“After the adventure I am expected to go home. I arrive there, carefully carrying the thick, tattered web of bonds I had with my fellows, torn apart and divided up too hurriedly at the parting. All their ghosts are still with me, as they will be for days, and the lot of us barely fit through the door together. My family and friends look somehow wrong, as if they are being played by actors. I go to sit down, but old chairs do not feel the same with all my new parts, new muscles, I greet my old lover and silently wonder, alone, if this is the correct universe.”

-Morgan Hite
Returning Home from the Wild: Exploring Participants’ Experiences of Re-Entry Following Extended Wilderness Trips

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Abstract

The experience of a strong sense of community developed while participating in extended wilderness expeditions is one of the most significant and meaningful experiences associated with taking part in this form of outdoor recreation. The experience of returning to a home community from an extended wilderness expedition is explored through the impacts associated with psychological sense of community (McMillian & Chavis, 1986; McMillian, 1996). A phenomenological approach was used to investigate the re-entry experiences of six individuals through the use of semi-structured interviews. Twelve main themes and seventeen subthemes emerged within the findings and illustrate a lack of preparation for the difficulties associated with re-entry, negative impacts associated with the experience of sense of community, and problems transferring aspects of a wilderness community into participant’s post-expedition lives.

Key words: psychological sense of community; extended wilderness trips; phenomenology; re-entry; post-expedition
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Chapter One: Introduction

There is a fascination with the naturally wild and untouched world that drives many individuals to uproot themselves from the comforts of their homes and explore the exciting, unpredictable and untamed settings of the wilderness. Extended wilderness expeditions are layered with complex experiences from exposure to nature and feelings of solitude, to the formation of groups, a sense of place, and a psychological sense of community (Allison & Von Wald, 2010; Beams, 2004; Breunig et al., 2010; Talbot & Kaplan, 1986). Programs that provide wilderness expedition experiences can commonly be found within the adventure recreation, education and tourism fields. The popularization of these programs can be traced back to the organized camping and experiential education movements, which later contributed to the foundation of organizations such as Outward Bound and the National Outdoor Leadership School (Attarian, 2001; Talbot & Kaplan, 1986). Both of these organizations utilize the transformative power of extended wilderness expedition to educate, train and build the character of those enrolled in the programs.

Today, many wilderness experience programs have built their framework based upon the structure of the Outward Bound process. This process uses problem-solving tasks in a setting with specific social and psychical characteristics such as the wilderness, which requires significant adaptation from the participants. It is believed that this process, if successful can result in a mastery of skills and a personal recognition of meaningful experiences found throughout the program (McKenzie, 2003). While past research has focused on participants’ outcomes and experiences throughout wilderness expeditions, there is a lack of research focused on participants’ post-expedition experiences (Breunig
et al., 2008; Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; O’Connell & Breunig, 2005). This research is concerned with exploring participants’ experiences of re-entry following extended wilderness expeditions to better understand how the experience or returning home may impact an individual’s psychological sense of community. For the purpose of this research, the use of the term expedition will be used to refer to wilderness experiences lasting a total two weeks or longer. By increasing attention to all aspects of wilderness trip experiences, it is possible to build a better understanding of the holistic experience that is undergone when participating in extended expeditions.

Although the majority of research surrounding re-entry is from business, tourism and education fields, the concepts in the literature are transferable to extended wilderness experiences, as participants must transition through the same stages of experience in order to re-enter the communities from which they have departed (Adler, 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004; Rogers & Ward, 1993; Sussman, 2000; Szkudlarek, 2011). Although wilderness expeditions are much shorter in length than the travel experiences that were the focus of other research, the distinctive circumstances present on wilderness expeditions allow for significantly shorter periods of time to contain a substantial amount of personal and social adjustment (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005; Mooradian, 2004; Rogers & Ward, 1993; Talbot & Kaplan, 1986). The type of experience present on extended wilderness trips is referred to as an “intense residential experience” (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005). It is these intimate physical and social interactions alongside a shared group purpose and goals that often leads to the development of a strong sense of community between expedition members (Allison, Davis-Berman, & Berman, 2011; Breunig et al., 2010). On expeditions, the process of group development and the establishment of group
norms are often accelerated in order to be able to fulfill the highly demanding requirements of the wilderness setting (Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Fabrizio & Neill, 2005).

Expeditions lasting 14-35 or more days have established a reputation in the outdoor industry for being significant and transformative experiences for participants as these programs are often focused on positive participant outcomes and development such as personal growth and therapeutic benefits (Ewert & McAvoy, 2000). While there has been little research focused on the impact of expedition length on participant outcomes, there has been some indication that wilderness experience programs lasting longer than 20 days may have a more significant impact on participants than expeditions which are shorter (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997). The amount of time placed in this type of remote setting creates an opportunity for programs to complete goals and focus on the development of uniquely crafted social, personal and technical skills, as well as form a group culture and community rooted in a wilderness setting (Beams, 2004; Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Fabrizio & Neill, 2005; Neill & Richards, 1998).

It is common practice for wilderness guides to assist individuals in the adaptation and adjustment necessary when entering a wilderness setting. Expedition guides do this as the comfort and successful adaptation of a participant increases the chances of a successful expedition experience and decreases the experience of culture shock. While individuals who participate in wilderness expeditions are provided with assistance and support in the transition to the backcountry, little is commonly done with intentional programming to prepare individuals for the return home. The lack of debriefing and an inadequate amount of time together post-expedition are all factors that have been
identified as detracting from the sense of community created on wilderness expeditions (Breunig et al., 2010).

The development of a psychological sense of community is a common theme found within many expedition program goals, as a strong sense of community among a trip group can help with group development, individual adjustment to the wilderness environment and the overall success of the expedition (Breunig et al., 2010; Fabrizio & Neill, 2005; O’Connell & Breunig, 2005). The strong sense of community that is formed between expeditions members is often reported as being one of the most significant aspects of an expedition experience, as it aids in the creation of an environment which can promote personal development, group processing and bonding. A commonly accepted definition of psychological sense of community is “a feeling that members have of 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” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). For the purpose of this study, this term will be shortened to sense of community and will refer to the abovementioned definition.

Sense of community is understood to contain four subcomponents, which are: (1) membership, (2) shared emotional connection, (2) influence, and (4) fulfillment of needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Despite the supportive literature that notes the importance of a developed sense of community for an individual’s well-being and quality of life (Bender 1982; Glynn, 1981; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sarason, 1974) the absence of a developed sense of community is believed to be a common problem in modern society as there is a stronger focus on the individual rather than the community (Putnam, 2000; Sarason, 1974). Due to the social nature of wilderness expeditions, group experiences in a
wilderness setting are often considered conducive to the development of a strong sense of community as the physical and emotional demands present requires participants to increase their reliance not only on themselves but also on the other members of the group. These conditions along with the escape from outside influences in a remote natural setting are aspects, which can contribute to the development of a strong sense of community between trip participants (Breunig et al., 2010). The intention of a wilderness expedition program often includes that participants are able to transfer the skills and experiences learned on their expedition to their home communities. This means that there are some expectations that the individuals who participate in a wilderness expedition are able to bring with them their experiences of a strong sense community and personal growth through this positive engagement back into their home communities for lasting positive outcomes. This is why it is important to better understand how sense of community may be impacted by the experience of re-entry to an individual’s home community from an extended wilderness expedition.

