

A Case Study of Relationships Forged Through a Freshman Outdoor Orientation
Program

Capstone Project

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Dedication

This thesis/project is dedicated to the students and staff who continue to support and advocate for the importance of college outdoor orientation programming. My passion for the outdoors and student development has been affirmed through this project and your support.

Abstract

A case study was conducted at a mid-size, Midwestern Campus to explore the nature of interpersonal relationships formed during a pre-college outdoor orientation experience among a group of three first-year students. This study also investigated how the friendship served the group during their first semester at college. Three semi-structured group interviews were conducted during the course of the first semester and revealed for this group of students, a close-casual relationship existed and the relationship has helped them socially, emotionally, and with self-identity development. The results of this study parallel other studies that were done on the significance of pre-college transition programs.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In response to the increasing needs of incoming first-year students, universities have adopted orientation programs that aim to ease the transition from high school to college. Students attending college are presented with a number of social and academic challenges that range from forming new self-identities, forging friendships, new independence, and learning to keep pace with academic rigor (Darling, McWey, Howard, & Olmstead, 2007). Pre-college orientation programs offer space for students to meet one another and to begin the acculturation process into the university. Specifically, college orientation programs are important instruments in cultivating interpersonal relationships that promote social skills and integration (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

A variety of college orientation programs are used at four- and two-year colleges. Some programs are more academic in nature, while others embody greater social components (Greenlaw, Anliker, & Baker, 1997). The purpose of this study was to investigate the meaning of interpersonal relationships forged during a pre-college outdoor orientation experience among student participants. The study also aimed to understand how the relationship served the students as social and academic resources during their first semester of Freshman year.

This chapter begins with a background of this study and is followed up by the study's context, role of the researcher, assumptions, scope and study limitations.

Background and Significance of the Study

The transition to college for first-year students can be challenging and stressful. These challenges include increased independence, adjusting to a new environment, academic rigor, and an opportunity to build new relationships and explore self-identity. Many universities have adopted formalized and structured orientation programs to assist in the process of developing social and academic integration to help ease this transition. Research indicates that students who are integrated into academic and social aspects of a university are more likely to become committed to that university (Wolfe & Kay, 2011). Additionally, prior research on freshman entering college suggests that social relationships are significant because they create a sense of place within the campus community, which increases the students' affinity to the university (Robinson, Burns & Gaw, 1996).

Orientation programs are created to foster students developing social relationships and to have a sense of affiliation with peers on campus. These relationships are important mechanisms in helping to ease students' transition and to become integrated into college life (Tinto, 1993). Traditional orientation programs are typically facilitated at the institution, involve current students, faculty, and staff, and provide an opportunity for first-year students to become familiar with the campus and begin forging relationships and building their social networks. First-year orientation programs offer a variety of models, of these, one model that aims to provide an experience for social and academic integration to develop is outdoor-based. Outdoor orientation programs or wilderness orientation programs are collaborations between students, staff, and

faculty. They involve small groups of first-year students where they spend at least one night away (Temes, 2016). Programming is structured to encourage the development of personal and social goals (Curtis, 2013) and promotes problem-solving through challenge-based experiences. Current research acknowledges that over 164 colleges are implementing some form of outdoor orientation programming (Bell et. Al, 2014). The increased trend of outdoor orientation programs is a response to a variety of institutional challenges that many universities face. Of the many reasons, a few that are top priorities include student retention, becoming part of a diverse community, building life-long recreation skills, and connecting outdoor education to the curriculum (Curtis, 2013). Students as consumers of the educational experience are impacted by these challenges and opportunities. What is not well-known, however, is the extent to which interpersonal relationships among students serve as different resources.

In terms of fostering student success during the first semester, a gap exists in understanding the nature of relationships forged through an outdoor orientation program and how the students use those relationships as resources. The current research on first-year college orientation programs provides evidence of the importance and significance an orientation program has on students' ability to adjust and persist at the university. The research also indicates that social and academic integration are cornerstones of success and should be emphasized in the program's objectives. The purpose of this study is to describe the nature of social relationships formed during a freshman outdoor orientation program experience among

participants and secondly, how those relationships are used as social and academic resources across the first semester of their college experience.

The study was guided by the following questions related to the interpersonal relationships formed during a freshman outdoor orientation. First, what is the nature of the social relationships formed by freshman outdoor orientation participants during the orientation experience? Secondly, how do the social relationships formed during the orientation program serve as social and academic resources for the program participants and what meaning do the relationships hold for them during their first semester on campus? In understanding the nature and meaning of these relationships, this study will contribute to the field of Education and orientation programs.

Setting/Context

A group of three first-year college students at a mid-size, Midwestern university in the United States who participated in a pre-college outdoor orientation experience off campus took part in this study. The study was conducted on campus in a private conference room. Three semi-structured group interviews were conducted to explore that nature of their relationship formed on the trip and how that relationship functioned as social and academic resources during their first semester of Freshman year.

Role of the Researcher

Transitioning to college can be emotionally and socially stressful for many first-year students. The first few weeks are especially critical to building a sense of place, community and belonging that will help a student persist at that university. In August 2018, I participated as a

staff leader on a college freshman outdoors trip. During the trip, I helped facilitate group dialog, provide insight on different campus and academic resources, and assist in the outdoor activity; rock climbing. During the five-day and four-night excursion, I witnessed just how powerful and impactful intentional group bonding had on the students' preparation for college.

For many of the students, rock climbing was new and intimidating. With the assistance of three outdoor program student staff, we were able to coach students through a variety of challenges related to rock climbing and transitioning to college. We also provided opportunities for intentional group bonding with the use of icebreakers, prompts, and breakout discussion sessions.

It was apparent as the days passed, trip participants became considerably more comfortable with the new setting and one another. Words of encouragement while their peers bravely participated, ultimately led to a community of students who built authentic friendships among themselves and the group leaders. Every night we engaged in a daily debrief where we shared our rose, bud, and thorn of the day (highlight, something to look forward to, and something that was challenging). Every student was engaged and shared things that they felt deeply about, including hesitations about starting college.

As the trip neared the end, what began as a group of strangers now developed into a circle of friends that depended on and supported one another. They continued to stay connected as a group through the rest of the on-campus orientation week and maintain a unique bond today.

I believe that outdoor orientation programs help to strip away preexisting identities and allow space for students to explore who they are and who they want to be. A sense of belonging and forging meaningful relationships is integral in students' ability to transition to an institution. I observed this in practice while assisting on the trip and thus the purpose of this study.

Assumptions

This study examined the relationship among three first-year students that participated in a college freshman outdoors orientation trip. During the program, the students camped for four-nights and climbed for five-days. The students shared their experiences while attending the trip, along with how the trip impacted their first semester at college with a focus on the friendship they built with one another. In this study, it is assumed that friendship is an evolving interpersonal relationship that changes over time. The friendship can be social or psychological and is assumed to function as resources in persons' lives. Resources, as it relates to friendship, is assumed to positively contribute to people in a number of ways; emotionally, psychologically, and socially. In this study, the participants shared how the friendship they built was sustained as multiple resources during the first semester.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study only included a small group of first-year students that participated in an outdoor orientation trip from one Midwestern university. This study does not cover all of the experiences of first-year students that participate in orientation programming but does discuss possible positive implications of engaging in an overnight, outdoor pre-college orientation

activity. Additionally, the study tracked the groups' friendship over the course of the first semester of their Freshman year and thus it cannot be assumed the findings of this study apply beyond the study's designated timeframe parameters.

