, I felt like I could go even further... so I would; it was a mix of complete non-thought and then also of pushing myself.

[Did the group talk about problems that you had?] The discussion circles that we had with the group were the most intense, insane experiences I've ever had with a group ... hearing people say stuff about you ... it made me really think about how much everyone's actions were

really affecting everyone else - something I don't usually notice ... at first I thought: 'This is so pathetic and it will be like some happy circle of bullshit!' ... Being in such a small group makes a difference; and being able to be comforting to people. This amazing sense of- if I tell someone this is how I feel, then how it really means something to them- especially in the positive sense- it makes you realize that we should share that more often. Negative feedback too can work.

The only goal I didn't do so well on, is that I didn't really make any close connections with people; in the first feedback circle I said that was what I wanted to work on - to move my connections with people in the group beyond the sort of surface level where they were at at that point, (*a few days in*), and then right after the circle, people were trying to make a conscious effort to talk to me, and we were all trying to help people do their goal... that was really cool.

[How was your solo?] That was incredible for me- I had a lot of incredible things on this trip as you've probably noticed (laughs); they put us out in the evening after feedback circle and I was scared out of my mind, but I set up my tarp well enough that I didn't get wet when it started to pour and thunder - rough night, but I made it through. ... I wrote in journal, thought a lot, slept a lot, had a good time by myself **[Were you thinking of course or home?]** well home more - it amazed me that on course I barely thought about home, but on solo a lot was about how I deal with people at home. **[Was it different to think about them from course?]** Yes ... in terms of being hesitant to really get to know somebody ... I didn't necessarily come up with a conclusion about it but it seemed really clear to me what I do. **[Did you work on that on course?]** I thought about doing that ... I tried but there weren't really people that I wanted to get to know really well, so there was less incentive.

It seemed that I got closer to my instructors than other students ... At the beginning with Instructor X ... she had a lot of hair on her legs ... I was afraid she was a flaky, nature-loving emotional basket case, and Instructor Y just didn't seem like he wanted to be there; Instructor Z was O.K. but kind of goofy-looking ... (*later on she says:*) Instructor X talked a lot and I found

out she was a lot like I was - she really listened to what I said and could relate it back to me in different ways, and would help me to make goals.

[What was a key learning for you?] Well on the course I managed to take on the role of leader quite a bit which was odd for me - never done before- it was so weird ... **[What did it feel like when you were looking after Jennifer? (depressed student)]** It was kind of nice that she asked me, it sort of fit in with the leader role that I was sort of playing on the course; like she was better friends with some of the other girls but I guess I kind of played the big sister role for her ... the group really came together more while we were operating under that objective of getting her evacuated when she was sick; **[Will this new role effect your regular life?]** Yes I think - it was such an incredible feeling - I realized that I could see this other part of myself that I wouldn't see before and that I could do stuff that I couldn't before, and I just felt okay with taking on that role ... makes a difference whether someone asked me for something or when I'd just do it.

[On the group working together] ... It went through a period of a lot of arguments, and people making judgments about others and sticking to a certain role with people ... some people seemed to want more of a vacation than a challenge ... so we were in such a different place. Later though, the group did manage to come together around a common goal which was to get to the pickup spot on time ... it started fine but then we got into a huge mess - we fell apart because it wasn't a group anymore, it was a bunch of people traveling to get home ... at this one point we were deciding whether to run the rapids or portage around, and everyone did their own thing - no one was listening, and some did some dangerous things and none of us were speaking to each other ... **[Did you try to say anything?]** When I tried to intervene, I got told off, so I just felt like I didn't have any authority to ... But then that night, we had a huge feast (got fish from a fisherman), and everything just clicked again.

[In discussing what she learned from the group's 'community service' day where they played soccer with some kids from the native reserve at Gull Bay] ... it was a very bizarre experience- we had a 3-hour discussion about it after. It all boiled down to 'well are we just there to feel pity for these kids? Were we actually doing something good?' Jesse said "They don't want us here, I don't want to be here, this is stupid!" - we all thought we'd done such a good deed ...

[Does this relate at all to the volunteering you do at the food bank in Toronto?] *It made me wonder if I do that for altruistic reasons or not ... Jesse just made us see how part of it was for our benefit too, but she just said it to us in an extreme way.*

[If the alien came back, how would you describe yourself now?] *(laughs) More of an aspect of being dependable, and being O.K. with people depending on me ... I was kind of like a peacemaker for conflicts and stuff; I usually distance myself from those things. I guess also I try to be true to myself and pretty insightful, about me or others around me, which I never would have classified myself as before ... the negative would be that I'm still kind of stubborn. **[Is it like this is a good and a bad side?]** Yeah it's true- like it is also why I admired Jesse because she was so strong about how she felt about things like the reserve, but it also drove me up the wall in how she was so extreme about it, like a tantrum.*

[Any things you see differently now?] *One of the biggest things that's changed since I've gotten home is that TODAY is my life as much as tomorrow and 2 months from now... like every day I'm trying to do what I really want to do - don't know how it came out of OB exactly - I'm not usually like that - maybe the whole cycle of getting up and canoeing every day and seeing new things - like you see that you're missing out on stuff if you do just sit around. Also - being a leader will definitely carry on - not so much telling people what to do -but that I can be heard and people want to hear what I have to say.*

In this discussion I felt like I was speaking with someone four years older than before; Esme was more articulate and more able to say why she thought certain things happened. She

was also to be more specific about her own experiences and feelings, without the nervous laughter of the first talk.

Wave 3 - Three Months Post-course

Esme begins by saying she is happy about switching to the new program, and that things are going well. She says that her experience at OB comes up often -

It is not like this is the thing that's changed my life, but mostly where it comes up is, say with my boyfriend, (*who did OB and planted trees*). Now I can talk to him about the outdoors ... or what you feel like when you're on the wall face, and I never could talk about that before ... or when you are outside in your tent sleeping, all these things keep popping up that you did - stories that you have to tell.

[Did you integrate those learnings into your regular life?] Yeah definitely - (they're) much more toned down but I think that's normal. A couple of things stick that I think I should still be dealing with-not like I've worked them all out, but I am more aware of them now after being on course than I was before. **[Specifically ...?]** The big one ... that part of me inside that I didn't know and that I was afraid to know, you know and I wasn't really letting anyone else in to see it, cuz I was too scared and didn't want anyone to say that wasn't good enough... just not quite accepting who I am, or having any clue who I am ... (*here she explains how school-related stress had her very upset for a while until she thought back to course ...*) and this just all ties back to how at Outward Bound taught me to think a bit about what I wanted to get out of something so I am doing that more now - thinking not worrying.

[Has the leadership role you had there continued?] ... that sense of myself hasn't gone away really; like I am not as afraid to do it anymore. **[Have you noticed it at your new program?]** Yes. We have these tutorials there, of 10 people and a tutor to discuss things every week and it's funny but I seem to have gotten myself associated with the group of people in the tutorial that talk a lot which is a little weird for me, but I feel like I'm a pretty apparent part of the

group ... this is definitely something that I can attribute back to OB because I just realized there that you could just say what you thought and people weren't judging you. I just got more okay with saying stuff in a group, and thinking that people actually cared what I was thinking.

[Regarding the OB culture...] Within the group, we were all so diverse at first it was hard to listen to other people really, or get past that to understand each other. It was like 'I can't talk to you because I'm a 40 year old man' or whatever. But later on we overcame this, and I think stopped holding on to our regular ideas about who we were or had to be and just started to be more open to other ways.

[Were there a lot of rules compared to regular life?] ... You have like this complete freedom to start again, well maybe not start again, but like to just do what you want, and act how you want, and you're not thinking about what you are supposed to do, and what people normally think you will do. So like for me in the icebreakers, I guess often (*in regular life*) people would just pass over me quickly and not expect me to say much, or to talk last, but here I could just jump in and no one would know that that was weird. **[Why did you feel this?]** You felt that people didn't know who you were normally, so they wouldn't judge you for being different than that.

[How did gender play out on course?] ... the girls on the course did back off a lot and not really take up too many challenges, especially physical ... I guess the guys didn't care, they'd just fight over who was going to carry the most canoes and all. They (girls) also sort of wanted more of a vacation - time to talk and hang out. **[Were the girls focusing on other things to learn/succeed at?]** YES!! Actually you are totally right - it is so true because a lot of those girls who came had some big personal issues that they were trying to deal with ... so they were probably more interested in talking about stuff. (*also with instructor X*) ... I learned a lot from her - she just made me more aware of things from a woman's perspective.

[Any comments on the natural environment?] ... it's kind of like taking you away from it all - from all you know and are comfortable with... like I had no clue what I could do in the wilderness, like what I could expect. I was not feeling grounded at all there- and so this worked out well for me... when I know a place, I have a given expectation of myself and what I can do, so I don't push myself anymore than that, but here, because of not having any of these expectations already set for myself, I think that I did push myself.

[Do you think the course helped with your goals of being more independent?] ... got me thinking about what I am doing and why, and whether that is really what I want to be doing or learning. Like do I want to take on this challenge? What do I want to give to the group? Like should I keep doing dishes because no one else is doing them and then they'll say 'thanks'? Normally I would've just done the dishes or whatever and not thought about it. (*I'm*) just used to doing what's easiest and makes people happy. *She says it was Instructor X who suggested she think about these things* - just about why I was ending up doing it - to think about if I was afraid to ask others for help or to do their share. It just helped me to start being more aware of how I have to think about what I want and then decide if what I'm doing will lead to that.

In the time since our last talk, Esme seems to have deepened her understanding of the group dynamics, and her role in them. Her narrative indicates both overt and covert areas of transformation. The shift from 2 to 3 also reminded me of Rosaldo's advice that we not think of cultural knowledge as something that sits, pre-formed in our informant's minds (1986). There was an undeniably performative aspect to our discussions.

Chapter 3.2

The Transformational Culture of Liminality: Communitas on Course

Introduction

“Well I feel differently about it at different times really ... it is like it is a big bouncing board to go forward from. You know how sometimes changes come in big leaps, and so maybe OB was like a big bounding and made a new base, a base from which I can now make moves, even if those moves now are more slow.” (Esme #199)

Student discussions of the course itself provide many indications of the transformational influence of the Outward Bound experience. In this chapter, I focus on how the research participants have explained their experience and what they learned that transformed their perspective and behaviour. As discussed earlier, this ethnography focuses on the way that the distinct culture of OB influences these transformations as a counterpoint to the primarily psychology-based research that has been done on OB. In other words, using the research participants’ narratives, I have elaborated on what is already known about the transformational aspects of the OB process, by extricating specifically cultural dimensions. By “culture” and “cultural”, I mean those aspects of the experience which are extra-individualistic, and pervade the environment of the group, and influence why most students feel more open to undertaking personal transformation at OB than in their regular lives. Following Keesing, I define cultural aspects as ‘fluid, dynamic, historically dialectical and relational’ (Keesing 1994: 302-3). While culture exerts an influence on students, students also have a role in influencing the culture as will be discussed further in this chapter.

My objective is thus to elaborate on what these distinct cultural elements are, and why they facilitate positive transformation among the students. This is accomplished through presenting what the research participants have said about how their perspectives were transformed, and about why they felt that the course was a good environment for undertaking this. I have developed two simple models that clarify how the culture enters into personal transformation efforts, and how each cultural factor that the students outline is related to specific sorts of transformations. Since personal transformation, especially as an adaptive response to a changing environment, is an important part of life in North American society today, anthropologists need to develop a better understanding of the cultural context of personal transformation than we currently have.

In the previous chapter, I showed how the rites of passage model is a useful heuristic for examining the OB experience, even though there are various reasons why the course is not an exact fit for that model. Many aspects of the liminal period in the rites of passage model are instructive in enhancing our understanding of the OB culture and why it is intrinsically transformative. I will review the current understanding of liminality before introducing the models of how transformation works at OB.

Liminality

“Communitas is almost always thought of or portrayed by actors as a timeless condition, an eternal now, as a “moment in and out of time,” or as a state to which the structural view of time is not applicable.”
(V. Turner 1988: 508)

It is difficult to articulate precisely what differentiates the liminal period from regular life. This is partly because as a time of ‘anti-structure’, it is fluid and ‘eludes typical social classification’ (Turner 1969: 95). It is also the kind holistic experience for which we do not have a rich vocabulary in North America: liminality is “an experience that perpetually outstrips the possibilities of linguistic (and other cultural) expression.” (Turner 1988: 509).

In spite of this ambiguity, liminality need not be shrouded in mystery. Indeed, Turner was able to identify many of the tactics employed to create communitas and encourage transformation

during ritual liminal periods. His explanations of both concepts was, however, only partially elaborated in terms of what *communitas* or liminality would 'feel' like from the initiands' position. For example, he uses somewhat vague terms such as: "A sense of harmony with the universe" to describe *communitas* (1986: 43). I will clarify these concepts using ethnographic evidence in this chapter.

Turner did outline various tactics employed by the 'elders' or other mediators of the liminal process. One is the stripping away of material or other outward signs of difference to reduce the influence of hierarchies which can inhibit the learning of those lower in the ranks (1988: 511, 520). Another is putting liminars into unfamiliar and disorienting situations, again to create equality, and force them into the role of learner (1988[1974]: 237). These move liminars to be both more open to learning and supportive of one another. Turner also explained that the liminal period was an important time for the transmission of critical cultural knowledge from elders to initiands (1988: 520). The knowledge imparted assists the initiand to perform as expected in her new position in society post-liminality.

As discussed in Chapter 3.1 however, the OB course is not an exact parallel to the rites of passage model, and similarly, the liminal period is also an imperfect fit. OB students do not know each other beforehand, and do not normally continue to meet or act as a support network for each other after the course. Further, the students come from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences and thus equality is in many ways more usefully seen as an ideal than an actuality. However, the experience is still similar in various ways to the liminality of rites of passage. This is particularly true of its transformational influence as will be shown.

Transformation

The definition of "transformation" that is being used in this thesis was outlined in the previous chapter, but I would like to reiterate one point here. When speaking of transformation, I

am not implying that the person will be completely different, or that the change will affect all aspects of their character. Most students had some focal point for their transformative developments that recurred in various contexts of their narrative. This focal point was like a ‘learning motif’ in that it would emerge in various forms and at various times in a person’s narrative. For example, a person focused on their communication would mention what they learned about this in relation to group decision-making, getting to know people one-on-one, and even later, at home, with regards to an experience there. In the models that follow, the reader should bear in mind this definition of transformation.