When individuals initially enter the wilderness they are willingly entering an unfamiliar and unpredictable environment leaving behind the connections to their home, communities and social support. In this process, individuals can often experience culture shock, which occurs when an individual enters an environment filled with cultural stimuli, which have little or no meaning to an individual (Adler, 1975). This process requires individuals to adapt to new cultural surroundings in order to overcome the negative emotional reactions to the unfamiliar environment (Adler, 1975; Oberg, 1960). Research has shown that the process of re-entry can have attributes mirroring that of culture shock as individuals may experience difficulties and barriers upon their return.
home (Adler, 1981; Gaw, 2000; Martin, 1984). This experience is known as reverse culture shock and is encountered when an individual faces difficulties readapting and readjusting to one’s home after spending a significant period of time in a different culture. This process follows the same stages of experiences as culture shock and requires a certain level of adaptation over time in order for individuals to successfully transition home (Adler, 1981; Gaw, 2000; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963).

In the first introduction to a wilderness environment, individuals are able to prepare themselves for difficulties that may be present in this new setting. With the understanding of the stages of culture shock and reverse culture shock, travelers will experience two negative stages within their travels. The first is the initial introduction to an unfamiliar environment, and the second being their re-introduction to their home environment (Adler, 1981; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Oberg, 1960). While the presence of difficulties in the wilderness is often expected as individuals are entering an unfamiliar place, the presence of difficulties is not commonly expected once individuals return home. The unexpectedness of these difficulties can often make the transition from wilderness to home more difficult than the initial departure into the backcountry.

In addition to the expectation of difficulties, individuals transitioning into the wilderness environment have the support of both the expedition guides as well as the trip group who are sharing similar experiences. With the lack of support and the presence of unexpected difficulties, feelings of alienation, isolation, loneliness, depression and a strain on personal relationships can be common in individuals who have recently transitioned home (Adler 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004). It is these negative feelings and difficulties associated with re-entry and reverse culture shock that contrast
and may impact the components of sense of community: membership, emotional connection, influence, and fulfillment of needs, following an extended wilderness expedition.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to deepen our understanding of participants’ experiences of re-entry following extended wilderness expeditions by exploring how the experience of re-entry may impact an individual’s sense of community.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question for this study was: How does the experience of re-entry from extended wilderness trips impact participant’s psychological sense of community? Sub-questions include:

1. What factors do participants recall as significant to their sense of community during the expedition?
2. What factors do participants identify as being significant in their experience of re-entry?
3. What factors do participants identify as significant in their report about psychological sense community during re-entry and post-expedition life?

**Delimitations and Limitations**

This study was limited to the interviews of six individuals who have participated in an extended wilderness expedition. Throughout the interview, participants were asked to recall memories of their experience of re-entry as well as feelings and thoughts that were
present throughout the transition. In order to ensure that participants are accurately able to recall specific details of their experience, the return experience must have taken place within 24 months prior to their interview. This will allow participants to have readjusted back to their homes as well as be able to openly reflect upon their entire experience.

The qualitative approach of phenomenology, paired with an interpretivist paradigm used within this research, limits the generalizability and scope of the findings to the subjective experiences of the participants of this study (Moustakas, 1994). While the findings of this research are not widely generalizable, they are able to contribute important details to build a better understanding of post-expedition experience of re-entry and the lasting impacts of participating in an extended wilderness expedition. In addition, the qualitative approach allows for the data collected to be rich in participants’ own meanings and words describing their experiences with re-entry and sense of community.

The position of the researcher is an additional component of the limitations that must be considered in this research. With a developed background in the outdoor and adventure recreation industry, it may be possible to connect with participants through common experiences and offer an insider perspective through analysis. This position may be perceived as a bias in data analysis, but was managed through the use of a reflexive journal detailing the researcher’s personal feelings, meanings and understandings throughout the research process. This allowed the researcher to focus on the words, experiences and meanings reported by the participants in order to identify the essence of their experience of re-entry and sense of community.
Importance of the Study

It is important to build a better understanding of the experiences present in individuals’ transitions following an extended wilderness trip as the presence of unexpected difficulties or barriers could impact an individual’s sense of community, the intended outcomes and goals of a wilderness expedition program, and the possibility of participant’s repeat participation in wilderness travel. The post-trip experience of participants is also important to investigate as it may inform outdoor practitioners and programmers on how to improve their programs to successfully meet goals and objectives such as increased social, and personal skills as well as an increased feeling of well-being.

Extended wilderness expeditions are highly valued in the outdoor recreation industry for their ability to provide transformative experiences. However, some participant benefits and outcomes obtained from wilderness experience programs have received criticism for being short lived and not transferable to an individual’s home life (Beams, 2004; Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Talbot & Kaplan, 1986). It is important that both outdoor professionals as well as participants of extended wilderness expeditions have a better understanding of what experiences may be present post-expedition and what these experiences may mean for individuals (Breunig et al., 2010; Gass, 1999). If individuals are able to transition back home more effectively, they may be able to more successfully retain and integrate the newly formed skills, values and identities from wilderness expeditions into their everyday lives.

While it is common for wilderness expedition programs to include a focus on the development of technical skills rooted in the backcountry, the much larger goals and purpose of expedition programs is often focused on the participants personal development
and transfer of knowledge back into and individuals home life. Transfer has always been a considerable point of challenge for wilderness and outdoor education programs as the long term impacts on participants outside of the wilderness environment has been criticized as being short lived (Beams, 2004; Brown, 2010; Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Talbot & Kaplan, 1986). Reflection has been identified as a key tool in the learning transfer process as simply participating in an experience does not guarantee that learning occurs (Leberman & Martin, 2004). Similar to the adaptation to a wilderness environment, many expedition programs assist individuals with reflection by providing participants with opportunities to reflect about their learning on the expedition; few programs however follow up with participants once they return home (Leberman & Martin, 2004). This absence of any post-trip programming along with the possibilities of difficulties in an individual’s re-entry process may be a significant barrier to the achievement of programs overarching goals of the transfer of knowledge and personal development from the field to individuals’ home lives. The more that is known about what participants’ experience throughout their re-entry process and post-trip experiences the more that may be revealed about how to improve the quality and effectiveness of wilderness programs.