Summary

In summary, the literature indicates that first-year orientation programs play a key role in the ability of students to acculturate and transition to college. It promotes social and academic integration that influences students' ability to feel a sense of belonging while attending college.

Of the variety of first-year orientation models, outdoor orientations provide a unique environment that encourages exploration of self-identity, self-development, and authentic friendships. This study examined a group of three, first-year outdoor trip participants' perception of their newly formed friendship and how that friendship served them during their first semester. The study was limited as the study group was small and did not reflect the experiences of all participants.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Outdoor orientation programs have long been used at institutions as a way to ease first year student transition to college. In this chapter, I first address the history and purpose of first-year outdoor orientation programs on college campuses and then discuss the implications of pre-college relationships on student perceptions of belonging, with attention to self-development, self-identity, as well as social and academic integration through the theory of sense of community. I also examine relationships through an interpersonal lens and lastly, provide a theoretical framework to understand the significance and meaning of relationships forged by participants in a first-year university outdoor orientation program.

History and Purpose of Outdoor Orientation Programs

Outdoor orientation programs (OOPs) or wilderness orientation programs (WOPs) have been around for years and continue to be popular today. According to Curtis (2013), “Over the past ten years wilderness orientation programs (WO) have expanded across the country” (p. 1). this increase is associated with a variety of challenges that many universities and colleges face. Of the many reasons listed, a few major concerns include, “student retention, becoming part of a diverse community, building life-long recreation skills, and connecting outdoor education to the curriculum” (Curtis, 2013, p. 1).

Outdoor orientation programs are rooted in the foundations of experiential learning. Kolb’s model of experiential learning embodies the theory that learning is a hands-on experience

that connects the learner to the realities being studied. The learning occurs when a student participates in a concrete experience, reflects on the experience and then applies it to other situations (Kolb, 2015). First-year outdoor orientation programs follow a similar model where a student is placed directly in the program experience and through that experience attains insight into ways to overcome challenges with transitioning to college. Generally, OOPs involve small groups of first-year students where they spend at least one night away from the college campus (Temes, 2016). Often the programs will focus on developing personal, social and academic goals (Curtis, 2013). These goals support systematic institutional goals of retention and bolstering graduation rates. According to Galloway in his 2000 study on assessing wilderness orientation programs, a positive impact of student retention after participating in a pre-college orientation program.

As previously mentioned, current research indicates that over 164 colleges are implementing some form of outdoor orientation programming (Bell et. Al., 2010). The rise of such programming is a direct result of the challenges listed above. Because retention is a key driver for institutional success, and students feeling they belong to the university directly contributes to retention; it is important to foster an initial sense of belonging in a student's educational journey. OOPs offer opportunities to build friendships, explore self-identity, challenge physical and mental capabilities, and participate as a member of a community. These social aspirations are supplemented with academic and curricular initiatives. There are a variety of models for wilderness orientations, but key components are rooted in self-exploration,

collaboration among peers and campus staff, and validation that the student is seen and valued at the institution. One important construct relevant to the impacts of OOPs is connected to student development and self-identity.

Student Development According to Chickering's psychosocial theory on student development, college students experience different stages of development as they attend the university. He suggests that in order for student development to occur, the student will experience seven vectors, or tasks (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The seven vectors include: developing competence, managing emotions, developing autonomy, establishing identity, freeing interpersonal relationships, developing a purpose, and establishing integrity. These vectors account for sociocultural and environmental influences. Studies have revealed important findings using Chickering's student development theory on outdoor orientation programs, such as Frauman and Waryold's 2009 study. They found that first year students participating in a wilderness orientation program gained a sense of self in a new culture and experienced higher levels of self-confidence, emotional control, social competence, and task leadership among others (Frauman & Warywold, 2009). Of the seven vectors, this study is most interested in acknowledging the impact of freeing interpersonal relationships on student development. Chickering notes that, a student's most important teacher is another student, and that relationships with close friends and peer groups, or subcultures, are primary forces influencing student development in college (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). His definition of developing mature interpersonal relationships is grounded in tolerance and appreciation of difference, along

with capacity for intimacy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This includes the ability for students to meet people with different beliefs, values, morals, and backgrounds. Chickering asserts that the interpersonal relationship vector is especially important in forging meaningful relationships for students and allows for a new level of acceptance and self-identity realization.

Self-Identity In conjunction with student development is the process and development of self-identity. As it was mentioned, freshman outdoor orientation programs provide an avenue for discovery of the self through new experiences, people, and ideas. It is important to understand what defines identity and how it relates to incoming freshman. Identity is summarized by an individual's combination of behaviors, preferences, thoughts, talents, backgrounds, beliefs, and morals. For many college students, their identity has been previously shaped by their parents, community, and schoolmates (Chickering & Reisser 1993). John Dewey once said that "the self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action." (cited in Hanson, 2012, p. 181). For entering college students, the choice to enroll at a university is active and exploration into the self is a significant result of this action. Students bring preexisting identities to college and are granted permission to explore them. In a long-term study on the effect of wilderness programs on first-year students, Gass et al. discovered that one of the main themes found through student participants was that they challenged assumptions about who they are and beliefs they hold (2003, p. 36). This suggests that the program influenced the way they viewed themselves and reflected on their self-identities.

Marcia's 1980 identity status theory provides a framework for understanding self-identity for incoming freshman. In the psychological sense, identity relates to understanding who you are and is self-constructed based on a person's own commitment and exploration (Marcia, 1980, p. 109). Student-identity involves four different statuses relating to commitment and exploration. Included are diffusion (low commitment, low exploration), moratorium (low commitment, high exploration), foreclosure (low commitment, low exploration), and achievement (high commitment, high exploration) (p. 111). In a 1977 study on college students by Munro and Adams, it was concluded that students who enter the workforce directly after high school experience higher identity achievement, whereas a student entering college may experience a less defined career direction initially, (moratorium) but will gradually move towards achievement in their later student years (Marcia, 1980). Additionally, identity is shaped by a variety of relationships. These relationships include intimate, stereotyped, and isolate. Marcia suggests that the more intimate the relationship becomes, the greater the influence on identity development (Marcia, 1980). Studies on relationships in first year outdoor orientations indicate that participants develop stronger and more meaningful bonds with other trip participants and these relationships can serve socially to enhance self-identity. In a 1995 study of 360 college students it was revealed that students who participated in a semester outdoor seminar experienced less foreclosure (low commitment, low exploration) than students who did not participate (Anderson-Hanley, 1995). Self-identity and student development fundamentally build

toward acclimation to the university. In addition, acculturation also depends on the ability for students to find group membership in a community where they feel accepted.

Sense of Community

Researchers and theorists have been studying the theory of sense of community for over thirty years. However, more recent studies have begun to link sense of community to student persistence and retention at universities as it relates to outdoor orientation programs. McMillian and Chavis' definition of sense of community requires the understanding of the four core elements that embody community development (1986). Membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (McMillian & Chavis, 1986, p. 9) guide how people begin to form groups, and gives structure to the psychology of belonging.

Community in its most basic form has roots in the foundations of human development. As people, we have inherent needs that must be met, and in order to meet those needs, we must focus on our relationship to one another. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, "in order to develop, we need safety, love, and belonging (Lua, Xhang, & Qi, 2017, p. 154). These elements are built into how people approach and live their lives. In every aspect of natural and socially-constructed life, community is present. In 1989, Lloyd-Jones described sense of community as, "binding together individuals towards a common cause or experience..." (Elkins, Forrester, Noel-Elkins, 2011, p. 3). This definition presents two constructs that are essential in defining the basis for the theory of sense of community. The first construct is individuals, and the second is working

towards a common goal or experience. In order for outdoor orientation programs to be successful, these two components are essential.