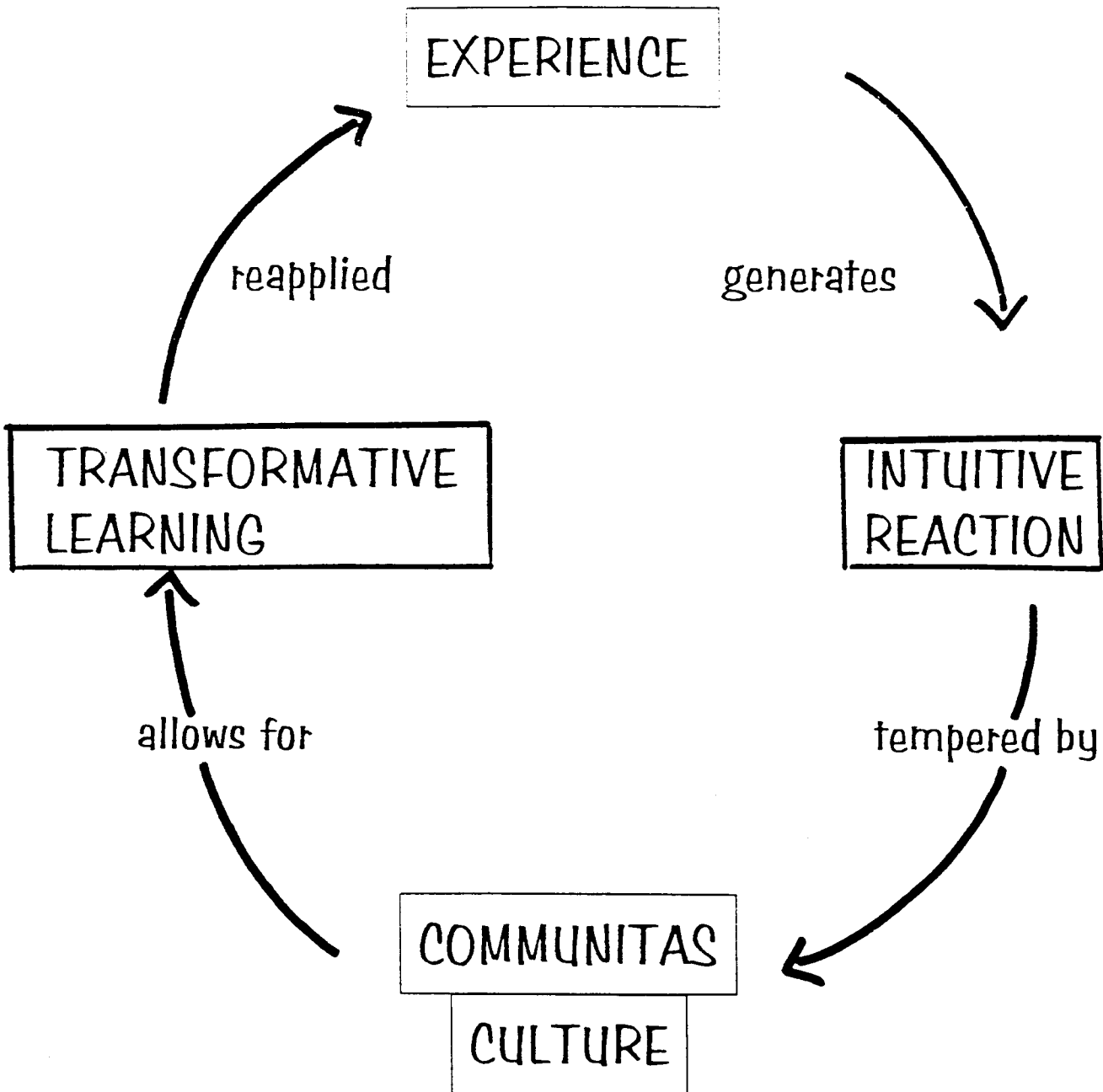
Models

The first model is what I call the “Communitas Cultural Learning Cycle” (CCLC) and is primarily intended to provide readers with a visual aid for conceptualizing the way in which the cultural environment and dynamics of the course critically influence the openness of participants to personal transformation. It is intended to enhance the explanatory value of the “Experiential Learning Model” (ELM) developed by Katz and Kolb (1972) that I introduced earlier in Chapter 2.1. This model is embedded in both the formal literature of the field, and in practitioner discourse. The model demonstrates how a learner begins with experience, moves to reflection on the particular experience, abstracts a generalized lesson from it, and finally reapplies the lesson to future experiences (see page 19).

The value of this model has been in its ability to demystify non-book-based education by demonstrating how it operates and the ways that it can be enhanced, such as by assisting the learner with making meaning of their experience in the ‘reflection’ stage, or by providing the proper ‘framing’ for an experience beforehand so that the learner is more likely to make the intended metaphoric connections on their own.

There are two ways in which the explanatory value of the ELM could be enhanced by the present ethnography. Firstly, it needs to make the influence of cultural factors more explicit in order to distinguish between the active role of instructors and students. While all personal actions have a cultural dimension, the ELM does not currently make allowances for the particular influence exerted on a person in a distinctly new cultural environment such as Outward Bound. Secondly, the model should identify where the role of the instructors plays in to creating a positive and supportive environment for transformational learning. While it may not be possible to get to a 'whole truth' about the experiential learning process, an ethnographic approach to exploring it can provide a new angle to existing research that will move us towards a 'more complete' set of partial explanations.

The Communitas Cultural Learning Cycle



The Communitas Cultural Learning Cycle

Experience:

This model begins where any experiential learning model should, and that is with the experience of the learner. The experience could be physical, such as learning to run a rapid in a canoe, or emotional such as dealing with the interpersonal dynamics of negotiating how to run the rapids with a paddling partner. It can also be more reflexive and personal as in the times spent alone on solo, observing the wilderness around you, or contemplating questions about one's beliefs and actions. The experience is the site of production of the basis for knowledge.

Intuitive Reaction:

Experiences generate a need for a response - be it an answer or an action, and a learner's initial impulse is usually to use what they already know, to decide how to proceed or react. Dewey called this process the 'formation of purposes' wherein one has current observations and existing knowledge, and combines them using judgment to make meaning of the situation and thus form a purpose or reaction (1938: 69). This process is influenced by our pool of cultural knowledge as gained in living our regular lives outside of the course. We also learn and grow from new experiences and discovering alternative approaches in our regular lives and culture plays an intrinsic role in this. In this CCLC model however, I try to show how when someone is put into a distinct new cultural environment, such as that of an OB course, there is an additional cultural dimension that must be factored in on top of the regular influence that our culture exerts on our behaviour on an ongoing basis.

Communitas Culture:

An OB course can act as a catalyst to the learning process in that its distinct, liminal culture provides a greater range of alternatives to learn from, as well as a space that encourages reflection on, and experimentation with, these alternatives more so than in regular life. In other

words, the “communitas culture” can infuse more information into the learning cycle than is normally available in regular life. At OB this culture is a dynamic creation between the OB values and model, the students, and the instructors.

In the second model below, I outline what each of these cultural factors *is*, but for the moment I wish to stay at the level of what these factors *accomplish*. First, the communitas culture provides a unique environment in which to learn to understand the motivations behind, and benefits of, perspectives and approaches different from your own. OB instructor Cam Collyer explains that in regular life, you tend to only “know the surface of other people’s experience, but then sitting around the campfire, you get to hear these wildly varying accounts of that experience from each other’s perspective.” (1996). Being exposed to the contingency of your own approaches, facilitates being more open to the validity of alternative approaches (Rorty 1989).

This kind of recognition has the potential for being a traumatic, or at least disconcerting discovery were it to occur in society’s regular mode -what Turner calls the ‘normative mode’ where we are inclined to follow rules laid out for our position in the structure- to move in our familiar grooves.

The liminal period puts people in a space outside of that normative structure - a culturally-constructed and socially-sanctioned space for being in the ‘subjunctive mood’ - where regular rules are shed in favour of others which encourage new possibilities and one is exempt from normal responsibilities and expectations. Add to this the emergent sense of communitas among liminars, and what results is a space which not just allows for, but supports and rewards people for taking on new challenges and trying out new roles or skills. In other words, in the liminal period, a ‘safe’ space structured for initiands to work through the discovery of their contingency and experiment with how they might better think about the world, and live their lives. As with all rites of passage, this support and space are temporary, which lends an element of ‘urgency’ to acting on what one is learning while the opportunity is available

Transformative Learning:

As discussed, the culture of *communitas* acts on, and influences the initiands' interpretations of, and reactions to their experience. This process facilitates personally transformative learning in that it presents alternatives to the way they currently understand the world in a setting that is intimate enough for them to establish a solid grasp on those other ways of being. The setting can also provide an opportunity to experiment with these other ways of being in, and acting on the world. While the experiential basis for the learning may occur on course, it may only become clear, comprehensible, or relevant to the student later on, at home, when other triggers or experiences combine with it to bring it into better focus.

This transformational learning does not end with the new revelation, but is eventually reapplied by the learner to future experiences. Some lessons are reapplied by students while still on the course. Colin told me a story of how he tried one approach to getting the group to do something, and when he realized that it was not working, he tried a different approach that same day, a consensus-building approach that he had seen the instructors using (# 571, 578). Other lessons seem to become more relevant later on, as was the case with Esme's newly cultivated ability to lead the group which was more important to her at school where it really mattered to her. In any case, the point is that new approaches are learned, and learned well enough that they can transform the way that they students operate in their regular lives.

Authentic or Contrived?

The concern with whether a 'created culture' of liminality is as effective in facilitating transformation as a spontaneous one was taken up by Turner in his writings. His prime concern seems to be a question of authenticity. In other words, could *communitas* that was planned as part of a structured rite of passage by elders or other teachers generate as 'authentic' a transformational

experience as one that was spontaneously generated? This question seems even more pertinent today given the much-cited postmodern malaise with over-determined social structures and control systems (Lyotard 1979). Though Turner found non-spontaneous examples of effective *communitas* such as the Franciscan Monks, he seems less than satisfied with his conclusion (1988[1974]: 511).

A serious consideration of his question leads to the uncovering an important gap in his discussions of rites of passage and, specifically, their transformational capacity. Abrahams has pointed out that we (Western society) tend to equate spontaneity with the “authentic self” (1986: 65) as if giving forethought to who we are or what we stand for, is somehow ‘inauthentic’. The sense of authentic that is being used here, then, seems to be on a par with how we use the term ‘nature’ or ‘natural’ to refer to things which are in binary opposition to ‘the cultural’ or made-up things. In the western usage, ‘natural’ has come to signify real, unadulterated, pure, and things that one can take at their face value. Spontaneous behaviour falls within the halo of ‘natural’ since it seems to be instinctual, unconsidered, and not done ‘for effect’. As Jasen has shown for the nature-culture dichotomy (1995), viewing things in narrow dualisms glosses over the complexity of their interrelations. Abrahams’ writing succinctly summarizes the complexity of pairing spontaneity with authenticity:

“In nearly all things we value openness and apparent spontaneity, even while we depreciate most expressions for following form and convention. In our desire to optimize authenticating acts at the expense of authoritative ones, we seem to appreciate most those moments we can say afterward were big but which (*supposedly*) stole up on us and took us unawares. We are (*however*) surprised only by the fulfillment of our expectations.”
(Abrahams 1986: 63)

While this analysis should demonstrate that there is no basis for assuming that spontaneity is necessary for an ‘authentic’ feeling of *communitas* among liminars, spontaneity does deserve consideration on the grounds of how people will interpret their experiences. That is to say that some people do hold this cynical attitude towards any experiences which they perceive as being

contrived for a certain effect. This attitude affects a person's interpretation of the course, and hinders the likelihood that they will feel a sense of *communitas* with their group. Lacking this support also limits their potential for transformational learning. For example, one student, Katherine, was uneasy right from our first discussion, responding with *'It's not like I want to have this big change in my life'* even when I was not asking questions related to change. After the course, in the second two talks, some positive aspects of the experience emerged for her, but her overall stance remained similar - *"I haven't changed anything. I'm still the same."* (#307). The passage below reflects the kind of wariness or cynicism that she carried into most of her observations.

[Did you have any good group discussions?] Not really. Well we usually talked before we eat in circle and somebody reads a verse- and sometimes we'd have a game like where you pick one word to describe the day; kind of pointless activities. You know, like you say "challenging" (but) its not really what you're thinking but you just say a word- lots of stuff was pointless like that. **[How do you mean 'pointless'?]** -just wasting your time because its stupid. It just drags on and on and nobody really cares they just say 'it was fun'.

(Katherine #258)

The discussions with Katherine were instructive precisely because of this cynicism and what it revealed about how *communitas* is not something that just overwhelms people and controls them: it is clearly a dialectical production requiring the active involvement of the learner for its formation and effectiveness. Geoff's musings on course reflect this point as well: *"I remember trying to analyze why they (instructors) were doing that- like: 'Why did they stop the canoes now? Why are they making us talk about certain things? Why do we do these little circles?'"* (#893). Clearly, he was actively engaged in assessing, adopting and adapting the cultural mood of his group.

The rites of passage model currently does not account for people who are cynical or negative about being manipulated into feeling or doing certain things. By not discussing these occurrences, the rites of passage model implicitly assumes that these rituals are effective for 100% of the initiands. This does not appear to be the case among the research participants in this

ethnography. While there is not time in this thesis to explore the reasons for this resistance in depth, one possible instructional strategy can be offered for mitigating this kind of reaction on course. That is to make it even more clear to students at the outset that it is ‘their course’ and thus in their power to decide what they want to take out of the experience. This helps to move responsibility for learning into the students’ perceived locus of control thereby removing the likelihood that they will see the instructors as ‘manipulators’.

Communitas Cultural Elements

“I am not using ‘polyphony’ as such as my basic method but different living viewpoints or loci of consciousness; the prime end product of the experience being not a text but witness—a word related to witting, knowing- and the acceptance of subjectivity.”

(E. Turner 1993: 45)

In order to operationalize the cycle introduced earlier, and to expand on the elements of the communitas culture which emerged as important for OB, I have put together a second chart outlining those cultural factors which facilitate transformation. The most effective way to explain this model, is to use ethnographic examples which speak to the cultural elements or transformations as I will do below. Two points to bear in mind are that it is a cyclical model, always reconnecting with new experiences. Secondly, the transformational learning is arranged so that as you move down the page, the difficulty of the transformational learning increases. So in other words, while almost all of the participants emerged from the course with an improved sense of self-confidence, only a few articulated, or manifested how the experience moved them to more clarity or perspective.