Although wilderness expeditions have been reported to be able to increase participants’ sense of community, this research has primarily focused on individuals’ experiences throughout the wilderness trip (Breunig et al., 2010; Fabrizio & Neill, 2005; O’Connell & Breunig, 2005). By exploring participants’ post-trip sense of community, it may be possible to better understand how the process of transitioning from one community and environment to another may impact an individual’s sense of community.
While individuals on wilderness expeditions are able to experience a strengthened sense of community, including feelings of belonging, influence fulfillment of needs and emotional connection, upon re-entry individuals are re-introduced to a once familiar environment and may be faced with feelings of depression, alienation and isolation (Adler, 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004; Rogers & Ward, 1993). With the experiences gained in a wilderness context, individuals are presented with a significantly different social and physical environment to home and the benefits gained from the time spent away may result in changes in an individual making the process of re-entry more difficult (Adler, 1981; Gaw, 2000; Sussman, 2000).

A more deliberate focus on research and field practices surrounding participants’ pre and post wilderness trip experience is needed as this can be a crucial time for building and maintaining the sense of community, group cohesion and development created on expeditions (Breunig et al., 2010). The suggestion for a stronger focus on preparing individuals for the re-entry process is a recommendation that has also been consistently found in re-entry and reverse culture shock research (Adler, 1981; Fabrizio & Neill, 2005). With a better understanding of individuals’ re-entry and post-expedition experiences, it may be possible to improve the quality of extended wilderness expedition programs in the hopes to increase repeated participation, improve the retention and transfer of the skills, identities and values developed in the wilderness to individuals everyday lives as well as understand how these experiences may impact an individual’s psychological sense of community.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the current literature that is related to the experience of re-entry that occurs when an individual returns to a home community or environment following extended wilderness trips. This review of literature will explore the current research and understanding of re-entry as well as the impacts that this experience may have on a participant’s psychological sense of community. This chapter will provide an in-depth look at research surrounding the critical elements of wilderness trips and the cultural adaptation of wilderness expedition programs in order to better understand the context of re-entry that will be examined in this study. This chapter will also review current literature concerning reverse culture shock, cross-cultural re-entry and cultural adaptation, focusing on the stages of reverse culture shock, difficulties with re-entry and coping methods that have been identified throughout previous research. Seminal research related to the understanding, experience and measurement of psychological sense of community will also be reviewed in order to build a theoretical framework to understand the impacts that will be explored in participants’ post expedition experiences.

While previous research on the experience of re-entry has been conducted, the focus of past research has primarily been within the field of business expatriates, educational travel, and tourism. There is currently a very limited amount of research focusing on the re-entry process of participants returning home after extended wilderness trips. For the purpose of this study, re-entry will be defined as “the continuum of experience and behaviours which are encountered when an individual returns to a place of origin after having been immersed in another context for a period of time sufficient to
cause some degree of mental and emotional adjustment” (Westwood, Lawrence & Paul, 1986, p. 223). By examining the current research regarding reverse culture shock, cross-cultural transitions and re-entry, it may be possible to build a better understanding of the experiences that participants undergo following a return from lengthy wilderness expeditions.

Wilderness Expedition Experiences

To best understand the experience of re-entry from an extended wilderness trip, it is important to explore the significant elements of a wilderness expedition in order to recognize what similarities and differences are present between this and other forms of travelling. Outdoor wilderness expeditions have been defined as experiences that are resource-based using non-motorized transportation and self-sufficient operations for an extended period in the natural environment (Cashel, Lane, & Montgomery, 1996). These experiences often include a focus on some form of backcountry travel such as backpacking and mountaineering expeditions, as well as extended canoe trips or other forms of water travel. For the purpose of this research, the term wilderness is not restricted to designated and sanctioned wilderness areas, but is in reference to any natural area that is largely undeveloped and used for recreation opportunities (Breunig et al., 2010). A wilderness setting is a unique physical environment that is utilized by various organized groups in order to enhance the significance of an experience and promote positive outcomes in the group (Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Talbot & Kaplan, 1986).

Programs that utilize wilderness settings as a medium for group experiences are known as
wilderness experience programs or WEPs, and have been recently increasing in popularity through organizations concerned with participant outcomes such as wilderness therapy, youth-at-risk and rehabilitation programs (Attarian, 2001). According to Ewert and McAvoy (2000), “the wilderness experience may provide a mechanism for change by providing the unique physical setting from which the individual, is part of a unique social setting” (p. 16). These programs and the majority of research on wilderness expeditions have been commonly focused upon participants’ performance on the expeditions or the participant outcomes and personal development immediately following the experience (Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Gass, Bell, & Nazfigure, 2014). This leaves a major gap in the research and current understandings of participants’ experiences once they depart upon the completion of the wilderness expedition. Post-trip experiences can be a crucial area of understanding needed to better serve participants a positive wilderness experience with lasting impacts transferable into their everyday lives.

Trip providers and wilderness guides can have a major influence on the benefits and significant experiences that individuals can achieve from an expedition as they are responsible for the safety and personal enjoyment of the participants throughout the experience (Bobilya, McAvoy & Kalisch, 2005; Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Sibthorp, Pailey, Gookin, & Furnam, 2008; Sibthorp, Paisley & Hill, 2003). Extended wilderness expeditions typically last anywhere from 14-35 or more days and the experiences that occur on these types of trips are what researchers refer to as “intense residential experiences” (Allison, Davis-Berman, & Berman, 2011). This is where participants live and interact with the same group of people in close proximity for an extended period of time with little to no outside cultural interaction. These types of experiences can have
similar impacts upon participants as living in a foreign country for a significantly longer amount of time, as the extremely close living accommodations, and social interactions between a group on a wilderness expedition requires individuals to adapt quickly to the developing culture of a new group as well as increase their reliance on themselves as well as the other members of the group (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005).

As a group on a wilderness trip forms and becomes cohesive, it develops its own culture with social and behavioural norms in a very unique physical environment. Due to this distinctive wilderness setting and newly developed group culture, consequences from individual’s behaviour and actions become transparent to an entire group, and the emotional and social support of others is earned and not taken for granted (Cashel, Lane, & Montgomery, 1996). According to previous research, the development of a strong sense of community on wilderness trips is a common focus found in trip providers’ mission statements and program goals (Breunig, O’Connell, Todd, Young, Anderson, & Anderson, 2008; Mitten, 1999; Sharpe, 2005). A sense of community may be acknowledged by participants through the feelings of belonging, shared experiences, common meanings, fulfillment of needs and influence as well as an attachment to other group members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

This sense of community helps participants focus on group goals and share a sense of purpose with each other and may encourage individuals to continue participation in wilderness programs. Although these intense residential experiences are useful in building group cohesion and a sense of community, they are often very different to what individuals experience in their home communities and the experiences in a wilderness
community may not be transferable to a post expedition existence (Allison, Davis-Berman & Berman, 2011; Allison & Von Wald, 2010; Ewert & McAvoy, 2000).