The theory of sense of community is formally defined as, "... a feeling that members have a belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (Sprinks, 2013). The theory's intentions are to explore how the two constructs, people and purpose, relate to overall motivation and satisfaction of human needs. The research that has been studied to help describe how sense of community functions, is based mostly on qualitative analysis. According to the theory's creator, David McMillian, (2011) "sense of community is a complex notion ... Defining the spirit of community is like catching lightning in a bottle ... thus "sense" is used in the first half of the theory (p. 511). The struggle to capture the true essence of the theory can be illustrated in the application of the various assessments that have been created.

Other curriculum theories also provide context into the evolution of sense of community. Typically place-based approaches, which heavily influence OOPs, illustrate characteristics that are similar to the dimensions of sense of community. There is an innate connection between sense of community and place-based theories, "sense of place is an experientially based intimacy with the natural process, community, and history of one's place" (Austin, et al, 2010, p. 77). The physical environment naturally creates boundaries that are conducive to the creation of membership in a community. For OOPs, the physical and environmental boundaries are strategically chosen based on programmatic goals and objectives.

As a byproduct of psychological community, the theory of sense of community has evolved into a useful resource in identifying and assessing community development. It hints to place-based approaches, but also eludes to other social and individual differences that construct associations. McMillian and Chavis contend that there are four areas of focus that are essential in community, those are membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection.

Applied to higher education, belonging as membership, is influenced across the campus. A student's sense of belong is influenced by their peers, staff, faculty, administration, community members and many others that they might interact with. "In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness... (Ribera, Miller, Dumford, 2015, pg. 2). Belonging is a conscious assessment of social interactions with others which is why establishing membership is prioritized when creating successful first year wilderness programs. Perceived peer and mentor support and are connected to the dimensions of a student's academic and social integration at a university.

Interpersonal Relationships

Outdoor orientation programs have historically been linked to student success through their ability to promote relationships among student participants. Studies indicate that these social relationships function and are sustained throughout a college experience (Ribbe et al., 2016). Additionally, in prior research, themes of friendship as a social and supportive network have emerged and provide evidence on the lasting impact for college students' transition to

college (Bell et al., 2014). The following section describes and defines relationships, along with how they serve specific needs.

Relationships Because orientation programs are often the first opportunity for students to connect and build lasting friendships, social integration is a prominent aspect in the programs (Tinto 1993). Research suggests that relationships formed during a precollege experience positively influence college transition and adjustment (Paul & Brier, 2001). The research also supports that relationships formed through orientation programs help ease loneliness as well as emotional adjustment (Swenson et al. 2008).

Precollege interpersonal friendships provide students an opportunity to connect, share, and work through challenges. The process of building these relationships intersects with self-identity. Interpersonal relationships are often forged through shared interests, values, sense of humor, sexual orientation, musical preferences, and hobbies. Proximity also influences relationships forged (Buote et al., 2007). Additionally, self-disclosure and sharing personal details about their background creates a stronger friendship bond (Buote et al., 2007). For students living in the same residence halls, the strength of those relationships is also increased. This is also evident when students are placed in close proximity through shared spaces on overnight orientation trips. It is because of these newly formed relationships that students begin to develop community and resources to become successful in their transition to college. The theory of people as means related to interpersonal relationships helps us understand this phenomenon and the usefulness of the relationships.

People as Means The theory of people as means provides a framework for understanding and interpreting how relationships function. According to this approach, relationships contribute in a number of ways: emotional support, encouragement, knowledge and skills (Orehek et al., 2018). The relationship is viewed as an instrument in order to fulfill goal(s) and if the relationship does not meet the goal(s), it is dissolved. The goals can be presented as a need that is already understood by both people, or it can be discovered after initial contact is made. It is said that when a need is “in progress” of being met, the bond is considerably stronger (Orehek et al., p. 374, 2018). Applied to college outdoor orientation programs, relationships formed directly contribute to the need (goal) to belong, feel safe, and effectively acclimate to college life (Tinto 1993).

People as a means also indicates that relationships which are perceived “more socially supportive are more likely to produce an increased level of closeness” (Orehek et al., 2018, p.379). Some people might serve multiple means, but those relationships can be less frequent. Orehek et. Al., suggest that relationship maintenance is critical in sustaining a meaningful connection. They suggest the following to protect a relationship:

...become more instrumental to the partner, allow opportunities for partner to become more instrumental to oneself, prevent rivals from becoming instrumental to the partner, prevent partner from becoming more instrumental to other rivals, prevent oneself from becoming instrumental to alternative partners, and prevent partners from becoming instrumental means to oneself. (p.382).

These strategies are also supplemented by encouraging increased frequency in meeting the partners' goals.

Summary

In summary, higher education has embraced the practice of implementing orientation programs as a way to ease student transition to college. Of the variety of models, outdoor orientation programs provide an intimate environment where one-on-one interaction creates a stronger sense of community with other peers (Bell et al 2014, p. 33). Student integration into a university is highly influenced by social and academic integration. Pre-college relationships can impact a student's ability to navigate the variety of nuances that come with the transition. Often first-year students will experience a shift in their personal development as well as with their perceived self-identity. With the support of interpersonal relationships, students are likely to persist and have a positive impact on student success.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to describe the nature of social relationships forged through a college outdoor orientation program and how the students used those relationships as social and academic resources during the first semester of their freshman year. First, this chapter begins with the description of the research design and its importance as it relates to the study. Second, this chapter explains the setting and the participants being studied. Next, it discusses the

development of the interviews. The chapter concludes with a detailed description of the collection and analysis of the data.

Research Design

This study applied a qualitative case study design and adapted methods of phenomenology. As Johnson and Christensen (2017) note, “a case study is a form of qualitative research that focuses on providing a detailed account of one or more cases” (p. 50). They also describe phenomenology as, “a form of qualitative research in which the researcher attempts to understand how one or more individuals experience a particular phenomenon” (Johnson & Christensen, 2017, p. 48). This study had two phases. In the first phase the researcher made observations during the trip of participant interactions. Field notes were kept regarding those observations. The purpose of the observations was two-fold: 1) to make notes of the activities that fostered participants learning about one another and forming relationships; and 2) identifying potential pairs, trios, or small group for the interview phase of the study. Upon completion of the orientation experience, one small group of participants was identified to be invited to the second phase of the study. In the second phase of this study, the identified participants were invited to three, semi-structured group interviews. The focus of the interviews was to explore the nature of the relationships that the participants formed during their outdoor orientation experience, and how those relationships may be significant social and academic resources across their first semester as university students.

Setting and Participants

Every year the university that is the setting of this study (hereafter university) offers a four-day freshman outdoor orientation program, Freshman Adventure (pseudonym), that takes place one week prior to entering college. Participants in this study were enrolled as first-year students at the university in the Fall of 2018 who also took part in the Freshman Adventure program from August 18 – 21, 2018. Fifteen potential participants were identified through a contact list provided to the researcher by the Director of the Freshman Adventure program. An initial email was sent along with a consent form to invite the students to participate in the observational phase and allow the researcher to take field notes during the trip. After the first phase, a small group of three students was identified and invited to participate in three semi-structured, 90-minute group interviews as the focal case. All of the interviews took place in a semi-private office conference room on campus. All data collected were encrypted and securely stored on a password protected laptop and on the university cloud.