Each column of this chart is aligned with the 4 points of the CCLC model discussed above. For OB, ‘Experience’ is represented by the “Course Elements” to which the students are exposed. I have delineated 4 basic types of course elements, each of which is connected to the next stages. The second column represents our regular, intuitive personal reactions to the course elements. In column three, I used student descriptions of what aspects of the course culture allowed them to feel more open to trying new things on course, and I have called these the factors of communitas culture. The final column specifies the key kinds of transformations that the students had as a result of the combination of the new experiences and the influence of the communitas culture. As noted, the transformations are listed from most common to least common (most difficult) down the chart. I will work through each of the communitas cultural factors below, giving ethnographic examples to illustrate where valuable.

The Communitas Cultural learning Cycle

| <u>Course Elements</u> | <u>Intuitive Reaction</u> | <u>Communitas Culture</u> | <u>Transformation</u> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Real Challenges (physical, emotional, mental, etc.) | -Frustration with early failures and hardships -Excitement with success | * Support for both success & failure from group and instructors * Adventure is intrinsic to course | * Improved Confidence in one's ability * Understand reward for Struggle and risk |
| 2. Interdependence with real responsibility | -Frustration with others' approaches to decision-making -Frustration with ambiguity and not being given 'right' answer | * Acceptance of diversity : chance to experience diverse approaches at work * Open Communication with Others : understand others' motivations via: - <i>formal</i> : discussion circles, debriefs - <i>informal</i> : extended intimate interaction | * Compassion : - Empathize with other positions -comfortable with Ambiguity |
| 3. Fresh Start: -minimal prior expectations of your ability | -Anxiety in trying to establish role /position in group | * Communication with Self : time and place to be alone to consider possible strategies and effects of them | * Reflexivity and Self-awareness |
| -lack normal support network | -Seek comfort and empathy | * Culture of Possibility or 'subjunctive mood' | * Re-envisioning Self (s) -experiment with new roles |
| 4. Separation from regular life | -Resist letting go of home concerns /status -Anxiety over lack of familiarity -Ends-focus | * Simplicity - encourages shedding outside concerns and just 'being present' * Patience with Learning - reduced focus on 'right' answer and speed | * Clarity : able to see core issues * Perspective : enhanced sense of the 'big picture' |

Communitas Cultural Elements

Support

Adventure

Acceptance of Diversity

Open Communication with Others

Open Communication with Self

Culture of Possibility

Simplicity

Patience with Learning

1. Culture of Support & Emphasis on Adventure

The Outward Bound courses are structured to ensure that no one leaves without experiencing ‘real challenges’ on physical, emotional, and mental levels. As has been previously discussed, the participants are immersed in an unfamiliar setting, with strangers, and must learn new technical skills like paddling, as well as other interpersonal skills in order to survive and make it to their destination. By ‘real’, I mean that there is a potential for failure, and very often that is what happens, particularly in the early stages of the course when the group has yet to come together in a productive way. Because most students perceive them to be difficult challenges, the personal reactions range from excitement with successes to serious frustration with failures and hardships, on both a personal and a group-level. As Joseph explains, dealing with the differing abilities of others is not always an exercise in compassion ... “the strong paddlers would paddle hard, and then we’d have to wait for the slower ones ... for the person who had to stern for those who weren’t as strong, it’s just such a pain in the ass ... they’re frustrated all day.” (#742).

On the flip side, the exhilaration that people feel when they do succeed can override many of the hardships and provides a very real, immediate ‘reward’ to a person for taking the risk to try something new. There are obviously many examples of people feeling great about finishing a hard portage or making it down the rapids. What follows are two participants talking about more social risks and realizations that they had.

“I just liked being funny- it attracts people, makes them a little more friendly. When people are laughing you get to see more of them, they’re not as restricted or reserved. You actually get to know them ...” (Bill #520)

[What made you decide to share more, versus being passive?] “At first I was being quiet, then I started talking to Tammy, and then she started talking to other people too. So I saw that if I go and do something, there will be an effect, but if I do nothing, it’s not going to change anything” (Jarred #1717)

There are two elements of the *communitas* culture that act on both of these reactions. The excitement that accompanies the success is in large part built into the course culture because the school makes *adventure* a priority. By including challenges which are intrinsically rewarding to accomplish, like making it up a mountain face, as opposed to only ones that are necessary evils for survival, the OB model has intrinsic rewards for participants. Thus the cultural emphasis on adventure ensures a variety of experiences where the liminar will be exposed to the *'benefit'* of hard work and struggle. Turner wrote that each unit of experience has two parts: our struggle to overcome some obstacle, and the consummation or fulfillment of the struggle: it is "the passage from disturbance into harmony is that of intensest life." (V. Turner 1986: 38). Similarly, many students connected their 'best memory' with an obstacle that they overcame. Cam Collyer, an instructor, suggests that the threshold between struggle and success can be the "learning edge" for people, and argues that instructors can play a role in facilitating moments like this for the group (1996).

The second element of *communitas* at work here is a cultural emphasis on Support. This includes support for both success and failure, and comes initially from the instructors, but is usually eventually taken over by the group members. Above, Esme discusses several instances of supportive behaviour, by and for her on course, and the positive impact it had on how she viewed her own abilities. This is a characteristic effect of a supportive culture and leads to transformed confidence in one's ability. The following examples echo this link:

"Kayaking was challenging for a lot of people; there were a few people who were really scared and they felt really uncomfortable doing it and I think the group was really good in helping them get used to the idea of rolling over, being strapped into a piece of plastic!" (Geoff #839)

[Did you see helpful behaviour?] "Helpfulness? I think this was back and forth in the group the whole way through -everyone was helpful with someone at some time" (Geoff #859)

[Before the course, you said you wanted to work on your self-esteem; did you?] "I didn't have to work on it here! My friends at home don't give me support, I just support them... (my friends here) show support for me cause they want to ... way more confident" (Simone #1193)

[What do you miss most about course?] “Just being in a caring and comfortable environment that was created by us ... we were all really direct with each other ... there was lots of encouragement and we were supportive. I don’t really get that in the city, especially because I’m my own worst critic”. (Kirin #974)

“My group helped me to be more comfortable with myself just by their actions around me; by their sociability, their kindness I guess.” (Geoff #892)

2. Accepting diversity & Open communication with others

The next set of factors in the cycle shows how the experience of being interdependent with the group can culminate in transforming students’ sense of compassion. This area is particularly relevant as it is a key focus area in the OB mission. The course is designed so that each person in the group must learn to depend on the others in order to make it through, meaning that not only are you *interdependent*, but you also have *real responsibility* for your own, and others’ physical and emotional safety. As one student said: “... *you have to figure out how to work as a team ... taking different people’s ideas and combining them ... at first you think ‘O.K. I can solve all the problems’ but then after a while ‘No, I need other people’.*” (Simone #1230). This can lead to positive experiences such as Liz meeting a soul-mate on her course: “*I met Tanya right away, that was helpful cause I fed off her; her strength ... she made me want to be strong too.*” (#1593). Or Holden, who was surprised that he felt compelled to help others with their chores on course - “*Normally I’d say ‘do it yourself- I did mine!’*” (#1813).

Often however, being thrown into this kind of situation leads to a personal reaction of *frustration* - both with other’s approaches to decision-making, and with the ambiguity of not being given ‘the answer’ - or a sense that things are not fair. One example is when Colin was trying to get the group to make a decision on their own and some people in the group insisted on asking the instructors for help - he was frustrated that they could not understand that the point of the task was to do it on their own (#573). Other little things like people doing their fair share of dishes could

lead to frustration both because of differences in styles and because of the seeming unfairness (Jeremy #697). In Esme's narrative, we sense her discomfort with the ambiguity around what they did for their community service project at Gull Bay: 'Was it a good thing or not?' Liz expressed frustration with what she initially perceived as a lack of guidance: "*There was this stage where I felt like: 'You gotta tell me what's going on, I've never done this before'. .. at home people tell me what to do if I don't know how to do it.*" (Liz #1584)

The initial frustration that most people respond with in regular life, as on course, is again tempered by two elements of the *communitas* culture of the course: *acceptance of diversity*, and the encouragement of *open communication with others*. By putting together ten people who have not met before, the course is almost guaranteed to expose people to a diverse set of characters and approaches to work and life. Instructors encourage people to be open to what they can learn from these different approaches, as an alternative to the instinctive frustration. Holden describes how he felt about this aspect of course:

"I met a bunch of complete strangers. Saw a whole new lineup of different personalities. It's just knowledge. It's just stuff that I now have in my head about different people. Not like about certain other people, like 'this guy was like this', but about different kinds of people ... So it's kind of prepared me I guess in that way for the future ... like knowledge is power I guess - I know more than the next guy, so I'm gonna win! (*laughs*)" (Holden #1850)

The second cultural element is the encouragement for *open communication with others* in the group. This happens on a formal level with discussion circles that are initiated by instructors to foster openness regarding both group decisions, issues among people, and also just sharing feelings after a particularly hard or good day. Communication also occurs on an informal level among participants throughout the course, just because you are together for this extended period. OB also fosters this by requiring people to rotate their tent- and canoe-partners in order to allow everyone a chance to work with others. What follows are some student comments about the openness of communication on course:

[Were sharing circles important?] Yes- it let you know how everybody was feeling on a given day ... if it hadn't been that way, you would've formed opinions more. Like everybody forms prejudices from first impressions and everybody judges ... that would've lasted a lot longer if we hadn't done the circle thing. (Jeremy #696)

“Near the end of course people really started to say their feelings and being honest ... and not really feeling stupid about it. They realized that their ideas wouldn't be shunned.” (Geoff #948)

[Did anybody share interesting things in circle?] “Yes, we'd go around and make sure everyone put in something. It was good because say before we went rock climbing, we'd share our feelings so everyone would know how we felt about it, tell everyone all at once and have a general understanding about everyone.” (Deon #1369)

A few interesting anecdotes emerged that revealed gender differences in conversational patterns, and general approaches to group living. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully delve into that, it is important to note the way in which these differences in approach mean that males and females clearly interpret situations on course in distinct ways. Educating instructors on how these cultural dynamics operate would help to call attention to them, and perhaps mitigate them. One example is Maria, a bright, athletic and very warm young woman who in her own school was a team captain and had many friends. She expressed frustration with the coed environment in various domains, one of which is around communication:

(Regarding group decisions) ... “I'm not used to camping with guys ... Some people wanted to be heard more. Sometimes I'd feel that when I said something no one would hear, so much going on, I'd have to sit back. Some made themselves heard... I guess you have to do that in a big group.”
[Did formal sharing circles help in voicing your opinion?] Yes because I got my turn. (outside of the circle) sometimes no one would listen; had to beg to be heard” (Maria #1519-20)

Instructors at OB are trained to encourage communication among students and one of the tools for doing this is the ‘frame and debrief’ of experiences on course¹. These can also be called the “entry and exit” to the experience (Collyer 1996). For example, at breakfast before a hard day of white-water kayaking, the instructors might introduce some thoughts for students to discuss

¹ Experiential, integrated programming like Outward Bound, encourages learners to take responsibility for their own learning, and to see instructors as resources, rather than as sources of ‘answers’ or rules.

things in a way that could diminish their nervousness, such as talking about the natural rhythm of the river, rather than focusing on its danger. Another approach would be to talk about each person's expectations for the day, how realistic they were, and perhaps alternative ways to define 'success' for the day. After the experience, a debrief in a discussion circle can help students to process (draw learning from) what they went through as per the Experiential Learning Model introduced earlier, making connections that they may not otherwise make.

Collyer also feels that encouraging "regular processing creates a culture of communication" (loc. cit.) which is part of what I am suggesting is going to help lead to transformative learning. It is helpful to think about each of these 'entry and exit' units of experience on the course in the larger context of the rites of passage model: in a sense, these smaller units are like 'scenes of Passage' that contribute to the larger transformational process of the whole course. This idea has explanatory appeal in that it helps to further diminish the 'mystery' of how students come out of a 'simple camping trip' with these fundamental transformations in their perspectives. This shows that their experience is actually more like a series of small steps, rather than one large leap.

The cultural elements discussed, as applied to the liminars' frustrations, will for many students lead to an increased capacity for *compassion*. Compassion has two sides, the first of which is the ability to empathize with other people's positions or beliefs, not just to tolerate it. This kind of learning is more difficult to come to than the earlier ones of confidence and hard-work, so while many did emerge transformed in this domain, I do not feel that *all* of the research participants did. For instance, Holden, an otherwise levelheaded person, was adamant that another guy on his course was intolerable. When I asked him whether he would have done anything differently in how he handled that situation, he replied emphatically - "*I can't think of how I could*

For an extended discussion of how students' perceptions of the role of teachers changes to include teachers as part of 'us', see Henderson and Mehta 1996.

have. He was the opposite of my soul-mate. We weren't ever supposed to meet." (#1844).

However, many students did cultivate this skill. For example, when Jeremy spoke up to convince the group they needed to stop for the night, he said:

"I think people did listen because I was on the side of the people who were quiet and didn't want to say they were tired. So I just said 'hey look - there are people that aren't as strong as you - they can't push anymore. [Were you tired?] No, but I didn't want to sit back and just let these people get pushed around. Normally at home I wouldn't have done that.'" (Jeremy #691).

Jeremy also told another story about one guy who was always chiding others in the group for not being gutsy enough, until the day that the group had to do a 'trust initiative' and he "completely chickened out". He said this helped the group to see that everyone has their fears, and that once you realize this, you are less likely to judge people right away: *"At some point in the course, everybody is going to hold the position that everybody else held at another point- it's like a cycle."* (#698).