The concept of transfer can be understood as “the application of knowledge learned in one setting for one purpose to another setting and/or purpose” (Gagne, Yekovich & Yekovich, 1993, p. 235). As the purpose of many wilderness expedition programs is to provide positive participant outcomes and benefits following the trip experience, transfer is an integral part of this process, and facilitation and instructor practices are often centralized around this concept (Sibthorp, Furnam, Paisley, Gookin, Schumann, 2011).

Transfer can occur in different ways. “Near” transfer refers to the application of knowledge or skill from one situation to another of similar context (Gass, 1999; Simons, 1999). What is known as “far” transfer refers to the application of knowledge that crosses contextual boundaries and is able to be used in a situational context which may have no commonalities with the original learning environment (Simons, 1999). Although “near” transfer from wilderness experiences is valuable for participants that wish to continue participation in wilderness travel and build backcountry skills, in order for participants to be able to use the experiences, knowledge and skills they learned from the wilderness in the home environment they must achieve “far” transfer bridging the contextual learning gap from a wilderness to a home setting.

The fade-out effect, where participants’ benefits and knowledge from the expedition are short lived, is well known in the outdoor education and recreation field (Beams, 2004; Brown, 2010; Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Talbot & Kaplan, 1986). In order to maximize the conditions for transfer, it is suggested that programs take a stronger
focus on what occurs before, during and after the learning experience (Leberman & Martain, 2004). It is also suggested that programs provide more attention to participants once they leave the field in order to assist individuals with reflection regarding their learning experience as leaving the process of reflection post-course for participant to do themselves may not take place and the potential to miss out on a crucial learning opportunity may therefore be lost (Leberman & Martin, 2004).

In reviewing Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning model, reflection is a key component in the transfer process as this is the stage of learning that leads to conceptualization and experimentation. If individuals are not about to actively reflect then the application and far transfer of their new knowledge may never take place outside of the wilderness context and the long-term goals of the wilderness programs may never be met. With a better understand of what experiences a participant goes through following an extended wilderness experience, it may be possible to improve the far transfer from a wilderness to home setting.

While there are numerous factors that influence transfer, the limited opportunities for individuals to use, display and enhance newly developed skills and knowledge following a learning experience can be one of the most significant barriers to transfer (Leberman & Martin, 2004). When individuals return home, the presence of barriers and difficulties readapting to their home communities may hinder the use of newly developed skills, knowledge and personal constructs developed in the wilderness as these may not be seen as valuable by the other members of one’s home community. While the specific social and physical conditions present in a wilderness environment are utilized by programs to increase personal exploration, learning and skill development, the learning
that takes place in this very unique environment may be difficult to transfer back into
every day life without the proper reflection as the wilderness environment presents
individuals with conditions very different than home.

In research conducted by Allison, Davis-Berman and Berman (2011), 19
participants were asked to write letters following an expedition, describing how the
experience had impacted the participants as an individual and as part of a community. A
sense of isolation and feelings of loneliness while readjusting to their home community
were common themes found in letters written by participants. The feelings described in
the letters were attributed to the fact that participants felt others around them could not
appreciate and share the understanding of their trip experience. The uniqueness of the
experiences that the participants underwent also created a separation between participants
and their family and friends which made returning to the previous way of life much more
difficult (Allison, Davis-Berman & Berman, 2011).

Many of the participants also indicated that the experience with the wilderness
expedition changed the way in which they perceived themselves in their interpersonal
relationships and culture. If this type of post-experience is common for individuals who
participate in extended wilderness trips, attention must be increased toward finding
methods to minimize and manage these difficulties. If these negative feelings and
relationships cannot be properly managed, they may compromise the positive
development that individuals gain from participating in a wilderness expedition.

In their research examining the development of personal and social values through
wilderness expeditions, Allison and Von Wald (2010) stated that “there are often rich
opportunities on expeditions to consider what it might be like to live in a very different
place from home… participants and leaders can examine taken-for-granted assumptions about their own values and belief, which can, in turn inform their own attitudes and behaviours” (p. 226). In this research, the use of the term expedition referred to wilderness experiences of two weeks and longer; throughout this length of time, individuals are able to form new perspectives regarding their home communities while being immersed in a very different social and physical environment. Through wilderness expeditions, individuals often experience a significant transformation by being able to form new identities based upon their experience and adaptations to the wilderness setting and group culture.

It was also found that expedition experiences often happen at crucial times in an individual’s life and generally occur in the teen years where a person is developing crucial values and a sense of identity (Allison & Von Wald, 2010). According to the authors, the very nature of expedition experiences is based within the shared experience of the group and the ability to become a community with a common purpose or shared interest. Furthermore, it is within this experience where individuals find the opportunity for significant and transformative experiences that impacts their personal and social values that they bring back to their home once the expedition has concluded.

While the sense of community and the group culture that is developed on wilderness trips is a valuable tool for increasing group cohesion and achieving program goals, it is developed in circumstances that are distinctly different than individuals’ home environment. Many of the participants in the previously mentioned studies indicated personal gains and enjoyment while participating in a wilderness expedition (Allison & Von Wald, 2010). In addition to these positive experiences, several participants indicated
that their post-expedition experience of returning home contained difficulties as they confronted elements of their home culture that contrasted with elements of their recently experienced wilderness trip (Allison & Von Wald, 2010).

Although many wilderness expedition programs’ primary focus is often participant outcomes, there appears to be a failure to include the process of re-entry as a part of the experiential process. It has been suggested that expedition planning should include some form of discussion regarding re-entry in order to help participants adequately prepare for the difficulties that may occur upon their return home (Allison, Davis-Berman, & Berman, 2011).

As participants in wilderness expeditions willingly enter a new and unfamiliar environment, it is often the responsibility of outdoor program designers and expedition guides to promote healthy and successful adaption, as participants’ failure to adapt to a programs environment can potentially cause stress and a wide range of physiological and psychological reactions (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005). The physical and social conditions inherently present on a wilderness trip require participants to adapt their behaviours and perceptions as they are creating a new social environment while removing themselves from another (Westwood, Lawrence, & Paul, 1986). Once removed from the familiar home environment and placed into this wilderness setting, a participant is forced to adapt and function to the requirements of this alternative environment (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983).

When participants leave their home environment to enter a wilderness setting, they leave behind the connections to their social support and reinforces of their cultural identity, as the wilderness setting is free from external home pressures and influences. “In
a sense, outdoor participants leave behind their everyday life and enter a ‘social wilderness’ in which previous social norms are not readily available or replicable” (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005, p. 49). Participants are encouraged to develop new social relationships and explore social roles in an attempt to develop a new and unique group culture and identity. In this setting, participants are able to develop their own meanings and values through the expedition experience and group culture (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005).