A copy of the letter from the IRB granting permission to proceed in this study is found in Appendix A. Additionally, Appendix B includes a copy of the initial letter of recruitment that was sent via email to the fifteen registered Freshman Outdoor Orientation program students describing the study and asking them to sign the consent form. The consent form is located in Appendix C.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection in this study consisted of two parts, the first being field notes and observations during the Freshman Adventure trip, and the second three semi-structured group

interviews during the 2018 fall semester. In the first phase, as participant-observer on the trip, I took detailed notes describing interactions among participants. These field notes provided me a log of activities and experiences in which students were engaged and notes on the formation of relationships I observed. Based on the results of phase one, I then asked a group of three students to participate in the three semi-structured group interviews. The three interviews systematically built off one-another and were hosted at three different points in the semester; one week after the trip, in the middle of the semester, and at the end of the semester. The first interview explored the nature of the social relationships and asked question such as, Going off together for four days was like a big blind date, what was it like to interact with people you did not know? One reason I invited you to this interview is because I noticed you clicked. Tell me the connection you found with each other. In the second interview, the researcher aimed to explore how the social relationships had been sustained. This interview prompted questions such as, How has your experience on the freshman outdoors trip influenced your first semester? What have been your biggest challenges so far in the semester? In the final interview, the participants were asked to reflect retrospectively on their semester. They were asked questions on their overall feeling of the semester and how they think their social relationship has developed or been sustained. The questions were developed to be open-ended and allow the students to describe their meaning of the relationships and how the relationship serves as a resource. A copy of the interview protocols can be found in Appendix E.

Data were gathered using field notes of observations during the four-day Freshman Outdoor Orientation trip. Written field notes consisted of descriptions of the different experiences and interactions between the participants and was used to reflect back on during the following interviews. After the trip, a group of three students was identified and invited to participate in the three semi-structured interviews that was held on campus during the fall semester. The interview protocol included warm-up questions and questions about the nature of the participants' social relationships with each other, how they have been sustained, and the participants' perspective of their first semester at college. The interviews were audio-recorded for transcription and analysis purposes. Thematic analysis of the data was applied in three tiers. The first tier was coded within the interview to identify recurring topics and patterns in the group experience of social relationships formed in the Freshman Outdoor Orientation program. The second tier was coded across interviews to identify patterns of consistency and change among the social relationships formed during the Freshman Outdoor Orientation Program. In the final tier, the researcher synthesized the emergent patterns into descriptive themes.

Summary

A qualitative case study applying methods of phenomenology was used to collect data to understand the nature and meaning of social relationships formed by participants in an outdoor orientation program during the fall semester at college. The design was created to also explore how the social relationships formed during the outdoor orientation experience served as an academic and social resource for the students. The study had two phases for data collection. The

first phase included the researcher taking field notes of observations during the outdoor orientation trip. The field notes served to identify a group of trip participants that had socially bonded. In the second phase, the researcher invited a group of three students from the trip to participate in three semi-structured group interviews during the fall semester. The next chapter will discuss the meanings and findings of the data along with emergent themes that resulted in the analysis.

Chapter Four

Results and Discussion

This chapter includes the emergent themes of the three semi-structured group interviews with three first-year Freshman Adventure participants as a case study. The interviews were structured in such a way to examine the evolution of the relationships, forged during the orientation experience. Additionally, it explored how those relationships served as a means for the students during their first semester of freshman year. I begin with describing the emergent theme relating to the nature of the relationship. Next, I describe the themes in which their relationship functioned as a means socially and academically. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the implications of the findings of this case study.

Nature of Relationship

As noted in various studies, outdoor orientation programs serve as an avenue for first year students to build networks of friendships among peers to ease their transition to college (Curtis, 2013). The results of this case study provide an understanding and definition of the functionality and norms of the newly formed relationship among program participants at a Midwestern regional university. A key finding of the study was the participants' description of their relationship as a close-casual friendship with emphasis on polarity (opposites/compliments), loyalty, and adventure. The following section provides descriptions

and supporting excerpts from the series of interviews which provides clarity, narrative, and context to this theme.

Close-Casual Friendship When asked to define how they viewed their relationship the group described it using their newly coined term, close-casual. This term provides reference to how the relationship developed and served them as first year students.

As a relationship evolves, so does its purpose, functionality, and frequency. During the first interview with the group, and one week after their outdoor orientation, the group shared about the experiences they had on the trip and the impact it had on forming the new friendship. One student said, *“The trip was really the only reason I have actual friends and that I don’t think we would have met or bonded if we weren’t on the trip.”* The second student added, *“I think the reason we bonded is because of our different paths and personalities. My personality is more assertive, while the other two are much more easy going.”* The third student replied with sharing about the first night that they shared a tent together. This moment was commonly referenced as “the night in the tent” and held significance in forging their friendship. The “night in the tent” happened on the first full day of the trip. In the morning leaders guided icebreaker activities, in the afternoon the students climbed for the first time, and in the evening dinner was prepared. The students were tired and having met one another on the wall earlier that day, decided to bunk together in the same tent. The three students zipped up the tent and what happened next laid the groundwork for their future friendship. Sounds of laughter reverberated throughout the camp. One student shared her experience, *“when we had to go to bed, I felt like that night in the tent*

was a turning point. We helped one another fall asleep by sharing stories about boyfriends, prom, our faith, and about our family. I think at that point we broke through to another level and for the remainder of the trip we were tight.” Another student chimed in about her past relationships, *“I have so been there with my boyfriends!”* As mentioned, faith and spirituality were brought up, *“I consider myself very religious”* another responded, *“that’s great, and I can respect that, but I’m just not there in life.”* Barriers were beginning to soften, and the group began self-disclosing important details regarding their identity and upbringing. The night in the tent was a significant and influential moment in all stages of their friendship. It is important to note that the “night in the tent” was referenced in each of the three interviews as one of their favorite and most important aspects to define their friendship. The space created permission for the participants to self-disclose personal information related to their identity and created the intimacy or “closeness” part of their friendship. Research supports this experience with how placed based approaches are intentional about creating boundaries that lend to building and nurturing relationships. Personal and physical boundaries are conducive for natural bonding to occur (Austin et. al 2010).

The close-casual friendship evolved throughout the trip and into the first semester. On the second day of the trip, mutual understandings of identity were recognized and understood by the group. One student shared, *“As we all got to know one another, I’d say on the second day, there was a funny moment when we were playing cards where you had to swear, and we were like, this another student doesn’t like to swear so maybe we should call it something different.”* This

moment illustrated respect for the student's preference not to swear and created a sense of security in knowing she was accepted for who she is. Moments like these created a unique sense of closeness. During the second interview a student said, *"even though we have only known each other for a short while, I feel like I know them just as equally if not more than my childhood friends. Most people don't know about my anxiety, but it was one of the first things I shared with these two on the trip and in the tent. They respect me for who I am, who I am going to be, which include my struggles."* The ability for the students to feel accepted when together created a sense of belonging, one without judgement.

As time passed throughout the semester, the group agreed that their time spent with one another was not as frequent as it had been right after the trip. *"We are not spending every minute together,"* a student stated. *"Yeah, but when we do it is like we pick right up where we left off,"* another followed. The casual aspect of this friendship is related to the frequency of the three students getting together. *"When we do get together, we spend time at the climbing wall. We joined climb team and like to hike together."* Adventure and staying active was significant as it was the bond which formed and sustains their friendship. This parallels research that indicates that relationships are often created through shared interests, identity, and values (Buote et al 2007). The interests were already aligned when all three signed up for the trip and has been sustained throughout the first semester of their freshman year.