The second side of the kind of capacity for compassion that students seem to develop out of their rite of passage experience is the ability to see that most issues and actions have gray areas and complexities underlying them which are not initially apparent. One of the clearest articulations of this was from Kirin:

"The definition of a leader becomes questionable to me after OB because leadership is found in so many different forms ... A leader in one area is also a follower in another area, not an ultimate leader, everyone leads in their own way." (#986). "Before I always thought in black and white- someone who gets high marks is smart, low marks dumb. Now, I see more shades of gray. Someone with low marks might not care about school and it's not their thing ... I guess I am questioning everything I thought about before and took positions on." (Kirin #989)

In a similar vein, Jarred tried to explain how the course made him see how many options he had not considered before: *"After the course I have started to question my actions a lot more ... maybe I'm not as well-defined as I thought. My attitude and the way I think changes everyday and that maybe I don't really have a definite- like, personality."* (#1743). In other words, the

experience can problematize certain beliefs, and introduce potential alternatives for people to consider.

3. Communication with Self & Culture of Possibility

The next course element that all students experience is what I call a *fresh start*. The benefit of having a fresh start is that there are few prior expectations put on a person since no one knows how they normally behave. The difficulty of a fresh start is that the initiand must forgo the support network of friends that they can normally rely on at home. By the end of the course, people will often say that both of these aspects were liberating, but it seems that in the early stages of the course, these elements cause discomfort. One ubiquitous reaction is anxiety as the person scrambles to establish their position, or role in the group. Most people fall back on telling tales from their regular lives at the beginning as a form of identity-construction within the new group. A few will demonstrate their physical or organizational skills in the group activities to the same end. Either way, their initial reaction is typically an unexamined replication of their ‘regular personae’. In addition, participants tend to seek approval from others in the group to replace the regular support network.

Collyer suggests that eventually on a course there is a shift away from ‘what was’ in regular life, to “Well, what have we got here now?” when the participants become more ‘present’ in the course and aware of what the experience has to offer them (1996). Again, I suggest that two aspects of the *communitas* culture act on their initial reactions. The first element is the encouragement provided for *open communication with oneself*. The course is structured to give students the time and space to be alone, or at least alone with their thoughts. A few examples include: personal journals for students; catalysts for thought in discussion circles; and solo, the two day period where the students camp on their own and are encouraged to reflect on various things. Chloe told me that: “Solo is good because it gives people time in the middle for a break. To

think about everyone and what's going on and what to deal with. You get a chance to step back away from it (course)." (#1137).

Jeremy also explained how he took advantage of the alone time: *"That's the first time you're by yourself, and you do get time to think back over what's happened and what's going to happen over the rest of the course, and what you're going to do when you get home."* (#694).

Kirin was able to begin a more honest dialogue with herself through an interaction with another woman in her group who criticized her for attention-seeking: *"It really hit where it hurt- I didn't want to be known as conceited ... put me on the defensive, I guess because it was true. See, I didn't know that before but because I'm being so open here; like in the city I lie, I pretend I'm not proud."* (#976).

Again, not all participants were interested in or consciously influenced by the idea of self-dialogue. Some, like Wayne and Joseph, were more action-oriented and simply did not feel a need, or see value in this aspect of the course. Holden felt that he thought about things enough already at home and was impatient with being 'told' that he should do it on course:

"I don't need someone to tell me when to think or what to think about. Solo was annoying ... I told Instructor B that, and he told me that in Tibet monks believe boredom is the perfect state of mind ... So I was just supposed to sit there and figure out the meaning of life (laughs) [So the meaning didn't jump out at you? (joking)] No! I'm fif-teeeeen for cripes sake! I'm not looking to figure that stuff out! (laughs)" (Holden #1814)

The second cultural element that is at play here is what Turner has called the 'subjunctive mood' or the mood of possibility as discussed in Chapter 3.1. In a sense it is prevalent throughout all of these examples as it is a fundamental part of what differentiates the liminal period from regular life. It is particularly relevant though for people who are anxious to reestablish a position and identity for themselves in their new social group of initiands. The prevailing subjunctive mood works in conjunction with the increased emphasis on communication with oneself, in that as liminars undertake this internal dialogue, the culture of possibility influences many of them to take the risk of acting on their new perspective. Geoff explained his willingness to overcome his

inhibitions and experiment with a new, more social role by saying: *“Well, they don’t really know me or my past so -whatever, just go for it! And that turned out to be a lot easier than I thought it would be.”* (#887). Jarred puts it in the abstract saying that OB puts you *“out of your comfort zone, and shows you you can cope. Allows you to say ‘I can’t do that!’, and then shows you that you can.”* (#1953).

So not only do these two cultural elements transform initiands’ *reflexive ability* and thus self-awareness, but they can also inspire a person to *re-envision* themselves and to *experiment* with some of those roles either on course, or later in regular life. Kirin drew metaphoric significance from the mix of healthy and fallen trees that were around her on her solo, about how she could think about herself and others as changing and fragile: *“... they looked the same on the outside ... but some were rotten on the inside ... (it made me think of people and) how the strong one will one day be broken down like the other one”* (#965). Chloe combined reflexivity and re-envisioning to transform her attitude to life back at home:

“I felt more laid-back after the course- like I knew who I was ... that may not be the right phrase because I never really know (laughs), but I felt as if whatever I am right now, that is okay. Not that you’re problem-free ... you’re just more accepting of the good and bad in yourself ... You know that some days its going to rain, and some days its going to be sunny.” (Chloe #1130)

4. Simplicity & Patience

In this last segment of the model, we are dealing with a level of transformation that only a few of the participants were able to articulate. Here we begin with how the course entails that the students be separated from their regular life, much as has been discussed in Chapter 3.1. As Jeremy says - *“It’s interesting because you’re removed from your life, but it’s totally about your life”* (#695). Personal reactions to this vary, especially since some have chosen to come, while others have been pushed to come by their parents, spouses, or teachers. Three common reactions

are: to resist letting go of concerns from home, to be anxious over the lack of familiarity, and to be ends-focused.

While some people transform in this way, there are others who do not get beyond these strategies at all such as one man who focused only on his successful accomplishment of physical and mental challenges, with minimal reference or reflection on others in the group.

The two elements of *communitas* culture that influence these behaviours for some are an emphasis on *simplicity* and *patience*. Simplicity contributes to *communitas* because it encourages initiands to shed their outside concerns and interests in order that they can “be present” for the current experience.

Patience refers to a calmness or slowing-down that most instructors try to encourage. The aim is to reduce the ends-focus, the ‘get the right answer and get it fast’ mood that many groups begin with as people jockey for position. For example, in decision-making instructors usually try to show the group why the slower process of consensus-building will be more beneficial in the long-run. An instructor might also set an example by making the time to take in the forest on a portage. Holden’s discussion of pre-dinner quiet circles shows how these cultural norms can shift one’s perspective:

“We all thought they (dinner circles) were funny at first- stupid. But at the end they were just natural, part of the routine. Was a good thing, we could all just be quiet for a minute. It’s nice to be with the group in quiet - it’s like the group is part of you.” (Holden #1841)

These experiences, tempered by the *communitas* culture of simplicity and patience, have the potential to transform initiands’ ability to establish clarity and perspective. By clarity, I mean the ability to see what the core issues are, and not get caught up in the details of the situation. By perspective, I mean having a sense of the ‘big picture’ - a broader view of a situation or aspect of one’s life. Maria said that being outdoors helped with this: Nature “*gives you the sense of no problems, and that helps you think about things more clearly than in a city or inside with stuff to*

distract you.” (#1545). Colin develops a better perspective on what originally frustrated him about students being reticent to make any decisions without asking the instructors for affirmation:

“I find that in certain situations, they didn’t know how to handle it, or can’t make decisions for them selves, they always want to turn to the instructors... but we are here, we have full capability to make these decisions, if it is a bad decision, they’d tell us. .. But I think we don’t trust ourselves, because at home people aren’t allowed to do things. (Colin #938)

Geoff explained how he used to just dive right into a problem or challenge, whereas now he puts more forethought into being clear about it first. *“Instead of figuring things out as I went along, I’ve tried to plan it out ahead and maybe divided the group work up more fairly.”* (#884).

The ability to transform one’s perspective on a situation is significant in that it equips the learner with a broader or deeper lens with which to view his or her world and to make sense of it. The culture of simplicity and patience on course seem to help facilitate taking the time to think things through more fully which results in clarity and perspective. As with all of the transformational learning, these ones will ideally be reapplied by the learner to future experiences.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented ethnographic evidence in support of the idea that the OB course acts as a transformational experience for many of its participants. Using the idea of a liminal period from the rites of passage model illuminates certain aspects of why the experience facilitates transformation. The explication of the OB students’ explanations of their experience contributes to the anthropological understanding of these concepts. It also points to differences in this genre of experience in contemporary society as compared with the pre-industrialized societies on which the model was based.

The eight *communitas* cultural factors are not intended to be a complete recipe for creating *communitas*, however they are a good indication of what cultural factors OB students felt contributed to their openness to transformational learning on course. I have focused on the way in

which cultural factors particular to the kind of liminal period that OB represents, whether in the rites of passage model or the retreat model discussed earlier, are critical to facilitating transformation. Having shown how the process helps people to transform, the next task is to demonstrate that the change is lasting and not simply a small blip on their personal development curve that soon flattens back to normal. In the next chapter, I will show that the changes have continuity in students' regular lives and offer possible explanations for why.

Chapter 3.3

Jeremy's Story

Wave One - Pre-course

Jeremy is an 18 year old from southern Ontario and has just finished grade twelve. Our initial conversation was casual and open. My overall sense was that Jeremy had not thought about the course too much, but was interested in doing something different and 'getting away' for awhile.

Legend: Regular = direct quotes of students; [words] = my questions; *italics* = my thoughts

[Could you start by giving me a picture of your life so far?] Okay well there hasn't been much change: one public school the whole way, one high school, always in same city, and one house the whole time, until last year we moved from the country to a nicer house in town.

[What kinds of things do you like doing?] I've always liked fishing and being outdoors - which is probably the main reason I'm taking Outward Bound; I got into guitar about a year and a half ago, but I don't really play with other people or a band. I like acoustic, light stuff. I got a guitar for Christmas so I picked it up. I've always had an ear for music. I don't think I'll stop playing, but I'm not putting it at priority number one... I'm not really into computers or TV. I like playing pool at home. I play hockey in house league in the winter... I didn't do school sports because I have always had a paper route after school. With friends we mostly just hang out a lot. We try to find parties but there's not much going on in Brantford.

Jeremy has a few different groups of friends because he likes doing a variety of things. In the groups, he says he has "never been much of a leader" but is also not totally quiet. [So you go with the flow?] Kind of - I go with the flow but if the flow sucks then I go somewhere else! (laughs) [And if you do have to lead?] ... I'm afraid of being too power-hungry, but it actually ends up the opposite - I don't lead enough.

[How is school?] Uhh- it could be better. [Is that important to you?] Yeah, it should be. It used to be. I just got side-tracked in the last couple of years - hanging out with my friends and stuff - I found something better to do. I'd like to be doing better.

[Why did you want to do OB?] I heard about it on Much Music a while ago. A couple of friends did it too. My parents signed me up for my birthday, so I didn't really decide. Now that I'm going, I think I'll like being in the middle of nowhere ... I'm looking forward to the solo. I like being up north where the air is so much cleaner and all. Hope I can do some fishing. I like that a lot; I do it with my mom.

[How would you describe yourself?] Friendly- like not on-guard; not hostile; intelligent, I guess - I don't think I'm dumb; creative; [Anything you'd change?] I'd like to get rid of the introvert side of me - to become more outgoing. I'm not totally spontaneous but I'll try new stuff.

Wave Two - Final Day of Course

When Jeremy and I met on his group's clean-up day, he was tired and in a fairly serious mood. He was frustrated with various aspects of the course and seemed absorbed in how to resolve those. He also tells of many fun moments. I've kept this section short to allow more focus on Wave 3.

That's the thing , they didn't tell us anything. [Oh really?] We didn't even know yesterday what we were going to be doing (*for marathon*) today; it's a total surprise! (*He explains how initially, the students all thought the instructors would have the answers and were thus disappointed when they didn't.*) [Would you have explained more if you were the instructor?] In the beginning probably- but like I said, it was kind of neat the way they did it. It was like they (*instructors*) were learning too. *Another example of lack of information that he talked about was the white-water kayaking. He felt that more information or teaching up-front would've helped him and a few others feel more comfortable doing it, though he said that most were comfortable.*

[What kind of role did you have in this group?] Mediator. I did a lot of mediating because there were a lot of arguments ... our group got along pretty well but ... a lot of people

would get on edge. We had rain for the last four days of our trip, so everybody's smelly and dirty and they've been out in the wilderness for ten days and everything's wet. You don't have any dry clothes or anything and people just - certain people would get bitter and just get a lot more upset than others and others will be trying to go with the group. **[Where do you fit into this scene?]** It takes quite a bit to get me upset so I was just saying: "Hey don't worry about it- just be happy." *(laughs)* For a couple of days when everybody was just getting really bitchy we *(Jen and he)* just had a little thing going where we'd be the 'happy boat'. We'd just be smiling all the time ... trying to cheer everybody up basically... everybody thought they knew everything and stuff like that, and we'd say: 'Hey who cares? Just let's have fun!' I think it gave them *(others)* a chance to think about it.

[How did you chose that way of dealing with it?] I basically didn't want to get involved ... *(because then I'd)* get bitchy, then I wouldn't be having a good time. So I'd just lay back and try to make other people happy without totally getting involved in their arguments about ... the map, how to start a fire, who's going too fast, who's going too slow. **[Did you do much of the navigating?]** Not really, I kind of left it to other people.

[Any other roles you had?] Actually, I did cook quite a bit of the time and I enjoyed doing that, because it was fun. ... we didn't really have much of a leader ... we tried to have a different coordinator everyday, but again, when that was my role I just tried to lead by example. I didn't really tell anybody to do anything I just said "Look guys let's just get together and do it."

[Any other styles?] Some of the louder people would *tell* people, you know, just try and delegate responsibility. Nobody really objected to it, it's just that I don't think that it made people quite as happy ... not just doing it for fun. Other people - you couldn't even tell they were leader of the day- they wouldn't talk.

A theme of 'people should just chill out' ran through Jeremy's narrative this time- he felt that many people were arguing about trivial things. His solution of trying to 'cheer' people up and stop complaining was creative but at this point, I wasn't sure that he had actually grown

from the experience. The 'happy' strategy seemed like a problem-avoidance tool that just kept him from having to be 'too involved'. It seemed like he had picked up something from playing mediator, but I was uncertain of whether it would last.

Wave Three - 3 Months Post-course

[Can you give me a sense of what's going on in your life now?] Tons and tons! I have to apply to university in a month so I've got grades to worry about and stuff. It's a big change- you have to decide the rest of your life. I want to go to B.C. I don't want to stay in Ontario.