The development of a group culture is beneficial to a positive trip experience as the group culture is formed around the social and physical conditions and requirements of the wilderness environment, by establishing group norms and behaviour. In this created culture, individuals are connected through a shared purpose and goals and the required tasks while in the wilderness become a community practice (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005). The culture, values and experience that are created through this form of intense residential experience may cause difficulties for individuals when they must leave the expedition experience and return home (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005). If one of the main focuses of wilderness expedition programs is participant outcomes, the process of re-entry must be included as part of the experiences as it is a direct result of the participation in the wilderness trip.

A significant amount of attention in wilderness programing is given to assisting and guiding participants through the adaptation to a new and unfamiliar environment in order to decrease the feelings of culture shock from an unfamiliar setting (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005). Little is commonly done to prepare participants for the reintroduction to the home environment after such a significant experience. The return to one’s home culture requires a degree of reorganization of cognitive, emotional and behavioural patterns,
similar to those required by the initial participation in the wilderness trip (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005).

According to Westwood, Lawrence, and Paul (1986), the acknowledgement and recognition of this necessary restructuring is needed in order to promote a successful re-entry. Therefore, there is a need to better prepare and improve participants’ knowledge about the process of re-entry following a wilderness experience in order to promote successful re-entry. If the experiences that occur on an extended wilderness trips can provide opportunities for participants to form new parts of their identity and broaden their perspectives, the experience of returning home may be more difficult than the initial introduction to the wilderness environment. This concept is commonly referred to in tourism research as reverse culture shock (Adler, 1975).

Reverse Culture Shock

To understand the idea of reverse culture shock, it is important to examine the originating concept of culture shock, first used by Oberg (1960) to describe the potentially disorienting and frustrating experience a person may face entering a new culture that is unfamiliar to them. The negative factors in the experience of culture shock are believed to be a result of losing familiarity with the symbols, social interactions and meanings found in one’s own culture, as these are no longer reinforced by the new cultural and environmental surroundings (Oberg, 1960; Thompson & Christofi, 2006). This is summarized in Adler’s (1975) definition of culture shock as “a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one’s own culture, to new cultural
stimuli which have little or no meaning and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences” (p. 13).

Culture shock is believed to take place not in a single incident but through the progression of four psychological phases of experience following a U-curve model. See Figure 1, U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment Adapted from Lysgaard (1955). This U-curve model begins with levels of high excitement as an individual is first introduced to a new culture. This is followed by a phase of shock from new cultural stimuli as travelers become frustrated and confused by the unfamiliar surroundings. The third phase of culture shock is adjustment and learning in reaction to a new environment, and the final phase is reached when a person is able to positively adapt to their surroundings and achieve stability in their experience. While the final stage is imperative to the positive experience of a traveler, it is only possible if a person is able to successfully pass through the third stage of learning and adjustment (Adler, 1981; Szkudlarek, 2010; Weaver, 1994). While these phases have been describe using different terminology they are commonly referred to as: (1) Excitement, (2) Culture shock, (3) Acculturation, and (4) Stability (Alder, 1981; Furnham, 1986; Oberg, 1960).
While culture shock has been the focus of a significant amount of research, the experience of re-entry is one that is often overlooked in the process of travel. The experience of re-entry shares many of the aspects described in the four phases of culture shock. Individuals may experience difficulties and confusions when returning home and this experience of re-entry has come to be known as reverse culture shock.

As the experience of re-entry is an essential part of the traveling process that all individuals must face once they complete their travel experience, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) expanded the culture shock U-curve model originally introduced by Lysgaard (1955), to what is now referred to as the W-curve theory (See Figure 2, W-Curve of Intercultural Sojourning). As the experience of culture shock is believed to take place in stages, the experience of reverse culture continues on in stages following the end of a cross-cultural experience.
The first stage of reverse culture shock begins when a travelling individual initially plans to return home from their trip and must begin to prepare for the separation from their host culture this is known as leave-taking or departure (Mooradian, 2004). Departure leads to the second stage, when an individual first experiences their arrival home. This stage is known as the honeymoon stage and is similar to the initial phase of culture shock as a sojourner is filled with positive emotions and excitement to return home. During the honeymoon stage, those family and friends who remained at home are also excited to reconnect with the individual who has been away from the home community. This stage of exhilaration and excitement to be in a familiar environment is often short lived, as individuals progress into the third stage where they must begin to readapt to their home environment (Adler, 1981). It is within this third stage that individuals begin to face the difficulties of the re-entry process as they often feel a sense of alienation and a loss of a sense of belonging that was previously felt at home. In this stage, individuals may also experience feelings of anxiety, depression, and other negative
psychological mindsets as they have lost familiarity with the common symbols, social interactions and meanings of their home (Mooradian, 2004; Sussman, 2000). This third stage may last up to three months, as many of those who experience it resist readjusting to their home environment, as this is the last stage of the re-entry process. This finalized transition may take individuals anywhere from six months to a year to process and regain a sense of belonging and normalcy in their home environment (Mooradian, 2004).

When looking at the complete experience of cross-cultural travel and re-entry, it can be understood that individuals will pass through two stages of negative experiences with difficulties from their cultural surroundings. The first stage of difficulties follows the initial introduction to an unfamiliar culture and the second following the re-entry to the home environment. With the re-entry process added to the experience of cross-cultural travel the stages of experience through the W-Curve model are as such: (1) excitement, (2) culture shock, (3) acculturation, (4) stability, (5) excitement at home, (6) reverse culture shock, (7) re-acculturation and, (8) stability at home (Adler, 1981; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Oberg, 1960).

As previously stated, the development of a group on a wilderness trip aids in the adjustment of individuals to a new environment and culture. In research by Fabrizio and Neill (2005), the stages of culture shock within a wilderness expedition were examined alongside the Tuckman and Jensen (1977) model of group development, as there are many similarities between the two models. As an individual begins a wilderness experiences in the culture shock stage of excitement being in a new culture, the group of individuals is in the forming stage of Tuckman and Jensen’s group development where they are first introduced to each other.
The next stage of the experience is the culture shock phase where individuals experience frustration and confusion with the new environment. Here the group enters what is known as the storming stage of the Tuckman and Jensen (1977) group development model. It is the intergroup conflicts and problem solving progression in the storming stage that allows a group to enter the final two stages of development, which are norming and performing. These final two stages of group development are almost synonymous with the final stages of culture shock, which are adjustment and adaptation.

By looking at the experience of group development alongside the experience of culture shock, it is possible to see that the process of group development and the progression through the stages of culture shock share many similarities. As groups develop on wilderness trips, individuals participating in the trip adapt to their new environment and developed group culture. The parallel processes of group develop and the transition through culture shock creates a group culture that is specifically adapted and unique to the physical, social and situational aspects of a wilderness expedition.