Additionally, the students expressed a feeling that this friendship was based on an intimate sense of loyalty. One student explained that she knew that the other students will always

have her back and that even if they don't see one another as much, they will always be there. The evolution to this deep sense of trust and support was discovered early on. On the final night of the trip, all participants gathered around a fire to debrief about their trip experience and to share fears that they had about life and entering college. One of the students expounded on the impact of this exercise, *"When we played fears in a hat I felt the most connected not only to the entire group, but especially these two. It made me realize that we are all in the same boat and that we are all humans."* The sense of commonality bridged differences and formed a community of people that understood the difficulties of transitioning to college because they were experiencing it simultaneously. This provided an additional avenue for the group to dive deeper into their personal lives and build the authentic trust and loyalty that is the essence of their friendship.

The group's definition of a close-casual relationship is one that is rooted in vulnerability, authenticity, and the knowing that the person will always be there for them no matter how long it has been since they last saw them. An embrace in the hallway, a shoulder to cry on, an afternoon hike, or laughter over funny climbing moments are all ways in which this group of students bonded and became friends on the first-year Freshman Adventure trip and during their first semester. As one student put it, *"You don't have to hang out all the time to be good friends. They are good friends because no matter how long you go, you know they are always just a text message away."*

Relationship as a Means

Relationships serve people with a variety of needs and the relationship is viewed a tool to meet those needs (Orehek et al., 2018). As noted in the literature review, not all needs are equal in nature and sometimes the relationship is actually the need, the need to belong. In this study, the three student participants shared a variety of experiences that illustrated how the newly formed friendship served them during the trip and the first year of freshman year. Three themes emerged after analyzing the three interviews. They were that the students in this study found the friendship to serve them socially, emotionally, and helped them with self-identify development.

Social Resource Transitioning to college can be socially challenging. Developing social networks at college are important to a students' sense of belonging and can have a positive impact on students' sense of membership, influence, integration, fulfillment of needs and emotional connection (McMillian & Chavis, 1986). During the three interviews, the participants shared about the impact this friendship had on their ability to navigate the challenges with transition. During the second interview, one student talked about the ability of the group to meet, *"In the first few weeks of school we have been scheduling lunch with each other. It doesn't always work, but it is nice to know we can try to eat at least once a week."* Included with sharing meals together, the participants all agreed that when they see each other it is typically at the climbing wall or engaging in some kind of outdoor recreation. Community is built when common interests are shared among the group. The shared interest in climbing was established on the trip and was sustained throughout the first semester of their freshman year.

The students also indicated how nice it was to have people on campus that they already knew before entering the formal orientation week. One student said, *“It felt so good to have friends before the orientation week started. I didn’t feel so stressed thinking I had to make friends during that week. I knew I already had a support network.”* As previously mentioned, building new connections with peers can be stressful for incoming students. However, with the new connection the three students had already built, it took the pressure off initially. They had inside stories from the trip that bonded them together. The stories and shared trust provided community that was forged through a common purpose of not feeling alone.

As the semester progressed, during the second interview the students began talking about living arrangements for the following year. *“Let’s rent a house!”* one student excitedly shrieked, another responded with, *“Yes, I’m game!”* The students continued to talk about the different areas of town that they wanted to find a house. A closeness was felt in the security of knowing that the students had met other people who liked them so much that they wanted to live together in the future.

At the core of this friendship as a social resource was the ability to engage in recreational activity, knowing that they have two other people to talk to, and opportunities to create even more social interactions. The nature of this relationship was close-casual, and socially this follows suit. When the students interacted at common meeting areas, the need to belong directly influenced their perceived acceptance. As a social resource emerged, so did opportunity for emotional support.

Emotional Resource According to Chickering, a student's most important teacher is another student and student connection is built through intimate and vulnerable moments (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Emotional support in this study was defined as the following:

“Emotional support is born out of real, authentic relationships with other people. In healthy friendships and relationships, it is a two-way street; both people in the relationship give and receive emotional support freely. Emotional support is a vital component of a healthy relationship and indicates that a relationship is deeper and more meaningful than a casual acquaintance (Define Emotional Support, 2012-2014).

The experiences of the three participants was rooted in the ability to share with each other challenging and difficult moments in life. The friendship served as an emotional resource almost immediately when they initially met. On the second day of the trip, one of the students experienced a challenging emotional moment while climbing. The other student safely clipped in and peered over the edge of the cliff where she was hanging. One student coached the other through and gave supportive encouragement such as, *“I know you’ve got this, you are stronger than you know!”* Eventually when the student climbing summited, she was warmly embraced in the arms of the other student. Since the first night in the tent, the student who was supported replied, *“I knew she understood me in a way that I felt safe and could just cry.”*

Similarly, on that same day, the student who provided emotional support for the other student on the wall experienced an intense emotional moment. In the same way she felt supported, the same student came over and put her arms around the other and they sat together

until the student became calm. Those moments of real, raw, and authentic vulnerability shaped their relationship throughout the remainder of the trip and into their first semester.

During the second interview, one student spoke to knowing triggers and emotional challenges of another student, *“I know that S2 has a hard time when she is alone and her anxiety will likely be heightened. We’ve kind of made it our thing to know that I am always a text away if she needs a hug or to cry.”* It was in these moments that a mutual understanding existed where the *“I’ll be there for you”* was experienced. The frequency of the emotional interactions follows their term of close-casual. Even though the students did see each other all the time, the closeness persisted. One student shared, *“It was about midway through the semester and our schedules have been really busy so we really haven’t seen each other. I remember I was on my way to class in the hallway when I saw S2 and ran over to say hello. She immediately fell into my arms in tears. Even though it has been a long time since we caught up, this is how our friendship is. I am there for her because she knows me and S2 gives me the same thing back.”* Care and empathy were critical aspects of the friendship as it was a significant bond that brought the students back to one another.

Emotional support as a resource provided the three students with a safe space to grieve, heal, and feel cared for. Encouragement and empathy combined to create a unique connection that no matter how hard it may seem, the students find friendship in knowing that they have someone who genuinely cares. This care also paved the way to another type of resource, assisting in self-identity development.

Self-Identity Resource Self-identity is shaped in a variety of ways. As noted, students arrive at college with previous identities, but they are also exposed to a new environment that allows for the creation and exploration of a new self (Gass et. al, 2003). With an outdoor orientation program, identities are stripped away and the students that participate are intentionally introduced to a new culture. As a result, permission is given to begin the exploration into who they want to be. Identity was a reoccurring topic that was brought up in each of the three interviews. For one student her journey with self-identity development shifted throughout the first semester, *“I came to school without a clear idea of who I am and who I wanted to be. I didn’t know that I would love climbing, or that I would have made some of my very best friends on the trip. I’ve never really been into anything and now I can go climb and be by myself, or climb and be with them (two other students).”* This friendship gave this student a chance to be exposed to new activities and challenges that ignited affirmation in beginning to understand who she is and what brings her joy.

Additionally, self-identity as a resource played out with a student deciding on her major. She began college with an idea of which program she was interested in pursuing and through the first semester that significantly changed. With the help of this newly formed group of friends, she was able question her true passions. *“I thought I was going to go into natural sciences and now I’m just not sure. I’m not all that interested it and it is really stressing me out!”* Another student responded with, *“It’s okay if you don’t know! Take a deep breath, we’ve got a lot of time to decide. If it’s not right, then don’t make the decision just yet.”* This sequence of conversation

was the beginning of the student's journey to discovering more about her professional interests. The two students in this conversation continued to be there for one another and the student ended up meeting with a variety of advisors to explore her options.