[What program?] Physics. It is easy for me. I have a logical mind, I work well with numbers and theories and stuff. I can write O.K., but I don't like it as well. **[This sounds different than in the summer ...]** I got back into the school thing a lot... I just realized that if I didn't get back into it, I wasn't going to university next year and then I'd have to stay here for another year and live at home! (*laughs*)

[How have things been since you returned?] I found myself really relaxed when I got back - just like: 'Who cares?' ... I'm playing hockey again this year, but still not doing school sports. I guess I haven't really jumped-up my physical activity much. Socially, I branched out quite a bit actually- I found myself a lot more outgoing when I got back, talking to people was a lot easier and stuff. I started hanging around different groups and stuff **[How so?]** I just found myself more outgoing... my self-confidence raised a lot. I guess from working with other people; the team work kind of thing.

[Can you compare the way you work with other people now with before the course?] All I can say is that I'm more outgoing ... Just getting involved and delegating responsibilities; I got a lot better at that. On course, (*I was*) talking to people, sitting around, giving my point of view, expressing my opinions... before I was more reluctant to talk. (*On course once*), we were all trying to decide whether to keep going ... I think before hand I would've just sat back and let everybody else decide, but I kind of just got in there and said: "Okay, this is what's happening...".

[Did people listen?] I think people did, because I was on the side of the people who were quiet and didn't want to say they were tired ... I didn't want to sit back and just let these people get pushed around. Normally at home I wouldn't have done that.

[Why do you think you behaved differently on course?] I think that the small group setting brought out a lot in everybody. It made everybody comfortable. And like if you develop all those skills in a small group, it is easy to branch them out to a large group. **[Like a testing ground?]** Yeah, a lot of people wouldn't have enough self confidence, and would be scared to just jump out and do it in a big group.

[So what do you get out of Outward Bound?] hmmm- a lot of fun! It does make you appreciate your country- not as a nation but as a place. It makes you appreciate the way people used to live- voyageurs and stuff. I think it teaches a lot of balance - it helps you balance your thoughts, balance your use of the forest. **[How was the balance of activity and down-time on the course?]** Pretty good ... by the time you get done everything , its not like (*you*) want to go wander around in the dark... but I think if we'd only paddled half the day, everybody would have gotten pretty restless staying in one place... When you're paddling, it isn't that demanding on your head - it's a motor skill so you don't think about every stroke- you can look around.

[Were the sharing circles important?] Yeah- it let everyone get their thoughts out ... if it hadn't been that way, you would've formed opinions more, like everybody forms prejudices from first impressions and everybody judges whether they want to admit it or not, and I think that would've lasted a lot longer if we hadn't done the circle things.

[Were there diverse people in the group?] Yeah, it taught me a lot about group dynamics- the way certain people withdraw from the group, and (others) just jump into a position in the group. Certain people have leadership skills and others will sit back and take orders and stuff. The instructors tried to fix it up by saying certain people would do certain things each day.

That lets the strong 'leader people' sit back and see what it's like on the other end of the spectrum. **[Did that give you a chance to lead?]** - I've never really been prone to do that ... (but now) if I'm in a group with a lot of people that I don't know, then I'll try more than I would have to speak my voice- make my opinions known ... On course, certain people would lead even when they weren't wanted - especially when they weren't wanted (laughs). And it made everybody else see that they didn't want to be like that.

Jeremy tells the story I relayed in Chapter 3.2 about how a guy teased a girl all trip because she was scared about rock-climbing, but then when it came to a certain 'trust' initiative, he was scared and wouldn't do it. Jeremy explains that this was typical of how the course helped you to understand how other people felt:

At some point in the course, everybody is going to hold the position that everybody else held at another point - it is like a cycle. Everybody's going to go through highs, and feel comfortable doing one thing, and excited about it, and then get apprehensive about another thing.

[What's the point of OB?] I think I'll go with the balance theme- its about balancing your thoughts, your life, your actions, your ego, its really about pushing yourself too- *(then Jeremy jokes as an aside)* 'Hey that's a good one, pushing yourself- Pamela will like that heh heh' ... There's real life involved in it. It's interesting because you're removed from your life, but its totally about your life kind of thing.

... you do see your life as before, during and after, even though its only a 3-week period and for some people there are 18 years before that. I saw it like that, though not during the course.

Jeremy took a much broader perspective in this discussion. It seemed that he had taken some of his frustration from things that bothered him on course, and turned them into insights about how people operate.

Chapter 3.3

The Ongoing Influence of Experiential Memories

“I don’t have to consciously think about (what I learned at OB) anymore - if it’s in me, I apply it. It is what I think the overall effect should be ... the learning will just be incorporated into your character traits.”
(Wayne #1317)

Introduction

“It is now up to the individuals themselves to make their own discoveries, their own interpretation, and thus move towards perceiving relationships in new ways, towards ‘tasting’ new realities.”
(Fellner 1976: 249)

How do you know if someone has learned a lesson well? In dealing with the kind of subjectively-conditioned, somewhat enigmatic learning in which experiential educators traffic, this task is particularly challenging. First, as Enright has discussed, the concepts themselves, such as leadership, compassion, and communication are difficult to define, let alone measure (1988: 15). In addition, each student’s pre-course level of development varies meaning that each evaluation ought to be relative and individualized. Finally, lessons manifest themselves, or come to fruition at different times for every student- sometimes not until a parallel situation comes up in their regular lives much later. In a sense, experiential educators have built faith in the approach based on results they see on courses, and assumed, as Fellner writes above, that carrying through with the lessons is largely up to the individual.

A common criticism of outdoor experiential education is that it provides only a short-term 'hit' that does not really leave the students with any lasting growth or educational value. Enright and others confirmed that not much research has been done to assess the validity of this critique, and recommend that follow-up research post-course be included in subsequent projects (1988: 52-3; see also Katz & Kolb 1972: 173). In a mailed survey of Outward Bound Canada alumni from the last 6 years, I used quantitative techniques to explore whether the participants believed that the course had had a lasting effect on them (n= 250). To the question "How would you assess your overall sense of what you are capable of after the course?", an impressive 80% responded that they had 'changed' or 'significantly changed' on a 5-point Likert scale (Cushing 1996b). While there was no pre-course baseline to this study, it is significant that even over an extended period of time, people attribute significance to the experience in terms of their personal development.

Chapter Aims

This ethnography was designed to address the gap in research on the long-term effects of the course by including a third, 3 months post-course follow-up discussion with each research participant. In the third discussion, as outlined in Chapter 2.2, the aim was to achieve an understanding of whether the transformations that we have discussed at the end of the course had lasted once the person was re-established in regular life. We reviewed their life story together, paying close attention to learning themes that had emerged in the first and second interviews.

In the last chapter, I presented statements from the students regarding the various lessons that they identified as being transformative. The anecdotes were gathered in certain themes and examined common inter-narrative threads. I will now re-contextualize some of those same transformations in the fuller context of all three of the stages at which I spoke with the participant. This will demonstrate individual's relative position through time, as well as help the reader to resonate with how the transformations are actually being *lived*. By attending to individual life stories, we can learn about broad cultural dimensions of the Outward Bound experience through

how people use the elements of culture “to talk about their lives” (Cruikshank 1990: 1). The stories of transformation are not sensational, nor do I try to convince the reader of their radical or indelible nature. My more modest aim is to show how some students have sustained their transformations in their regular life, and to help provide the reader with a ‘sense of familiarity’ with the people.

Ethnographic Illustrations

“Direct experience is key, but there must be some way to help the student beyond immediate consumption of experiences to the greater challenge of improving their lives back home ... transference.” (T. James 1980: 6)

Jeremy’s self-narrative, provides several interesting examples of how he has been able to transfer what he learned on course into transforming aspects of his behaviour in regular life. The key transformation that he identified was becoming more outgoing and, for Jeremy, this assisted him to communicate better in group settings. In our first discussion, he mentioned that he might like to work on ‘getting rid of his introvert side’, partly because it inhibited him from being a leader in groups. By the end of the course, he told me that he felt comfortable to take on the role of mediator, and sometimes to lead decision-making in the course environment. He explained this as a transformation given that normally he would be “more reluctant to talk”. It is evident in our final discussion that the transformation had taken root. He explained how he was more outgoing when he came back, and better at being involved in decisions in school work groups. Jeremy believed that being in a small group was key to how he transformed since it acted as a kind of ‘testing ground’ for him and others to try new approaches with minimal risk. For example he found it helpful being able to share ideas, communicate openly, and to work as part of a team.

Experience-based Learning and Performances

James has written that in order for ‘transference’ of learning to occur, the students’ successes on course must be somehow made “available to them as a future resource.” (1980: 8). This is sometimes accomplished directly in discussion circles or one-on-one conversations between

an instructor and a student, where students are encouraged to reflect on how what they have experienced on course, is relevant to their regular life. For Jeremy what was important was having the chance to perform in a new way, as someone who communicates, shares, and takes the lead successfully. It is as if through enacting this 'possible self' on the course, he gained the confidence necessary to do it.

Chloe is another example of someone whose enactment of a new approach on course assisted them in maintaining their transformation. In our first interview, she came across as a very active, determined and successful young woman, but her narrative indicated a substantially fragmented self-image, and a frustration with not being able to make the fragments, (such as 'contradictory' character traits, diverse friends, and hobbies), fit together. At the end of the course, she frequently referred to being delighted at being able to just 'be myself' and to feeling more at peace on course than at home, and how she wanted to hold onto these feelings. I wondered at that point whether she would be able to do so, since re-immersion in her regular life would undoubtedly re-introduce many of the same stresses as before.

When we talked three months after the course, however, she had developed an innovative way of keeping that transformation alive within her. She explained that even though things get stressful sometimes, she uses the feeling of "*having it together*" that she had on the course, as a sort of touchstone for how she wants to feel or deal with current issues: "*You just sort of know - you feel more accepting of the good and bad in yourself... have to remember that lesson.*" (Chloe #1130). As we talked, she explained how she had drawn on this new side of herself in hard situations. For example, in her drama group, when the tension got very high, rather than focus on the stress, which she had done in the first interview, she introduced a circle-discussion technique she learned on course, that aims to draw issues out in a way that encourages discussion and resolution.

As with Jeremy, Chloe indicated that having the chance to ‘be’ a different way on course was vital to her ability to sustain that transformation in her regular life. Chloe’s story brings up another interesting point about the way in which the transformations last, (when they do). When I began this research, my basic idea was to explore whether and how people ‘transformed’ as a result of the course experience. My research with the alumni focus groups and my own experience had convinced me that some changes were occurring, but I was not sure how extensive they were or why they occurred.

As I continued to interview Outward Bound participants, I came to realize that they were not thinking or talking about the transformative effect as something ‘total’ but rather as partial. In Chloe’s case, she does not radically alter her lifestyle and become a very relaxed person. Instead, she recognizes that she likes the *effect* created when she is able to be more relaxed about life as she had while on the course. She wanted to find a way to maintain that new side of herself within the context of how she normally lives her life. The same is true of most of the students, which is why, as discussed in Chapter 3.2, I developed the idea of transformational ‘motifs’ to describe how in the case of outdoor experiential education, the transformations are ‘partial’: not in the sense of ‘incomplete’, but as an integral, constituent element of a whole.

An interesting feature of Kirin’s narrative (see Chapter 3.1) is how her self-concept evolved from the first to the last discussion. In our first conversation, she came across as more confident than most of the interviewees, and illustrated this through various stories about her abilities. Clues to her self-doubts were evident in how she compared herself with her exchange partner, and when she said she was hard on herself, but this was certainly not the prevailing theme that she was portraying. Through the second and third interviews, however, it became clear that Kirin was not so sure of herself, as she yearned for ‘approval’ from the instructors, was sensitive to a fellow student’s criticism of her as ‘vain’, and also, in her reflections on solo, noted the

metaphoric parallel between her situation and that of the little trees that were not growing as well as the others. There are two points to make about this evolving self-telling.

When people tell about themselves, they do so at a particular moment and under particular circumstances, both of which affect the content of the telling. Context affects content. The act of constructing an identity is a “creative process... ongoing and lifelong” (Kondo 1990: 48). It is thus important for ethnographers to realize how the point-in-time self-narratives we evoke can not be mistaken for *the* essential representation of the person. Just as with other cultural knowledge that we gather, it emerges in jointly-constructed performances between us and our informants, and is thus inevitably varied at different tellings (Fabian 1990). Recognizing this as an inevitable part of fieldwork is what Fabian called “performative” (versus ‘informative’) ethnography (Fabian 1990: 5). The performance analogy should not indicate a lack of veracity to the narratives, but highlight that they are positioned, partial, and dynamic.

While this line of thinking could be used as an argument against the use of self-narratives at all in a social scientific endeavour, I would argue for an alternative strategy. In a stimulating paper on anthropological fieldwork and representation, Uni Wikan argued for a pragmatic approach to interpreting what informants tell us, that intends to keep ethnographic interpretation ‘close to the ground’ (1992). She suggested that we need to “go beyond the words” that people use and “attend to what people say and the intent they are trying to convey, rather than groping for some ‘larger’ answers within the particulars of their spoken words” (ibid.: 466). In other words, rather than focusing on the meaning, (literal or symbolic) of the words themselves, we need to think of words as “ways of producing effects” upon the intended audience (ibid.: 464)².

Bringing this discussion back to Kirin, her words, and likely those of many of the other participants, were indeed intended to ‘produce a certain effect’ on me, as an audience. The

² Wikan’s discussion of the effect of words draws heavily on the ideas of Donald Davidson (19xx), as explicated by Richard Rorty (1989). The quotes here are, however, in Wikan’s words.

informants had a general understanding that my research aim was to assess the effect the course had on them, so it is possible that they wanted to produce a positive ‘effect’. Still, I believe there is more to it than simple posturing; only part of the ‘effect’ is intended for me. As Kirin proceeded through her self-narrative and the constituent supporting anecdotes, it was clear that it was as much a process of telling herself about herself, as it was about any external audience.