There currently exists a significant amount of research surrounding the re-entry process and experience of students who participate in academic exchange and study abroad programs. Gaw (2000) examined the re-entry experiences of 66 college students who had experience traveling over-seas for post-secondary education. This research used a descriptive survey to investigate the re-entry experiences and assess the degree of reverse culture shock experienced by the students upon their return home. The survey also measured the willingness that students had to seek counselor assistance for their problems that were associated with their difficulties returning home.
It was found that students who experienced higher levels of reverse culture shock were less likely to seek support services such as a counselor to help them with their difficulties than students who experienced lower level of reverse culture shock (Gaw, 2000). This is significant as it means that individuals who experience difficulties with re-entry may not take an active role in ensuring their own positive reintegration and re-acculturating. This indicates a need for programs that provide cross-culture experiences to include assistance, post experience support and intervention program strategies to support and help individuals with reverse culture shock following their participation in a program. A change in the perception and management of reverse culture shock experiences is needed as individuals who do not receive the proper support may encounter problems with their abilities to readjust and find normalcy in the home environment (Gaw, 2000).

Within the experiences of re-entry, a main area of concern is the psychological well-being of returning individuals, as they may experience psychologically harmful feelings such as confusions, loneliness, depression, frustration, and anxiety upon re-entry (Adler 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004). These negative experiences are often considered to be more difficult to manage and can be more psychologically harmful when they are experienced upon re-entry as they are unexpected. In an individual’s initial travel they willingly enter a new, strange environment and are often able to prepare themselves for a certain amount of unexpectedness and difficulties that can be an anticipated result of entering new surroundings. However, when individuals return home they expect to find themselves returning to a comforting and familiar setting, and do not expect to face any difficulties reintegrating to what was once a familiar environment (Adler, 1981;
Mooradian, 2004; Storti, 2001; Sussman, 1986, Thompson & Christofi, 2006; Weaver, 1994). This unexpected presence of difficulties is one of the most important differences noted by Martin (1984) between the acculturation and re-acculturation experience. “The individual is unlikely to expect to have difficulty reentering the home environment. After all, she/he is home again, where the environment will surely be familiar” (Martin, 1984, p. 123).

Rogers and Ward (1993) examined re-entry experiences by using two questionnaires to measure the expectations of social difficulties and the actually social difficulties experienced by 20 New Zealand students who participated in a 10-week education exchange. The research found that many participants experienced psychological difficulties adjusting back to their home culture such as social complications, anxiety and depression upon re-entry. It was found that participants’ expectations of these experiences did not have a significant relationship to the actual presence of difficulties upon re-entry. The research did show that the individuals who found their actual experience of re-entry to be more difficult than what they had anticipated were much more likely to have psychological difficulties in readjusting to their home culture. Those who expected their experience of re-entry to be difficult and found the actual experience much more positive were exposed to more factors of psychological well-being in their readjustment.

From this research, the authors suggest that it may be an effective strategy to over prepare sojourners for re-entry to their home culture, as there is a wide spectrum of expectations involved with individuals’ expectations of experience when participating in cross-culture travel. Although there are varying opinions on the role expectations play on
the experience of re-entry, it is clear that individuals who return home from a significant time spent in a different culture are often exposed to psychological struggles and experience difficulties in readjusting to their home environment. These difficulties may manifest themselves as feelings of isolation, depression, anxiety, alienation or social difficulties that may be psychologically harmful (Adler, 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004; Rogers & Ward, 1993). Whether or not the expectation of these difficulties plays a role in the ability of participants to readapt to their home environment, there needs to be a focus on preparing or at least making travelers aware of these experiences in order to avoid harm to their psychological well-being.

To understand reverse culture shock, it is important to be aware of not only the culture and setting that an individual is being introduced to through their travel, but also to examine the culture that an individual is returning to when their experience concludes. The results of a study by Thompson and Christofi (2006), which investigated the experience of Cypriot students returning home, found that individuals contextualized the experience of re-entry by comparing their home culture to the culture from which they were returning. The larger the difference between the daily routines and behaviour that an individual must adapt to in a new culture, the more difficult it can be for an individual to return home as they have lost touch with the familiar symbols, actions and meanings encompassed by their home culture (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005; Thompson & Christofi, 2006; Weaver, 1994; Westwood, Lawrence & Paul, 1986). It is also often overlooked by those who are traveling that the daily life of family, friends and co-workers continues on while they are no longer there. When individuals return home, they may feel that they have missed out on important experiences and events that others share and that now hold
significant meaning. Leaving a home environment to participate in any form of travel immerses individuals in an environment where they are able to create new memories and meanings though experiences, while at the same time removes them from the interactions and events of their home environment to which they must eventually return. As individuals’ identities change and grow apart from their home communities, simultaneously their home culture is continually changing without them in ways to which they may not be able to readapt.

Thompson and Christofi (2006) found that the experience of returning home was grounded in cultural comparisons to the country from which individuals were returning from, in areas such as work, social interactions, and relationships. Within the interviews many of the participants indicated difficulties with returning home, and one participant stated that “they had one foot in each place and, therefore, did not feel settled in either” (Thompson & Christofi, 2006, p. 35). For individuals participating in wilderness expeditions, this feeling may also be more significant as once they depart from the expedition experience and the group disbands, the culture and community created throughout the experience is no longer in existence.

In addition to educational research, there exists a large amount of research exploring the experience of business expatriates (Adler, 1981; Sussman, 1986). Research conducted by Adler (1981) examined the experience of governmental employees returning to North America from assignments overseas. While this research examined individuals who are required to travel for business purposes, the experiences are still transferable to those who participate in wilderness expeditions. Alder (1981) found that employees indicated that the re-entry to their home culture was more difficult than the
initial move to the foreign country. They reported the difficulties experienced in returning were not expected and the skills and experience gained while working abroad were not valued in their home or work environments. As these employees adapted to their new culture while away from home, they gained new skills and behaviours that were commonly accepted and valued in the culture in which they were working. Upon returning, the participants found that other supervisors or colleagues did not recognize the skills and experience gained while away from home as being valuable.

Workers’ moods, upon re-entry, were often initially high but were short lived as this period of positive enjoyment was followed by the low shock phase of the reverse culture shock experience (Adler, 1981). Participants in this study indicated that the negative emotions toward their return were often caused by feelings that their foreign experience and the skills that they gained were not transferable to their home country and work environment. It was also noted that re-entry from cultures similar to that of an individual’s home culture can be assumed to be easier than that of a culture that contrasts or is very different than the culture to which an individual returns (Adler, 1981).

Within this study, it was found that returnees often developed different coping modes or attitudes in the ways in which they approached and were able to cope with re-entry. Returnees’ coping modes were classified as either active or passive. Those individuals with an active attitude toward re-entry attempted to change themselves in order to fit back within their home environment. Those who were considered passive did not make any effort to change or readapt. From these two classifications, participants’ attitudes were then classified as either optimistic or pessimistic, which focused on the individuals approach to their re-entry. The majority of individuals in this study were
identified as having an optimistic-passive attitude; this can be attributed to the context of their travel as it was for the purpose of a work organization. It was found that returnees with an active coping mode attempted to change themselves as well as their home environment in order to readapt following a travel experience; passive returnees did not attempt any active changes in their re-entry process.