Another example of how this relationship served as a resource for identity-development was with body image. During the first interview, one week after the trip, one student expressed her concerns about gaining weight during her first semester. *"I always make sure to get at least one workout in a day, if not two, I am worried about gaining weight."* Later, during the second interview (midway through the semester) the same student brought it up again, *"I've been talking to student 3 and she is supporting me through this. I'm trying to be proud and satisfied with my body shape and who I am. I am realizing now that I don't need to be a different person. I'm learning to love myself."* The ability for the one student to disclose a personal identity struggle with another provided her with an encourager and someone who reminded her of her worth. Chickering's student development parallels this experience as it confirms that the student is working through her identity issues and is learning how to manage her emotions around it (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Lastly, this relationship valued pre-existing identities, but did not allow them to define who the person was. For instance, one student explained, *"what was so different about our friendship from past ones is that neither (S1 or S2) ever questioned why I wasn't pursuing my sport at an international level. For my whole life, that is all anyone has ever talked to me about or thought of me as. It feels so nice not being just defined by that. There's more to me!"* The

student appreciated that she had room to become who she wanted in the company of the other two students. Space and permission once again provided an opportunity to positively impact and influence the students' self-worth.

Discussion

Based on the three semi-structured group interviews with the three freshman trip participants the emergent themes of the nature of the relationship and how the relationship served the students during the first semester of their freshman year revealed a variety of positive impacts. The framework that was set in the first two chapters of this study parallels with other researcher found about the impacts that first year outdoor orientation programs can have on a student's ability to adapt to college. Development of social networks and an increased sense of belonging are important in the student development process (Tinto, 1993). The participants in this study revealed a type of friendship that can be formed during an outdoor orientation program. The participants labeled their friendship as a close-casual relationship. This definition associates with the frequency of the interactions and the intimacy of the group. The analysis revealed that authentic relationships can be forged and that usefulness of that relationship can persist throughout the duration of the first semester of freshman year. For these students, time between interactions did not influence the level of closeness they felt when they saw one another again.

Additionally, consistent with the research (Buote et al. 2007), the participants' friendship was based on self-disclosure and loyalty. It was also influenced by a shared set of norms

(McMillian & Chavis, 1986) that aided in sustaining the relationship. The students found the relationship to serve them socially, emotionally, and as an instrument to work through their forming self-identities. Socially, the students used the friendship as a way to continue climbing and being active. They continued to gather at the campus climbing wall into the first semester. This common meeting ground established friendship boundaries and presented an opportunity to continue building group membership around a common interest. Emotionally, the three students were able to support one another through difficult challenges. They did so by listening, making themselves accessible through different media channels, and creating a safe space to self-disclose personal struggles. The relationship also served the students as an avenue to have discussion about their developing identities. This included breaking through aspects of their pre-existing identities and forging new ones related to interests and possible academic major changes.

There were some drawbacks to this study because the sample size was limited to three students with a unique and specific experience. The time frame also presented challenges as this study was conducted over the course of one semester at college and potential changes in the nature of the relationship and its resourcefulness may have shifted as time passed. The study was exploratory in nature and provided a deeper understanding and appreciation for the purpose of pre-college outdoor orientation programs and creates a foundation for future research.

Chapter Five

Summary and Conclusions

This qualitative case study was conducted to understand the nature of relationships formed during a freshman outdoor orientation trip among participants. The study also explored how pre-college relationships might function as resources for students during their first semester at college. The participants in this study were three students that attended a pre-college adventure orientation program. The group participated in three semi-structured interviews during the first semester to share about their newly formed friendship. The educational implications suggest that for this small group of students, participating in a pre-college outdoor orientation program provided them an opportunity to build a useful friendship that served them socially, emotionally, and as an avenue for self-identity exploration.

This chapter includes educational implications, recommendations for future research, limitations, and a summary to conclude the chapter.

Educational Implications

Universities are faced with a variety of challenges some of which include pressure to retain students and bolster graduation rates (Galloway, 2000). Research suggests that institutional success can be positively impacted by first-year orientation programs. Tinto's model of student integration drives many activities around first year programs (Karp et. al, 2011). This model asserts that when students feel connected, socially and academically to the institution, it can positively influence their ability to persist. This is important as many first-year orientation

programs aim to build community among incoming students and develop personal, social, and academic goals (Curtis, 2013), thus impacting retention. The findings in this study parallel and contribute to the field of first-year orientation programs. The study revealed that the participants that participated in a pre-college outdoor orientation program did forge meaningful relationships with peers that served them as resources during their first semester at college. Insights were gained on friendship as a resource related to social, emotional, and self-identity development through this study.

The student relationship in this study is nonlinear in nature. The group described the evolution of their friendship as close-casual. They felt an intimate connection to one another from the first week following the trip to the last day of their first semester. The connection persisted even though their frequency of interactions declined overtime. This defined the casual aspect of their friendship. The friendship was multidimensional and served as a variety of resources for the students. Consistent with prior research on people serving as means (Orehek et al., 2018), the students found the friendship to assist them in socialization to campus. It functioned as an avenue to engage in social activities such as recreation. The friendship also was defined by trust and loyalty. Because the students felt comfortable with one another, they shared personal aspects of their lives. The closeness provided someone to talk to about challenges around transitioning to college, including mental health. Finally, the relationship gave the students permission to explore aspects of their self-identity by engaging in personal dialog about who they want to be. All of these resources collectively established group expectations and

norms, which led to group membership and helped the students navigate the variety of challenges with adjusting to college.

This study affirmed the importance of intentional pre-college outdoor orientation programs and the value that they bring to students' lives beyond the actual trip experience. It also provided insight on the potential for students to build close-casual relationships through participation on a pre-college outdoor orientation trip. Transition and acculturation to college can be intimidating and stressful. However, this study revealed how pre-college friendships forged through a freshman outdoor orientation program can positively impact students' sense of belonging.

Recommendations for Future Research

In the future a longer study might more accurately gauge the impacts of friendships forged through an outdoor orientation program among participants. Since this study was limited to one case of first-year college students, it would be beneficial for future research to study other first-year outdoor orientation programs to compare the experiences and impacts of pre-college relationships. Additionally, extending the scope of the study to explore the impacts of the friendship over the course of a full year may reveal additional findings and nuances.

Limitations

The focus of this study was on one small group of students who forged a friendship after experiencing a first-year outdoor orientation trip. The sample was small in scope and results of this study cannot be generalized to other populations of first-year students.

Additionally, this case study explored the impacts of the friendship over the course of the groups' first semester. Thus, it cannot be assumed that the findings of this study reflect the perceptions of the students' full year at college.

Summary

Pre-college orientation programs allow students to build social networks that can ease the transition to the university. Outdoor orientation programs is one model that intentionally promotes peer bonding through the use of recreation and other structured activities. As prior research suggests, in order for students to effectively acclimate to their new college environment, they need to feel a sense of belonging. This particular study shows that friendships forged during a pre-college outdoor orientation program can function as beneficial resources that aide in students adjustment to college and perceived belongingness. The friendship in this study revealed key resources that the group utilized during their first semester. The resources included social, emotional, and self-identity support. Educators and college orientation professionals should continue to develop orientation experiences that foster pre-college friendships, because in this study the impact was fruitful.

Although this study was a start in providing an understanding of how first-year students use friendships forged during an pre-college outdoor orientation program as resources during their first semester, more research can be done to better understand their lasting impact.