Turner wrote that ‘experience urges towards expression’ (1986: 37). Drawing on the work of Lacan and F. Mullan, Frank has suggested that people write self-narratives because “the self must be told” (Frank 1993: 42, 47). Frank has built on this notion and argued that after periods of transition or transformation³, people feel an urge to make a ‘public claim on their new identity’ as a way of establishing its validity not just for others, but for themselves (Frank 1993 :42). Kirin’s narrative demonstrates that as she genuinely began to feel better about herself, her career, her body, it became important to include that as part of her public self-telling. Thus, even though she did not explicitly identify lack of confidence as a big issue in the first self-telling, her inclusion of anecdotes of change in her subsequent tellings, indicate that it was indeed a concern. This retrospective perspective allows us to see how her emerging ability to see herself in a more positive way is a significant transformation. One example of this lies in how she is learning to accept not being ‘the best’ performer at her school by revising how she conceptualizes what defines ‘best’. This transformational motif also resonates through other aspects of Kirin’s life such as in her revised concept of leadership, and how she is taking more responsibility for making decisions about her career and school.

Course versus Home Environments

“What is needed by the heart, will settle in the mind.” -Swamiji

(Narayan 1989: 47)

³ In his ethnography, he was referring specifically to people who wrote “illness narratives” about their transformation during or after a serious illness.

One student, Bill, suggested that being in a small, supportive group had a significant effect on him. He indicated early on that he was shy, and felt uneasy in various group situations. He wanted to overcome his shyness at Outward Bound. By the end of his course, he had an air of light-heartedness and of self-discovery, which he explained as being a result of having felt supported and appreciated by the group. Certain people in his group particularly appreciated his humour and occasionally eccentric behaviour which helped him to feel “free of constraints” and for his shyness to “go away” (#520). Later, however, he told me that this transformed sense of himself was difficult to sustain back in regular life, since people in the city have less time and do not get to know that side of him.

Bill’s case illustrates how important the ‘communitas’ of the course is. Without it, and without having the other liminars around you upon re-aggregation, it is difficult for the OB initiands to perpetuate the transformations. Because North Americans are often encouraged to think of personal transformation or development as an individual project, we are doubly vulnerable to this loss of support because we do not *expect* it to be important. In contrasting the North American definition of self to that of the Japanese, Kondo hypothesizes that the English word “I” encourages us to see our “selves” as bounded and whole versus the “relational” concept of the Japanese who have various declensions of “I” depending on the social or relational context of use (Kondo 1990: 32).

Maria had a somewhat contrary experience to Bill in that she found it simpler to enact her transformed self in regular life than on course. Our pre-course discussion revealed a gracious, articulate young woman. She was excited about the challenge and possibilities of the upcoming course as she had heard stories from her older sister. After the course, she discussed what she enjoyed about it, but, she was also disappointed. She was disappointed in herself for not being able to come out of her ‘shell’ and open up more to people on the course, even though she felt that she had absorbed various new ideas about how to do it from her observations and interactions on

course. The paradox of the 'liminal' phase, as constructed by Outward Bound, can be viewed in relief here as we see how initiands are expected to both 'passively absorb' new cultural understanding (Turner 1988[1974]: 520), and also to *actively* practice the learning as they move through the wilderness.

In the third interview I had with Maria, she explained how she had taken her transformed understanding of herself, and of how to work in groups, and applied it at her new school. She was more assertive in decision-making situations in order to be heard, and she made an effort to open up to people in social situations. Since Maria normally goes to an all girls school and camp, and she expressed some concern after the course about the male-female dynamics, it is possible that the mixed-gender environment of the course contributed to making it hard for her to actualize the transformations while still on the course.

The Rhetoric of Self-Transformation

Maria, Holden, Geoff, Esme and others all had an initial understanding that an Outward Bound course *could* be transformational, based on what they had heard, and seen of people they knew who had done the course. Some students even had a sense that they wanted to work on 'changing' certain aspects of themselves. While I have tried to show throughout this ethnography that people's *expectations* are not by any means the sole determining factor of whether their experience is transformational or not, a word is needed at this point on how the experience is framed within larger societal themes of change. In choosing the rites of passage model as a heuristic for illuminating the cultural processes at play on an Outward Bound course, I have shown that the course structure parallels a common cross-cultural archetype for periods of transition and transformation, and while not an exact fit, does feed off of that pre-existing understanding for some of its influence.

This frame also relates to another narrative in the West today: the meta-narrative which dictates that the continual redesign of the self, or self-improvement, is desirable, and indeed even

necessary. In one interpretation, Foucault explicates what he calls “technologies of the self” such as bathroom scales, whereby we become surveillance officers of our own bodies. In this scenario, clearly the ‘self-perfecting’ person is actually the victim of larger social dictums for what he ought to become (1988). Martin offers a similarly ominous version of the social impetus towards improvement in her study of the ‘on-the-street’ understanding of the immune system (1994). She argues that “flexibility” is the new desirable trait in the West, be it in bodies due to immunological discourses, or in labourers due to the economics discourse of ‘retraining’ (ibid.: xvii, 37, 40). This theme can be, and often is, easily carried over into social and psychological adaptability, and how we are socialized to feel that continual ‘self-improvement’ via personal transformation is positive.

Frank has suggested that these social-cultural contexts can enhance our understanding of why and on what occasions people feel that transformation is possible. His ethnography concerns an emergent genre of self-narratives by people who claim to have transformed as a result of severe illnesses. He argues that such works are more likely now, in the late 20th century, given the meta-narratives discussed above. Where revelation leads to transformation, Frank argues that for most people to even *perceive* their illness as a revelation, (or what he calls an “epiphany”), a “cultural milieu in which epiphany is possible or even expected” is needed (1993: 42).

“Reflexively and sometimes prescriptively, illness narratives invoke change, based on understanding illness as a moment at which change is especially possible.” (Frank 1993: 41)

The lived experience of *Outward Bound* is probably as conditioned by the same meta-narrative as illness is. That it is culturally-influenced, however, does not diminish the fact that it feels ‘real’ to the people living the experience. It would not be accurate to assume that only people who are anticipating transformation experience it. I included discussions of various people in the preceding chapters who were not much concerned with transformation at all, other than in a loose sense of ‘improving physical skills’. Jeremy’s narrative, which heads off this chapter, indicates only a moderate interest in personal transformation, and yet in his final narrative, various

transformational motifs are apparent. In addition, Suchman's research among Outward Bound participants indicated that prior expectations of change are not good indicators of eventual outcomes as their expectations change, emerge and decline throughout the course (1992: 79)

The net effect that the 'rhetoric of self-change' might have on helping people to sustain the transformation is also ambiguous. On the one hand, the impetus to 'transform' would seem to encourage people to keep up with their new approach or understanding. On the other hand, the rhetoric surrounding self-change can make it seem artificially easy, as well as dramatic, as with, for example, the major 'transformations' undergone weekly by actors in television situation comedies. Thus, when participants come up against real obstacles to maintaining their transformed approach in regular life, they may be prematurely discouraged because their expectations were so unrealistic to begin with.

In Jeremy's narrative, there is an excellent example of the way that people can learn things and have their perspective transformed, without intending that at all, or even being fully aware of the extent of the transformation. Going into the course, Jeremy was primarily focused on being outdoors and having a chance to canoe, fish, and camp alone on solo. During the course, he seems to focus on the moment, and the specifics of the issues that he felt he had to deal with - people arguing, people being in grumpy moods that effect others, people not listening, and his own fears regarding kayaking. By the time we spoke three months later however, he had worked through his experience, and the issues the group had, and had come to a different level of understanding. He had taken the specific issues and experiences, and used them as a base to cultivate a new perspective on more general themes. For example, in retrospect, he attributes his mediator role in certain situations to a sense that justice was not being done when the less assertive people were being overlooked in decision-making.

This transformation in perspective is substantial and was also apparent in more subtle, or indirect ways in our discussion. Being able to experience it first-hand undoubtedly assisted him in

coming to this transformed understanding. Perhaps the frustration he expressed in the second interview brought his ideas into focus.

Jeremy was also particularly articulate which likely contributes to his success in transferring what he learned to his regular life. Not everyone has such linguistic skill. Henderson wrote that: "There is a deep knowing experienced on trip that we are not accustomed to. It is a knowing that we experienced with our whole body ... We call it mystical or speak of an aura because we do not have an adequate language." (1995: 73). It is possible that when our language for talking about transformation is inadequate, we are less able to continue to cultivate the changes we have made. Again, particularly with Outward Bound students, who separate from their fellow initiands when they exit from the 'liminal' space of course, there is less opportunity to come back to the ideas repeatedly, and to work through their meanings and potential practical applications.

I will share a final anecdote before reflecting on the collection of narratives presented here. Initially, Colin, like Jeremy, did not express any specific interest in self-development on course, and was particularly uncomfortable talking about himself in our first interview. He presented a story of himself as a practical, normal person who could follow orders in football, and liked the idea of rock-climbing on course. Our first discussion around how he might 'lead' was vague and unremarkable. By the end of the course, however, he had much more to say about leadership, about the purpose of the course, what frustrated him, and what was exhilarating.

The moment of revelation for Colin was during the final expedition, by which point he said he had figured out that the "whole point" of this part of the course was for the group to strike out and rely on each other, not the instructors. While he told the story during our second talk, his whole body moved as he enacted the conversations that transpired regarding a certain map-interpretation-related decision. He tried to argue for what he thought was the right decision, and thought that he had overcome resistance to his plan. In the end, however, those people did seek

help from the instructors instead of going with his plan of trying to make the decision autonomously within the group, about which he was quite incredulous.

In reflecting on the experience in our second interview, he was excited to discuss ways that he could have been a more effective leader in that situation. Furthermore, his ideas were distinctly different than the sports model that prevailed in his thinking in our pre-interview. Interestingly, by the third interview, these ideas had taken on a sense of the commonplace for him, as if he felt that he had always understood these dimensions of leadership. He had, like Jeremy, an unmistakably transformed perspective.

Discussion

“I painted a mask I made last year black; maybe because I was kind of depressed about being injured. Then this year I painted a compass on it like the Outward Bound crest. Maybe it symbolizes the direction OB gave me in my life- like I came out of darkness last year because of Outward Bound.” (Kirin #1023)

The preceding narratives show a broad range of ways in which the particular transformations of individual participants continue after they leave Outward Bound. It should be clear that the transformational effect of the course that was revealed in Chapters 3.1 and 3.2, continues to influence how people see themselves and act on their worlds. These transformations vary in their extent, and the degree to which people articulate them, or are aware of them. For most people, it appears that in re-aggregating into regular life, they recognize at some point that there are many obstacles to sustaining the transformation that they began on course. They have lost the support of the ‘communitas’ environment, the freedom from other responsibilities that the liminal period provides, and the culture of adventure that prevails in a wilderness setting.

Still, for all but two of the participants in this ethnography, the experience was transformational, and has had a lasting, or transferable effect in their regular lives. Kondo’s (1990) term “crafting selves” is a wonderful phrase to describe what these OB students are doing because it invokes a sense of agency, creativity, and fluidity. She writes that ‘crafting selves’

means how “people construct themselves and their lives- in all their complexity, contradiction, and irony ... in specific situations at specific historical moments” (ibid.: 43).

This construction process begins on the course when the participants can experience ways of being and understanding the world, and continues on into their regular lives, as they use the tools gained in subsequent scenarios. For Outward Bound students, as indicated, more of the responsibility for sustaining the change falls squarely with them than for initiands in the traditional sense of a rite of passage.

Chapter 4.0

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Summary of Research Approach and Findings

With this ethnography, I sought to generate enhanced insight into how the learning process on Outward Bound wilderness courses operates and, in particular, why past participants claimed it was a transformational experience for them. By listening to how students described their experience I hoped to render a useful explanation of why personal transformation seemed more possible, achievable, and even desirable in the learning environment of Outward Bound courses than in students' regular lives. Most of the existing literature and research on Outward Bound, and outdoor experiential education in general, focuses on the student as an individual learner and is thus dominated by psychology-based interpretations of the process. To broaden this scope, I chose to employ ethnographic method and theory which seeks to identify the cultural (i.e. extra-individual) dimensions and patterns of the phenomenon of study.

Outward Bound wilderness school courses make an excellent case study on the cultural dimensions of personal transformation for several reasons. Firstly, it is a school and is thus primarily occupied with educating students. As learning is intrinsically linked to personal growth, a learning environment is a particularly apt place to explore questions of what factors can facilitate personal transformation. Secondly, in addition to its general educational aims, Outward Bound's mission explicitly states its desire to deliver an education that is transformational in the holistic sense of creating 'better citizens', not simply better canoeists. Thirdly, the temporally-bounded structure of the experience, (3-4 weeks), facilitated isolating the specific effects of the course culture on students. I was able to design the interviews to capture their pre- and post-course self-

narratives. Finally, since I have been a student at Outward Bound, as well as worked for the school in various capacities, it was not a wholly unfamiliar experience for me, thus providing me with a solid 'position' or basis to explore it.

The three key research questions that guided the ethnographic research were: In what way are Outward Bound courses transformational for the students? What cultural dimensions can be identified that exert a positive influence on the students' willingness and ability to undertake personal transformation? What transformations last and why?

Using a constructivist framework, I used self-narratives as the optimal means for establishing an understanding of the course experience and its transformational effects (if any). These self-narratives were jointly-constructed between myself and each research participant, and were useful at creating a sense of how the course affected them in that any transformed beliefs, self-perceptions, and behaviours were reflected in the way that they talked about themselves. The method of conducting our discussions as semi-structured interviews facilitated drawing out what was important to the students about the experience, and having them relay it in their own terms and structures. By asking certain common questions across all interviews, however, I was also able to determine whether certain notions such as the rites of passage, *communitas*, generative education, and border intellectuals could usefully enhance the existing constructions of how Outward Bound works. By making the study diachronic, I was able to have a unique perspective on how well students were able to sustain the transformations in their regular lives.

Taken together, the students' narratives clearly indicate a significant degree of transformation, in specific focal areas for each person as discussed in the ethnographic sections. By employing some of the notions discussed above from anthropological and educational theory, I analyzed the self-narratives for common themes and found that indeed, the overlapping cultural and social dimensions were fundamental to how students experienced the course. All students spoke of

various group and personal dynamics, and the culture, (or in their words - 'norms' or 'style' or 'feeling' of Outward Bound), surrounding how these were dealt with. Each student interpreted the culture and experience somewhat differently as a result of how this new experience related dialectically with their existing beliefs and world-view, however, various commonalities were evident.