From these various attitudes, Adler (1981) identified four main classifications of re-enterers. Those who are optimistic/passive were classified as re-socialized returnees, and have a low recognition for skills gained from cross-cultural experiences. The re-socialized returnees removed themselves from their foreign experience in order to readapt and cope with their return to their home culture. The optimistic/active individuals were identified as proactive as they were aware of the individual changes that took place within them and attempted to integrate the culturally learned skills and values to their home in order to cope with re-entry.

Those returnees who are passive/pessimistic were identified as alienated and tended to disassociate themselves from their home culture as a coping method to re-entry. Lastly, those with active/pessimistic attitudes toward re-entry were identified as rebellious re-enterers. They moderately used and displayed the skills and values gained from their cross-cultural experience, however as an attempt to cope with the difficulties of re-entry, they strongly tried to change and control their home culture. If steps can be taken to assist individuals to prepare and construct specific coping methods and attitude toward re-entry, it may be possible for individuals to keep and transfer the gained skills and values acquired from their cross-cultural experience.
Overall one of the most significant findings in this study was that participants reported that the unexpected negative experiences with re-entry would deter them from participating in this type of experience again. More attention needs to be given to the experience and difficulties that individuals participating in cross-cultural travel face upon re-entry, as it may be a significant factor to the continued participation or involvement in these types of practices. This is especially important in the field of wilderness expeditions, as participation and continued involvement are foundational supports for the continuation of this industry.

The experiences of re-entry and the themes found within the research by Allison, Davis-Berman, and Berman (2011) relates directly to the experiences of culture shock and reverse culture shock in other literature. Wilderness expeditions slightly differ in experience than that of a trip to a foreign country, as individuals do not enter an already developed culture. The experience of re-entry can be conceptualized as being the same as the individual must leave a culture they have adapted to and return to the culture from which they have adapted. As stated before, the development of a sense of community on wilderness trips is often indicated as a result of the unique environment and social interactions that occur (Breunig et al., 2008; Ewert & McAvoy, 2000). With the combination of the development of new skills, social norms and cultural reinforcements that occur throughout cross-cultural experiences, changes in the cultural identity of the traveler is a common occurrence with this form of extended travel. It is commonly believed that cross-cultural experiences have the ability to increase an individual’s cultural knowledge and self-awareness as these situations allow travelers to experience a contrasting culture where personal beliefs and values may evolve outside of one’s home
culture (Allison & Von Wald, 2010; Martin, 1987). As a large portion of identity is formed through cultural interaction and social contact, the adaptation of an individual’s behaviour, personality and social world while abroad may lead an individual to experience a significant change in their personal identity.

While an individual participates in extended travel they are often developing a new cultural identity (Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004; Sussman, 2000; Szudlarek, 2010;). This identity is accepted in their host culture as it is based on the local accepted norms. However, when individuals return home, they may experience difficulties being accepted and relating to others, as their personal links with this home culture have been weakened through the shift in identity and newly discovered sense of belonging in their travelling host culture (Szudlarek, 2010). This is expressed clearly by Furnham (1986) when he stated “Learning a second culture or ‘forgetting’ one’s first, is rather like learning a language or letting a language fall into disuse” (p. 34).

Research conducted by Allison and Von Wald (2010) explored the social and personal developments that occur through wilderness expeditions as the experiences on wilderness expeditions create opportunities for participants to restructure and develop their own attitudes perspectives and self-identity in an environment very different from home. According to Allison and Von Wald (2010), expeditions have the capacity to become a community practice, where groups of people develop through shared interest and goals often at a crucial time of development. The social and personal development that occurs on wilderness expeditions may not be able to transition back into the home environment with the participant, as the setting in which the growth was achieved may only be supported by the expedition community and wilderness setting.
In research regarding the dynamic nature of cultural identity and the experience of re-entry, Sussman (2000) stated, “for many repatriates, they no longer find a fit between their newly formed cultural identity and that of their home culture environment” (p. 365). It was also noted that individuals may feel disconnected or apart from family and friends as their new cultural identity is no longer rooted to that of others in their home community. From these experiences, most participants reported negative responses to the experience of re-entry. However, they were often unable to identify the cause of the undesirable feelings. This may be caused by the inability of an individual to reflect upon their cross-cultural experiences and the lack of acknowledgement toward ways in which their identity has changed. This would be a clear example of the passive/pessimistic coping attitude identified early by Adler (1981) as the individual disassociates him or herself with aspects of their home culture as a way to deal with the difficulties present in re-entry, often sacrificing personal growth, development and new values to feel at home in a familiar setting.

When an individual returns home, there are two forms of adjustment that an individual must undergo in order to readapt to their home community. The first is psychological adjustment, which is focused upon a returnee’s personality, emotional condition and perceptions connected to their home culture. As there are several psychologically stressful conditions that may result from the difficulties of re-entry, psychological adjustment will vary depending on the individual. The second form of adjustment is sociocultural adjustment and is concerned with how an individual interacts with their previous social network and support after their experience of being away (Mooradian, 2004). Strong social support is an important factor in how well an individual
is able to readjust back to their home environment, as it can relieve feelings of loneliness and isolation that are often involved with re-entry. Where individuals often experience difficulties with re-entry is when the other member of their home community are not willing or able to accept the changes that have occurred in an individual’s identity throughout their travels. These changes are displayed in the skills and values that are new to the individual behaviour and personality.

From this lack of support, a traveler is forced to make a decision between which aspects of their new cultural identity to sacrifice for their previous social support and culture. In this circumstance, an individual is forced into an optimistic/passive coping response (Adler, 1981). While they may be able to readjust successfully to their home culture, they must sacrifice the growth and cultural identity that they have developed through their experiences.

When an individual returns from a significant amount of time away from their home, communities and social circles, there is often a strain on personal relationships, as adjustment is needed to the changes in both the traveler as well those who have remained in the home environment (Allison, Davis-Berman, & Berman, 2011; Sussman, 1986; Westwood, Lawrence, & Paul, 1986). The less support an individual has throughout their re-entry and adaptation to his or her home, the more difficulties and psychological stress an individual will be likely to face. Experiences of re-entry to a home community may be difficult for travelers as they may experience negative psychological feelings such as stress, loneliness, and depression (Adler 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004). As the experiences of re-entry may be psychologically harmful to those who go through it, it is important to increase the amount of knowledge and awareness of this topic. In order to
better understand these types of experiences, it is important to explore in more detail what impacts the experience of re-entry may have on an individual’s life and psychological well-being.

A key component throughout re-entry research is the subjective understanding of the concept of home. The idea of home is often conceptualized as the tangible or symbolic place from which people travel from and return to, and a place where one could be oneself (White & White, 2007). Home is conceptualized as a familiar environment where an individual feels accepted and understood, a place where one feels they belong, and is predictable regarding their interaction with people and places (Mooradian, 2004; Storti, 2001). This conceptualization of home can be partially understood through the components of sense of place which is composed of three components, physical environment, human behaviour and social and/or psychological process (Steadman, 2003).