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Appendix A - IRB

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

<i>Twin Cities Campus</i>	Human Research Protection Program <i>Office of the Vice President for Research</i>	D528 Mayo Memorial Building 420 Delaware Street S.E. MMC 820 Minneapolis, MN 55455 Phone: 612-626-5654 Fax: 612-626-6061 Email: irb@umn.edu http://www.research.umn.edu/subjects/
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EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

July 30, 2018

Lynn Brice

218-340-2618
lbrice@umn.edu

Dear Lynn Brice:

On 7/30/2018, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	A Case Study of Social Relationships Forged a Through Freshman Outdoor Orientation Program
Investigator:	Lynn Brice
IRB ID:	STUDY00003720
Documents Reviewed with this Submission:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NELSON - RELATIONSHIPS IN AN OUTDOOR ORIENTATION PROGRAM - CONSENT FORM.docx, Category: Consent Form; • NELSON - RELATIONSHIPS IN AN OUTDOOR ORIENTATION PROGRAM -LETTER OF RECRUITMENT .docx, Category: Recruitment Materials; • NELSON - RELATIONSHIPS IN AN OUTDOOR ORIENTATION PROGRAM - HRP-580 - SOCIAL PROTOCOL .docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • NELSON - RELATIONSHIPS IN AN OUTDOOR ORIENTATION PROGRAM - INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .docx, Category: Other; • NELSON - RELATIONSHIPS IN AN OUTDOOR ORIENTATION PROGRAM - LETTER OF SUPPORT.pdf, Category: Letters of Support / Approvals (Location);

Appendix A – IRB (Continued)

The IRB determined that this study meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To arrive at this determination, the IRB used “WORKSHEET: Exemption (HRP-312).” If you have any questions about this determination, please review that Worksheet in the [HRPP Toolkit Library](#) and contact the IRB office if needed.

This study met the following category for exemption:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that Human Subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the Human Subjects responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects financial standing, employability, or reputation

Ongoing IRB review and approval for this study is not required; however, this determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a Modification to the IRB for a determination.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the [HRPP Toolkit Library](#) on the IRB website.

For grant certification purposes, you will need these dates and the Assurance of Compliance number which is FWA00000312 (Fairview Health Systems Research FWA00000325, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare FWA00004003).

Sincerely,

Jeffery P Perkey, CIP, MLS
IRB Analyst

We value feedback from the research community and would like to hear about your experience. The link below will take you to a brief survey that will take a minute or two to complete. The questions are basic, but your responses will help us better understand what we are doing well and areas that may require improvement. Thank you in advance for completing the survey.

Even if you have provided feedback in the past, we want and welcome your evaluation.

https://umn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_5BiYrqPNMJRQSBn

Appendix B – Letter of Recruitment

LETTER OF RECRUITMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT ON SOCIAL RELATIONSHPS FORGED THROUGH A FRESHMAN OUTDOOR ORIENTATION PROGRAM

Project Title: A Case Study of Social Relationships Forged Through a Freshman Outdoor Orientation Program

Date:

Dear <<insert name>>,

My name is Mollie Nelson and I am a graduate student in the College of Education and Human Services Professions at the University of Minnesota Duluth. I am also one of your staff leaders for the upcoming Freshman Northshore Climbing Trip. I am writing to you to let you know of an opportunity for you to participate in a research study that I am conducting as part of my Master of Education program. The study is seeks to understanding how interpersonal relationships are formed among participants in the UMD Freshman Outdoor Orientation Program. More specifically, the study is focused on understanding the importance of interpersonal relationships among campus peers as part of a student’s college experience.

I am contacting you because you are registered as a participant in the Freshman Outdoor Orientation Program and may be interested in participating in this study. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

For your consideration, I have attached the study consent form for you to preview. The consent form explains the purpose of the study and what you would do, should you choose to participate. At our August 17 trip preparation meeting, I will explain the study further to you in detail, answer any questions that you may have about the study, and invite you to participate in the study and complete the consent form.

I look forward to a fun trip. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for considering to help me along in my educational journey!

Kindly,
Mollie Nelson
Graduate Student – UMD Department of Education
715-651-9479
nels5765@d.umn.edu

Appendix C – Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of Research Study: *A Case Study of Social Relationships Forged Through a Freshman Outdoor Orientation Program*(Protocol Number)

Investigator Team Contact Information: *Dr. Lynn Brice*

For questions about research appointments, the research study, research results, or other concerns, call the study team at:

Investigator Name: Dr. Lynn Brice Investigator Departmental Affiliation: Education UMD Phone Number: 218 726 6815 Email Address: lbrice@d.umn.edu	Student Investigator Name (if applicable): Mollie Nelson Phone Number: 715-651-9479 Email Address: nels5765@d.umn.edu
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Key Information About This Research Study

The following is a short summary to help you decide whether or not to be a part of this research study. More detailed information is listed later on in this form.

The purpose of this study is to describe the formation of and sustaining of interpersonal relationships formed among students who participate in experiences such as the Freshman Outdoor Orientation in order to better understand the role such relationships play in students' college experiences.

What is research?

- The goal of research is to learn new things in order to help people in the future. Investigators learn things by following the same plan with a number of participants, so they do not usually make changes to the plan for individual research participants. You, as an individual, may or may not be helped by volunteering for a research study.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to take part in this research study because you have registered to participate in the Freshman Outdoor Orientation as part of your orientation to the University as an entering student in the fall. As a participant in the outdoor orientation experience, you are invited to participate in the study of interpersonal relationships formed in such experiences and their importance to students' college experiences.

What should I know about a research study?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

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Version Date: 6/21/2018
TEMPALTE VERSION DATE: 3/26/2018

Appendix C – Consent Form (Continued)

Consent Form

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to describe the formation of interpersonal relationships that may form through an orientation experience such as the Freshman Outdoor Orientation, ways in which those relationships are sustained, and the importance they have for students in their college experiences. Prior research has shown that students who feel connected to their peers, instructors, advisors, and others on campus achieve academic success. Universities provide programs that deliberately seek to foster such relationships for entering students. This study seeks to contribute to our understanding of how interpersonal relationships with peers are formed in an orientation program and sustained over the course of the first semester.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for the four days of the outdoor orientation experience and potentially across your first semester. There are two phases to the study: 1) observations of the group by the researcher during the program; and 2) three subsequent one-hour group interviews.

What will I need to do to participate?

This study has two phases. The first phase doesn't require you to do anything extra and won't impact your experience. You will be asked to acknowledge that the researcher will be making observations throughout the four-day experience and taking field notes. The purpose of the observations is two-fold: 1) to make notes of activities that fostered participants learning about one another and forming relationships; and 2) identifying potential pairs, trios, or small groups for the follow-up interview phase of the study. In the second phase, you may be asked to participate in three interviews with one or more fellow program participants with whom you have formed a friendship. These follow up interviews will occur the week following the program, mid-fall semester, and at the end of fall semester. As participants in the observational phase of the study, you do not need to do anything outside of participating in the orientation program. Should you participate in the follow-up interviews, you will participate in three one-hour, audio recorded interviews with one or more of your program peers conducted by the researcher. The focus of the three follow-up interviews is discuss the relationships you and your peers formed during the orientation program, and how those relationships may be significant to you across your first semester as a university student.

Is there any way that being in this study could be bad for me?