There were eight major cultural dimensions that emerged from their self-narratives that appeared to be important to facilitating the mood of personal transformation on the courses. Following Turner's name for the 'feeling' among initiands in the liminal phase of a traditional rite of passage, I have called these factors part of the '*communitas* culture' of the courses. As discussed, these factors included: Support for success and failure; intrinsic adventure, acceptance of diversity, open communication with others, improved communication with self, a culture of 'possibility', simplicity, and patience with learning. One key aspect of how students spoke of the culture or feeling of an Outward Bound course, was how important the experiential nature of it was. Most students explained that having the chance to *experience* someone else's leadership style, or to experience their own attempt at a new skill like speaking in a group, was vital to why the learning was effective. Experiencing the lesson helped them to operationalize it back in their regular lives.

For these research participants, those eight cultural factors were, in many cases, translated into transformational learning. As outlined in the *Communitas Cultural Learning Cycle* model that I have developed, the distinct cultural elements created on this course are interwoven into what we normally see as the experiential learning cycle and thus facilitate transformational learning beyond what people can normally achieve in regular life. Clearly, cultural factors also infuse the learning cycle of regular life as well. However, my argument is that the particular cultural dimensions identified above, serve to catalyze a greater degree of transformation than regular learning

environments of our everyday lives. As discussed, not all students undertook all of these transformations, and most focused on one or two areas or motifs throughout their self-narrative.

The eight key areas of transformation that emerged from the Outward Bound course for these participants were: improved confidence in one's ability, understanding the rewards of struggle and risk, compassion or empathy for other positions, being comfortable with ambiguity, improved reflexivity or self-awareness, re-envisioning oneself and experimenting with new roles, improved clarity of thought, and, lastly, gaining better perspective on issues. Most students discussed some progress related to the first few transformations, and many appeared to have worked on the middle areas. Some even articulated, or their self-tellings reflected, the latter, more complex transformations.

In the third wave of interviews, three months post-course, students revealed surprisingly altered perspectives on the course experience from the discussions on the final day of course. In almost all cases, the students had worked through their initial reactions to aspects and instances from their course, and constructed meaning or lessons for themselves out of those reflections. The content of these final interviews tended to be less oriented towards specifics of group relations and personal challenges, and more centered on how those experiences influenced the way that the students thought about and handled parallel instances now, in their regular lives. All but two students indicated that they had been able to integrate their transformed understanding into their everyday lives in some form.

Clearly, there were many obstacles to transferring the learning to their regular lives, with a significant one being that many of the cultural factors that generated the transformational *communitas* feeling on course, were not present in their everyday lives, or at least not to the same extent. They also felt that in the course of regular life, other more pressing concerns took over so that they didn't feel like they had the time to work on sustaining the transformation, even when they wanted to do so. This separation of experience into phases fits well with the rites of passage model

where the liminal phase, (or in this case, the course), provides people with a 'time-out' in which they can put extra effort into personal development as they are temporarily freed from their normal societal responsibilities.

My interpretation is that the students seem to have integrated the learning into their thinking more than they realize, as evidenced in subtle changes in their self-narratives compared with the pre-course interviews. Another key factor limiting their ability to sustain the changes, was that at home, they were no longer surrounded by their co-liminars, and thus were less inclined to feel a 'responsibility' to sustain the transformations that they had worked on together. All of these factors are important for understanding the effectiveness of Outward Bound, as well as where it could be more effective. They are also indicators of why the traditional rites of passage model is not totally appropriate for this and many other contemporary North American personal transformation efforts.

The rites of passage model is a useful heuristic but is limited in its ability to explain how and why personal transformation is undertaken by people in our contemporary, post-industrial North American society. It would be useful for anthropologists to explore further how to better explicate this process, and I will discuss how this might be pursued below. Still, even in the places where the rites of passage model was not appropriate for understanding personal transformation for Outward Bound students, (such as how these participants do not live together upon reaggregation), it was still illuminating because it pointed to what was missing, and possibly limiting the potential effectiveness of Outward Bound. In other words, this difference pointed me to thinking about what role various follow-up mechanisms could play in increasing the likelihood of students to sustain their transformed beliefs and behaviours.

Overall, this ethnography has demonstrated that by managing or orchestrating certain cultural factors in a learning environment as outlined, one can improve the chance that personal

transformation will be undertaken. I have shown how Outward Bound constructs a cultural environment that can facilitate transformation for those who choose to undertake it, while maintaining a significant degree of flexibility for individual students and staff to influence that culture in their own way. In this case, this strategy is clearly to the benefit of the students who, with few exceptions, express their delight at having been exposed to such a broadening learning opportunity. The ethnography has also pointed to areas where Outward Bound could be more effective in fulfilling their mission, which I discuss briefly below in addition to future directions for this research.

Recommendations for Future Research

After having such intimate involvement with the subject at hand, there are numerous areas in which I believe further research would be useful. For brevity, I will outline just three of those that I feel would be most illuminating.

1. Retreats versus rites of passage: I have made an inchoate effort at identifying the differences between traditional rites of passage, and the kind of ritual rejuvenation or transformation effort of contemporary, post-industrialized people that, in many ways, Outward Bound typifies. Further effort at understanding such contemporary rituals would be interesting for its ability to illuminate how we are, consciously or not, *inventing* cultural means to replace those rituals which have at one time been crucial to our social and personal development. The very fact that we are undertaking ritualistic retreats of various sorts seems to indicate that the loss of the formal rituals has left a void that many feel a need to fill. Understanding why we feel this need would undoubtedly help to make attempts to satisfy it more fruitful. There are three key questions that could guide such a research effort:

- I) What other contemporary rituals or retreats are comparable with the Outward Bound experience? One could compare both people's intentions and the transformational effects.
- II) What are the common factors among these rituals? Which ones are significant in terms of facilitating personal transformation?
- III) What can we learn from these patterns or elements about what North Americans need in order to feel 'fulfilled'? In other words, what is currently lacking from our cultural system that we trying to recapture through these rituals?

2. Gender differences: In conducting this research, I noted various overall differences between the males and females involved. These ranged from the way in which they structure their self-narratives, to patterns in what they valued most in the course experience. Due to the length of the thesis, I could not properly analyze or discuss all of these at this time, however, it seems that further exploration of the differences would be useful. Firstly, it would contribute to the growing body of research on the distinct ways that males and females structure their lives (Bateson 1989, Turkle 1995, Goldman 1996, A. Oakley 1981). Secondly, as the Outward Bound model was historically constructed for male students only, understanding how females experience the structure and culture of Outward Bound courses differently than males would likely enhance instructors' ability to deliver an equally effective course for both. This is not to say that the current model is *not* effective for females, but simply that the students' narratives suggest that there are areas which could be usefully adapted for a mixed-gender group.

3. Change versus transformation: I have created a distinction between 'change' and 'transformation' that was appropriate for the purposes of this ethnography. There is, however, much confusion and overlap between the two in both the educational and anthropological literature.

As such, it seems that further work into how to distinguish between them would be useful at a general level in both fields.

Implications for the Field of Outdoor Experiential Education

Based on this research, there are four implications for the field that deserve further exploration at the level of practice by Outward Bound instructors, as well as other experiential educators. Only an outline of each of them is included here, however it is my hope to be involved in working through the validity of these suggestions with program staff at the Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School in the future.

1. Follow-up Mechanisms: The research indicates that the ability of students to effectively integrate personal transformations into their regular lives at home is variable. It is worth considering how the organization might assist the students in transferring their learning to post-course life, should the student want this assistance. Possible means include sending standard, (or personalized by their instructors), letters to them at certain points, such as one month and one year post-course, which provide various questions which the students could use as memory triggers and points of reflection to re-introduce some of the course themes into their thinking at points where it may be fading. Another means could be for Outward Bound to organize short alumni gatherings with themed discussions or even student presentations about 'life after course' and how to make use of what was learned. I am not suggesting that Outward Bound become a therapy provider, but simply that more responsibility could be taken for ensuring the effectiveness of its mission. Clearly these means would all be voluntary for students.

2. Staff discussions of course culture: It would be useful for the instructional staff to have more formal discussions about what they perceive to be the cultural learning environment that they are helping to create in the courses. By having more formalized forums for comparing and discussing

the range of possibilities, staff would develop a broader understanding of how the courses can operate, as well as how the alternatives are more, or less, effective for certain types of students. Such discussions would also be useful for leading into a more fundamental discussion of whether the culture Outward Bound *has*, is in fact the culture that the people who make up the organization would ideally *like to have*, and if not, what could be done collectively to move in the desired direction. These kinds of discussions transpire informally continually among staff. An inclusive discussion, however, would bring out the diversity more clearly, and formalizing it would increase the likelihood of acting on any changes the group agreed would be strategic.

3. Community service project: In the interest of facilitating the mission of providing an education that is metaphoric and transferable to students' regular lives, it would be useful to increase the emphasis and time spent on the community service component of the Outward Bound courses. Echoing Daniel Vokey's theory, (1987), this ethnography clearly indicates that the emphasis on the community service project has waned in importance, both to staff and students. Where students did mention it, however, it was clear that it helped them to think about ways in which what they learned on their courses could be applied outside of the course. It seems to be particularly effective because it transpires while they are still in the context of the course or 'learning moment', and are thus still open to new ways of thinking and acting in the world.

4. Gender difference training: As indicated above, gender does appear to be a factor in how the course is experienced. It seems then, that if instructors had a forum in which to discuss their teaching experience with gender differences, they could learn more about how it can affect students' learning. In addition, formal staff training that introduced some of the excellent research that has been done on gender differences, (such as: Tannen 1990, Gilligan 1982), would be illuminating for many instructors who have not been exposed to this literature.

APPENDIX A

Standard OB Structure

1. Training Phase

Activity: school philosophy, focus on needed hard skills, high instructor involvement

Development: group 'forming', settling apprehension, hard skills, understanding expectations

2. Expedition Phase

Activity: group embarks usually canoeing, climbing or hiking; lower instructor involvement

Development: increased exposure to situations requiring group decisions & hard choices, individual and group effort and thus opportunities for success or failure; group 'norming' (feeling out how to work together) and 'storming' (more honest about what they don't like/ anger); leadership is transferring from instructors to students

3. Solo Time

Activity: 2-3 day period where each student camps alone with minimal provisions; post-debrief

Development: time for personal reflection on self, self-in -relation-to-group, and regular life; often framed as a time to consider differences between course and regular life.

4. Final Expedition

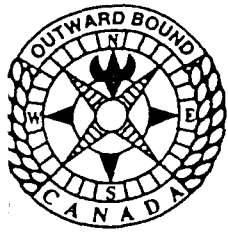
Activity: Ideally, if a group is ready, the final days of their expedition will be unaccompanied

Development: group should move into 'performing' stage here (productive decision-making and action); time to apply learning and move from students to leaders, often an 'acid test' of the group's actual development.

5. Concluding Phase

Activity: Service, 'marathon' challenge, reflection on course, closing banquet

Development: Learning importance of helping others; final physical 'success'; time to think about how to transfer learnings back to one's regular life; emotional break from co-participants



Canadian OUTWARD BOUND Wilderness School

May 6, 1996

150 Laird Dr.
Suite 302
Toronto, Ontario
M4G 3V7

Tel. (416) 421-8111
Fax (416) 421-9062
1-800-268-7329

Name & Address

RE: Participating in Research for Outward Bound

Dear Kristian:

The staff of the Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School are committed to providing challenging, educational experiences for all of our students. This is ensured in part through careful evaluation of the course experiences by Instructors and Course Directors.

This year we are also going to involve a number of course participants, like ~~you~~. The specific aim of the research is to understand the ways in which the course is effective in providing experiences which give students opportunities to see things in a different light. To this end, we will be talking with a random sample of students like yourself, before and after your course.

We are working with an anthropologist, Pamela Cushing, who has been involved with other research for us in the past. Pamela will be phoning a sample of students prior to the course to request their assistance with this project. It will involve you participating in a simple, short interview with Pamela over the phone. If you are telephoned, it is up to you to decide whether or not you would like to help, and your choice will not affect your status on the course in any way.

Your support would be greatly appreciated, and will help Outward Bound continue to provide high quality programming. As a standard part of anthropological research, any details used will be disguised so that all identities are protected. If you have any questions about this research, feel free to contact me at the Toronto office.

Thank you for your consideration.

Hepsi Barnett
Associate Director

Royal Patron
H.R.H. The Duke of
Edinburgh

National Patrons
Allan R. Taylor
Chairman

Isabel Bassett

Michel Bélanger

David Blackwood

C. David Clark

Robert G.J. Couchman

W.R.P. Dalton

André Fortier

Peter A.W. Green

David L. Johnston

Edward L. Mercaldo

John P. Rogers

Robert T. Stewart

Carl N. Wahl



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CONSENT FORM
RESEARCH STUDY ON OUTWARD BOUND COURSE PARTICIPANTS

With this research project, the researcher aims is to explore the culture of Outward Bound, and how aspects of this culture can facilitate personal change for students who take a course. Do people change the way they feel about themselves? How is this change connected to the course experience? Are there specific discussions, events, or behaviours that were a catalyst for the change? Do students feel that the course was a powerful learning opportunity, and if so, in what ways does it differ from their regular learning environment? How do students fit their experiences on course into the context of their regular lives? Do the learnings convert into attitudinal or behavioural changes in their regular lives? Does this change last? Why or why not? Through exploring students' responses to these inquiries, the researcher hopes to develop a conceptual model that begins to explain the influence of the cultural at Outward Bound, and how this is reflected in student self-narratives. The research will involve interviewing students about their perception of their lives for approximately one hour at three stages: before, immediately following, and three months after they take the course. It also involves informal discussions with Outward Bound staff regarding facilitation styles and strategies, and specific courses.

Your participation will help to answer these questions. The research in which your are asked to participate is supported by an Ontario Graduate Studies grant, paid for by the Ontario government. The research is sanctioned by the Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School. The research is being conducted by Pamela J. Cushing (Dept of Anthropology, McMaster University, Chester New Hall 5th floor, Hamilton, Ont. Phone: (905) 849-4664). My advisor is Dr. W. Rodman (905) 525-9140.

If you choose to participate in the study, this participation may take various forms. I may interview you by phone, e-mail, letter, or face-to-face, and this interview will be tape-recorded and later transcribed. A transcript or portions of our interviews may be used in publications resulting from the research. You may appear in photographs or video tapes used for public presentations about the research. Portions of this research may be posted to the world wide web. Participants may request and receive copies of the aforementioned materials which feature them, with the exception of tapes which will be re-used.