There are potential minimal risks for you should you decide to participate in the study. You may feel some minor discomfort should there be a tense moment among the large group of program participants knowing that the researcher is observing. In the first phase of the study, the researcher keeps field notes that are general and informal about the interaction among the large group of program participants. Those notes are kept confidential by the researcher. In the second phase of the study should you be asked to be interviewed, you might experience some discomfort discussing relationships that may have become strained or simply dissipated. However, given that the focus of the follow-up interviews is to better understand the relationships of program participants over the semester, there is much potential to learn from relationships that dissipated as those that were sustained.

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Version Date: 6/21/2018
TEMPALTE VERSION DATE: 3/26/2018

Appendix C – Consent Form (Continued)

Consent Form

Will being in this study help me in any way?

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant in the study. Participating in the Freshman Outdoor Orientation is voluntary and does not involve any grade or evaluation. Thus, participating in the study bears no influence on your participation in the orientation program nor your entering the university. You may find the research process interesting as a study participant and your participation may contribute to greater understanding of the importance of fostering interpersonal relationships through orientation programs.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You do not have to participate in the study. For the first phase of the study, you will acknowledge that the researcher will make observations during the program activities in which you and your peers will participate. There is nothing additional or different you are asked to do in the first phase. For the second phase of the study, you may be invited to participate with one or more of your peers with whom you have formed friendships during the orientation program. You may choose to grant permission for the general, informal observations and decline to participate in any follow-up interviews.

Detailed Information About This Research Study

The following is more detailed information about this study in addition to the information listed above.

How many people will be studied?

We expect about 15 people will be observed during the four-day experience, and then a small group of 2-3 participants for the subsequent interviews.

What happens if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research”?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be observed throughout the four-day outdoor orientation program, August 18 – 21. During the trip, the researcher will take general field notes about the group’s interactions. In this first phase, you will not be asked to do anything differently. Following the trip, you may be invited to participate in three small semi-structured group interviews. The group will be invited based on the observations of strong friendships and bonds made by the researcher throughout the trip. The three group interviews will occur on UMD campus in a private conference room. The first interview will be scheduled within one week after the trip and will ask participants about the relationships that were formed during the outdoor orientation experience. The second interview will be conducted in the middle of the semester and will ask whether the relationships continued and what it has meant to you in your first semester. The final interview will take place at the end of the semester and will seek to further understand the importance of the interpersonal relationships that the participants formed. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes.

Appendix C – Consent Form (Continued)

Consent Form

What happens if I say “Yes”, but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research study at any time and no one will be upset by your decision. You may acknowledge that the researcher will make group observations during the program activities and decline to participate in the interviews. You may withdraw your participation at any time during the study.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Throughout the study process, information collected by the researcher is held in strict confidentiality. Only the researcher will have access to the notes made about the observations. The final report of the study will be presented to the researcher’s advisory and second reader as required for completion of the Masters degree, of which this study is part of. Only the researcher will have access to the audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews. The results of this study may also be used for teaching, publications, or for presentation at professional meetings. In any reporting of the study results, all participants will be assigned pseudonyms and any identifying information (e.g. name of the university) will be masked to protect participants’ confidentiality.

Whom do I contact if I have questions, concerns or feedback about my experience?

This research has been reviewed and approved by an IRB within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants’ Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 or go to <https://research.umn.edu/units/hrpp/research-participants/questions-concerns>. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Will I have a chance to provide feedback after the study is over?

The HRPP may ask you to complete a survey that asks about your experience as a research participant. You do not have to complete the survey if you do not want to. If you do choose to complete the survey, your responses will be anonymous.

If you are not asked to complete a survey, but you would like to share feedback, please contact the study team or the HRPP. See the “Investigator Contact Information” of this form for study team contact information and “Whom do I contact if I have questions, concerns or feedback about my experience?” of this form for HRPP contact information.

Will I be compensated for my participation?

There is not compensation for your participation in the study.

Appendix C – Consent Form (Continued)

Consent Form

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research. Please indicate below whether you are willing to participate in the small group interviews. You will be provided a copy of this signed document.

Yes, I am willing to participate in the small group interviews.

No, I prefer not to participate in the small group interviews.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Appendix D – Interview Protocol

NELSON – RELATIONSHIPS IN AN OUTDOOR ORIENTATION PROGRAM - INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW 1: The Nature of Social Relationships

Welcome

Thank you for taking time to be here today. I'm sure your first week is busy and exciting! I'm excited to learn about your experience on the outdoor orientation, and also how you became connected. Are there any questions before we begin?

*Light refreshments will be served during the interview.

Warm-up

You just spent four days rock climbing and camping, explain what your experience was like? What was it like with each other?

Question 1

One of the reasons I invited you to this interview is because I noticed you clicked. Tell me about the connection you found with each other.

Question 2

Going off together for four days was like a big blind date, what was it like to interact with strangers?

Question 3

Was there a particular activity in which you knew you would be friends or was it a more gradual process over the four days?

Question 4

Was there something about the experience in the wilderness; camping, climbing, and no electronics, that influenced how you became friends?

Closing

Thank you for sharing about your experience! The next few weeks are an exciting time and I wish you the best. I appreciate your willingness to participate, I'm interested in hearing more about your semester at our second interview. I will email you a reminder and create a calendar invite for the next interview. Do you have any questions before we part?

**Note – The researcher anticipates that after the first interview and before the second, the social relationships will be sustained. It is recognized that they may dissipate and the intention of the second interview is to unearth the participants' understanding of how the relationship has evolved and changed overtime.*

Appendix D – Interview Protocol (Continued)

NELSON – RELATIONSHIPS IN AN OUTDOOR ORIENTATION PROGRAM - INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW 2: How the Social Relationships Have Been Sustained

Welcome

Thank you again for taking time to meet today. I found our last interview to be interesting and I am looking forward to learning more about the first few weeks of school and your friendship. Before we get started, are there any questions?

*Light refreshments will be served during the interview.

Warm-up

We are eight weeks into the semester, how are things going?

Question 1

As a group, do you still hang out since the trip? What does that look like? What do you like to do?

Question 2

Have you seen or stayed in touch with the rest of the program group?

Question 3

What makes this friendship that you have formed different from others, for instance, high school friends?

Closing

Thank you again for sharing! I am grateful that you are willing to participate and I'm excited for our next and final interview. Do you have questions before we part? I will email you a reminder and calendar invite for our final interview.

*Note - The first interview will influence questions for the second interview. Further questions may be asked based on the participants' responses and interactions.

Appendix D – Interview Protocol (Continued)

INTERVIEW 3: Retrospective on End of Freshman Year

Welcome

Welcome back! Once again, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here today for our final interview. I've found the two prior interviews interesting and have enjoyed journeying with you through your first semester of freshman year. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

*Light refreshments will be served during the interview.

Warm-up

NELSON – RELATIONSHIPS IN AN OUTDOOR ORIENTATION PROGRAM - INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

You have a full semester under your belt, congratulations! How does it feel? Do you believe that you have changed since our trip?

Question 1

New place, new schedules, new people, how did your experience on the freshman outdoor orientation trip influence your first semester? How did it shape your friendship?

Question 2

Have you continued to stay connected with each other? What does your friendship look like now that the semester is ending?

Question 3

What has been greatest asset of building this new friendship? What does that mean to each of you?

Closing

Thank you for your involvement in the three interviews over the course of your fall semester. You graciously shared about your experiences on the trip, how you formed this relationship, and about your first year at UMD. I have enjoyed our time together and appreciate you supporting me in my Master's program. This is the final interview and your part in this study is complete. Please do not hesitate to reach me about questions or if you want connect! Thanks again and congratulations on completing your first semester.

*Note - The first and second interview will influence questions for the third interview. Further questions may be asked based on the participants' responses and interactions.