Should you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw consent and/or discontinue participation in the study at any time. You may also decline to answer particular questions or provide particular sorts of information or materials. Please indicate below whether or not you wish to have your anonymity preserved.

Results of this study may be published as articles, reports, and/or a book. I may quote from interview transcripts in these publications. Should you wish, efforts can be made to preserve your anonymity in the text by disguising details that might identify you, and by changing your name. All information given to me will be kept confidential with access limited to my advisory committee and my research assistant. The facilitators for your course will not have access to your interviews. I can answer any questions you have concerning these procedures or other aspects of the project.

McMaster University has a committee concerned with the ethics of research with people. This committee reviews all research proposals submitted by persons affiliated with the university that involve human subjects to ensure that all such research is conducted in an ethically correct way. Should you have any complaints regarding this researcher's conduct, please contact the President's committee on ethics of research on human subjects at (905) 525-9140, ext. 23713.

Your signature indicates that you have read this form, or had someone read it to you, that you understand its contents, and that you consent to participate in this study under the terms set out herein.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

In publications resulting from this research (Please check one):
 I am willing to allow my name to be used
 Please change my name

Material covered by this consent form includes (Circle all that apply):
interviews photographic material correspondence other _____

McMASTER UNIVERSITY

APPLICATION FOR REVIEW BY PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON ETHICS OF RESEARCH ON HUMAN SUBJECTS

(Please submit form in triplicate. Copies of research proposal/application are not required.)

Date: May 3, 1996

FACULTY INVESTIGATOR(S)*

Dr. W. Rodman

DEPARTMENT

Anthropology

TELEPHONE #

825-9140
x23909

STUDENT INVESTIGATOR(S)

Pamela J. Cushing

DEPARTMENT

Anthropology

TELEPHONE #

(905) 849-4664

TYPE OF PROJECT (Check one)

Faculty Research

Thesis Research: Ph.D. Master's

Other (Specify) _____

RESEARCH SPONSOR (If applicable)

sanctioned by the Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School
Toronto, Ont.

Status of Funding (Check one)

Applied For Held (OGS)

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

The discourse between culture and self-narrative
in experiential education at Outward Bound

* In the case of student research, the faculty supervisor assumes this responsibility and should be identified above.

(Please refer to the Human Ethics Guidelines *Research Bulletin*, prior to completion of form.)
(If additional space is required, please continue on page 6 of the form.)

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSED RESEARCH:

a) The purpose of this research is to initiate the process of understanding how people grapple with personal change, and what kinds of cultural factors determine this reaction/attitude. My hypothesis is that there are cultural aspects to an Outward Bound experience which contribute to a transformative effect for some students. Further, this transformative effect is likely to be reflected in a change in how a student talks about him or herself (self-narrative) after doing the course. I have three specific objectives as outlined below:

1. To establish an empirical understanding of whether the outdoor experiential education process at Outward Bound does have a transformative effect on students.
2. To understand whether the transformational effect is lasting, or if the critics' assertion that it is only a superficial change is true.
3. To discern what elements of a course are vital to creating a culture where personal and group transformation seems 'natural' and positive.

b) Research methodology: I will conduct approximately 20 interviews with students in three stages; before they participate in the course, immediately following the course, and 2-3 months after the course. Each interview will last approximately one hour with the intent of having the participant tell their personal story or self-narrative. The specific elements that I will be listening for during the interview are the markers the person uses to categorize certain stages or aspects of her life, life philosophies, values, stories about key learning moments in their regular life, decision-making style, comfort level with change and/or risk-taking, and various aspects of self-concept including how they (or those close to them) would describe their character, and their strengths and weaknesses. Secondary consideration will be given to how they situate other people in their story, and what role they play before and after the course. Although these are specific types of data, the interview guideline must remain relatively open-ended for two key reasons. Non-direct questions will facilitate a telling in the person's own terms and will allow for variances in how each person assigns priority to different things in their story. Open-ended questions will preserve the integrity of the data better by making the subject feel in control of what they are willing to answer. If the person felt pressured to answer in specific categories, there is a risk of them distorting the truth more to avoid having to confront the researcher. Attached is a copy of the basic interview guideline that I will use.

A letter of introduction has been sent out by the Outward Bound registrar to all participants which explains what the research project is about, and that they may, but are not obligated to, participate in it. Interviews will be conducted in person and over the phone and recorded primarily on audio and/or video tape. The attached consent form will be required of all interviewees.

c) I have conducted extensive qualitative research in both an academic setting, for my undergraduate thesis, and a business setting for Procter and Gamble. In each, high ethical standards were maintained, and all interviewees were satisfied with these standards. My experience is both with group interviewing and with the one-on-one interviewing (live and by phone) that will be required here. I also have experience with informal interviews and discussions in the field from time spent in Togo, West Africa as a development volunteer. I have worked with the Outward Bound school for a year as well, during which time I have developed a familiarity with the culture that will lend context to the interviews. Finally, I will conduct a test-run of interviews with two participants from a June course before conducting the main interviews in July and August. While the content of this ethnographic work differs from my past experience, I believe that my past experience and the test-run will ensure a well-executed research plan.

(Circle one)

Do any of the procedures involve invasion of the body (e.g. touching, contact, attachment to instruments, withdrawal of specimens)?

YES / NO

Does the study involve the administration of any prescribed or proscribed drugs?

YES / NO

2. SUBJECTS INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH:

- a) Describe the salient characteristics of subjects — number, age range, sex, institutional affiliation or where located.
- b) Describe how subjects are to be recruited.
- c) Describe the relationship between the investigator(s) and the subject(s).

a) I plan to interview approximately 20 students plus two test-run students for the study. The students will all be from Outward Bound's Voyageur and Adventure courses in which both males and females primarily in the age range of 16 to 26 participate. This study is limited to the courses offered in Ontario and to residents of Ontario who are taking the course. They are a diverse group in terms of studies and work.

b) I will choose five students at random from the course enrollment listings provided by Outward Bound for the four target groups (Voyageur and Adventure, in July and August). The only criterion is that they be residing in Ontario. Should one of the people chosen decline to participate, I will select another at random from the list.

c) The investigator-subject relationship will be regulated by the subject and what they are comfortable with. The students will operate under the understanding that my role is to create an understanding of the student experience on Outward Bound courses and that the information they provide will be confidential as outlined on the consent form. The letter clearly states that they are not under obligation to participate or answer all questions. While they will meet me face-to-face during the second interview, I have no authority to demand participation or use an evaluative position to pressure them.

3. ESTIMATE OF THE RISKS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH:

(Circle one)

- a) Do you see any chance that subjects might be harmed in any way?
- b) Do you deceive them in any way?
- c) Are there any physical risks?
- d) Are there any psychological risks? (Might a subject feel demeaned, embarrassed, worried or upset?)
- e) Are there any social risks? (Possible loss of status, privacy, and/or reputation?)

YES / NO

YES / NO

YES / NO

YES / NO

YES / NO

If the answer is YES to any of the above, please explain why alternative approaches involving less risk cannot be used. Procedures for reversing reversible harm should be stated.

4. ESTIMATE OF THE BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH:

- a) The benefit of the research is that it will generate a student-centered account of what kind of changes (if any) different people experience through the course of participating in Outward Bound's experiential learning process, and presents it in narrative format. This is valuable for the academic community because it provides an empirically-based interpretation of a complex, and important social phenomenon (outdoor experiential education), and because it represents the experimental work in anthropology that tries to use narrative as the basis for a case. The benefit to subjects for participating is essentially that through their time and feedback, they will derive either a sense of goodwill by 'giving-back' to the school, or a sense of justice for what was not acceptable to them.
- b) None other than access to an otherwise unavailable channel for anonymous feedback.

5. PLAN FOR OBTAINING INFORMED CONSENT:

Please refer to Instructions for Preparation of Consent Form, enclosed, prior to completion of this section.

- a) Describe the explanation to be given to subjects before they agree to become participants in the project. For surveys circulated by mail, please attach a copy of the explanatory letter to the subjects.

See attached letter and consent form.

When I initially contact them directly by phone, I will go over all of the key aspects regarding their choices and freedoms. I will also describe the ways in which their story can be altered to preserve anonymity. Finally, the introduction to the conversation will reiterate what the letter discusses regarding the purpose of the research.

(Circle one)

- b) Are subjects competent to consent? If not, describe the alternate source of consent. If a minor, describe the procedure to be used.

YES / NO

- c) Do subjects have the right to withdraw at any time during and after the research project?
- d) Are subjects to be informed of this right?

YES / NO
 YES / NO

If the answer to c and/or d is no, please explain.

- e) What procedures will be followed for subjects who wish to withdraw at any point during or after the study?

After checking to determine whether their request to withdraw is associated with a misunderstanding of the research, if not, then I simply remove them from the sample and destroy the transcripts of their interviews.

6. STEPS TO BE TAKEN TO ENSURE CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA:

(Circle one)

a) Will the data be treated as confidential?

YES/NO

If yes, explain the steps that will be taken to ensure confidentiality of the data. If no, explain why.

The only people with direct access to my raw data (ie - with names) will be two people from the university with no connection to the school; my advisor and my research assistant.

For any public version, (ex - paper or presentation), I will respect whatever degree of anonymity the student requests on the consent form. Outward Bound senior staff (not facilitators) will be able to access non-identifiable transcripts (ie - No names, dates, locations).

b) Where will the data be stored, and who will supervise access to the data?

The data in either transcribed or audio form will be stored in my office at the university which is locked at all times when I am not there. I will supervise access as outlined above.

7. SUBJECT DEBRIEFING:

Will subjects be debriefed at the end of the research project? If yes, explain how this will be done. If no, explain why not.

YES/NO

After the third interview, I will explain the research project to the subjects in more detail and explain that I will be conducting a process of member checks. I will explain that this means that I will send them transcripts of my write-up for their review and editing. There will be a specified time period within which they will know they must respond if they wish to make any changes. The end-result, the thesis, will also be publicly available.

SIGNATURE:

Faculty Investigator

Paula J. [Signature]
Student Investigator

An Outward Bound Alumni Questionnaire

The Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School is trying to better determine what makes our courses stand out for you and how the experience fits into your life picture. The following questions are intended to provide a forum for you to share with us how you came to choose Outward Bound. Please feel free to be as descriptive or as brief as you wish. All information will be grouped together, ensuring confidentiality of individual responses. If you are interested in having a copy of the results, please phone 1-888-OUTWARD or (416) 421-8111 in Toronto to get your name on the list at the Toronto Office. Thank-you for helping us to provide quality courses.

1. Course:
- a) Season: summer fall winter spring
 b) Location: Black Sturgeon Chetwynd
 Pukasaw Baffin Island
 Other: _____
- c) Length: _____ days
 d) Type: Adventure/Voyageur
 Adult
 Other: _____

2. Year in which you took the course (approx.): 19____

3. Gender: Female Male

4. Current Age: 15/16 17/24 25/35 36/50 over 50

5. Where do you remember first hearing about Outward Bound?

- a) Word-of-mouth h) Poster
 b) Slide show/community presentation i) In-school reference
 c) Trade show/conference j) Television
 d) Package insert (ie. cereal box) k) Radio
 e) Retail outlet response card l) Newspaper
 f) Through a corporate program m) Magazine
 g) Other: _____

6. What was it that triggered you to start thinking about taking a course?

- a) Recent advertising or promotion
 b) Recommendation by a friend or a family member
 c) School counselor recommendation
 d) Participation in a program with the organization you work for
 e) Other: _____

7. How long have you known about Outward Bound? (circle one)

- 1 year or less 2-3 years 4-5 years 6+years

8. Approximately how long did you think about taking a course before actually signing up?

- a) less than one month d) 1 to 3 years
 b) a few months e) more than 3 years
 c) a year

9. Everyone has a limited amount of free time, and many activities with which to fill that time. Before you took the Outward Bound Course, what other kinds of things were you considering doing in your time off?

- a) an active sporty trip (ie. sailing, golf, tennis)
 b) a self-organized camping trip
 c) a leisure/southern beach-type vacation
 d) an organized camping trip (professional, YMCA, outfitter, etc.)
 e) a trip oriented around cultural events/activities (theatre, museums, ruins)
 f) time with family or friends
 g) a self-improvement course or activity
 h) other (please specify) _____

10. What held you back from taking a course sooner than you did?

- ___ time/vacation days limited
 ___ wanted to spend that time with family or friends
 ___ other alternatives were more attractive at the time
 ___ uncertain about being able to handle the physical aspects
 ___ not ready for or uncertain about the social/inter-personal demands
 ___ cost of course
 ___ other: _____

11. What about Outward Bund was most appealing to you before and then after taking the course? (Rank your top 5, from 1 to 5 - 1 being the best)

| Before | | After |
|--------|----------------------------------------------|-------|
| ___ | Spending time out of doors | ___ |
| ___ | It is an organized wilderness experience | ___ |
| ___ | Group discussions | ___ |
| ___ | Team-work skills | ___ |
| ___ | Learning technical skills (climbing etc.) | ___ |
| ___ | Camp craft (naturalist skills, knots, fires) | ___ |
| ___ | Solo & other reflective time | ___ |
| ___ | Being challenged physically | ___ |
| ___ | Being challenged emotionally | ___ |
| ___ | Learning to trust my own ability more | ___ |
| ___ | The adventure | ___ |
| ___ | A unique life experience | ___ |
| ___ | Meeting new people | ___ |
| ___ | Other: _____ | ___ |

12. a) Looking back on your Outward Bund course experience, do you feel that your sense of what you are capable of has:

1. Significantly changed 4. Not changed at all
 2. Changed 5. Don't know
 3. Not changed very much

b) Using the same scale as 12 (a), please rate the extent to which you feel you have changed (if at all) in the following areas?

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| a) physical fitness | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| b) outdoor skills | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| c) confidence | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| d) self-esteem | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| e) communication | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| f) inter-personal/team skills | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| g) leadership of others | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| h) ability to adapt to/manage change | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |

13. Was there anything about the course that made you feel uncomfortable?

14. Would you consider taking another Ourward Bound course?

- Yes No Maybe

15. How would it differ from your first course? What would you like it to be like?

* For questions 13, 14 and 15, please use additional paper as required.

Thank you! - Please send the completed form to:
 Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School
 Attn: Ken Powell, Associate Director
 150 Laird Drive, Suite 302, Toronto, Ontario M4G 3V7.

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