While a sense of place is not linked solely to a physical setting, it is attributed to the human interpretations of a setting that are linked to experience (Tuan, 1977). According to Mallett (2004), “the conditions under which people leave their homelands, their journeys beyond and away from home and their destinations are all said to impact on their identity and understandings of home” (p. 78). It is therefore imperative to examine all aspects of an individual’s travel experience including the constructs of their home environment as the conditions present may play a key factor to an individual’s process of re-entry.

It appears that through the experience of re-entry to a home environment, individuals may experience contrasting feelings to those that should be evident and
individuals may experience the feeling of a loss of home. When an individual leaves their home environment to spend a significant amount of time in a new environment, they create and build a new sense of place and a temporary sense of home as most people have a need to feel connected. This is something that is especially important in wilderness expeditions as the emotional connections, positive relationships and sense of community created in the field, contribute to participants feelings of safety, group cohesion and positive experiences (Breunig et al., 2010; Ewert & McAvoy, 2000, Mitten, 1999).

Psychological Sense of Community

Many of the ideas and feelings that are essential to the concept of home can be encompassed by the theory of psychological sense of community. Psychological sense of community can be conceptualized as “a feeling that members have of 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” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). The interactions and connections that are a result of a developed sense of community fulfill an essential human need despite the fact that the lack or absences of a strong sense of community is something that is believed to be a common aspect of modern life (Bender 1982; Putnam, 2000; Sarason, 1974). It is important that more knowledge is created regarding sense of community as it is a foundational aspect of psychological well-being (Glynn, 1981; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sarason, 1974).

In the past, the ideas surrounding community were primarily focused on understanding community as a geographical concept related to the individuals that were located in one’s neighborhood, town or city. A more modern understanding of
community is based on a relational context that is focused on interest, skills, and needs, where individuals who have similar characteristics and needs form a community not based on geography, but on the specific desires and qualities of the individuals involved (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Obst & White, 2007; Sarason, 1974; Sharpe, 2005). It is this concept of psychological sense of community that will be the theoretical framework guiding this research.

In other sense of community research, it has been shown that individuals obtain this feeling or sense, by having a number of different, “layered” community groups (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Although multiple sources or communities may help to create a strong sense of community, conflict may arise from the requirements of membership to more than one community. This may be especially true if the values and traits are not shared or understood by the overlapping communities.

Sense of community can be broken down into four essential elements: (1) membership, (2) fulfillment of needs, (3) influence, and (4) emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The majority of research regarding re-entry and cross-cultural transitions has identified impacts from re-entry such as a feeling of isolation, social anxiety, and a lack of a shared emotional connection. The feelings and experiences present in re-entry often directly contrast the four elements of sense of community and may impact an individual’s sense of community in the home setting (Adler, 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004; Rogers & Ward, 1993).

According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), membership is the feeling of belonging or being a part of a group, and is a result of a sense of relatedness that can be created from common values or shared experiences within a group. Membership is often
controlled by a group’s development of boundaries, which provide a feeling of safety and define those who are members and those who are not. The loss of a sense membership or belonging has been predominately indicated as one feeling attributed to the experience of re-entry. This is because one must often sacrifice their membership to their home community to build a sense of belonging when traveling. Communities create boundaries by the language, clothing and behaviour that are commonly accepted as a part of a community culture (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). When an individual’s personal characteristics fit within these boundaries, it is an open expression to others of that individual’s membership to the community. In turn, when others mirror these personal expressions back to an individual in that group, their membership is confirmed and acknowledged. A key function of membership is a common symbol system or developed set of meanings that members share in order to maintain boundaries of those who are and are not a part of the community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). When individuals partake in cross-cultural travel, they must often change their personal values to adapt to a new culture, this is referred to as cultural adaptation or acculturation (Sussman, 2000). These changes in self-concept often remain once the individuals return home from their experiences. It is not until an individual returns home that they find that they are no longer able to identify with what was once a common value system in their community and are forced to sacrifice their new value system readapt to their home culture.

A shared emotional connection is another element of sense of community that has been noted as being diminished as a result of experiences that occur throughout re-entry (Allison, Davis-Berman, & Berman, 2011; Sussman, 1986; Weaver, 1994; Westwood, Lawrence, & Paul, 1986). In a community, this connection is often based upon a shared
history or events and expressed through shared values and symbols of reference. If an individual is to leave their community and partake in experiences outside of their home culture, they may not be able to reestablish this connection, as members of their home community may not be able to identify with experiences in which they have taken part. Additionally, the sojourner may not be able to reconnect with others in their social circles, as events that occurred while they were absent from the community have now become a part of that group’s history.

This experience often presents itself when travelers return wanting to share stories, pictures and memories from their time abroad and are faced with feelings of disinterest among many friends and family members (Storti, 2001; Weaver, 1994). Although the members of a traveler’s home community may have some interest in an individual’s outside experiences, they do not share the same meaning for this journey as the traveler, and are not able to project the same value that the traveler has for these symbols, places and stories (Weaver, 1994). This disinterest from a community member can cause individuals to feel a lack of social support and can bring about feelings of loneliness, isolation and abandonment when returning home.

Although sense of community has been discussed significantly in a variety of previous research, the most common theme found within the literature is that the absence or decline of a psychological sense of community is a destructive and harmful force to the psychological well-being of a person, as its loss may be associated with feelings of alienation, loneliness and depression (Adler 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004). It is important that the awareness and knowledge around PSOC is increased through research
as the presence of a developed sense of community fulfills a basic human need (Glynn, 1981; Putnam, 2000; Sarason, 1977).

As mentioned earlier the development of interpersonal relationships and strong sense of community is a common goal found on many wilderness expedition programs (Breunig et al., 2008; Mitten, 1999, Sharpe, 2005). A pilot study by Breunig and O’Connell (2005) examined the sense of community on integrated wilderness trips and found results that suggest that group cohesion and sense of community are enhanced through wilderness trip participation. Breunig and O’Connell (2005) also stated, “wilderness trips provide an excellent opportunity for creating psychological sense of community. The feelings, beliefs and relationships gained from this sense of community may be transferred to everyday life and back to participants’ broader communities” (p. 97). Although wilderness trips provide excellent opportunities for creating sense of community, the re-entry and cross-cultural research suggests that the experiences that an individual gains outside of their home setting may not be transferable and may even conflict with their home communities making it more difficult to return home.

Research by Breunig et al., (2010) explored how participation in outdoor pursuits impacted college students’ perceptions of sense of community over time. Participants in this study were college students who were required to participate in a 13-day outdoor course, including a 6-day wilderness trip, in the summers of 2006 and 2007. Several participants completed two surveys on three separate occasions throughout the course. The first survey was the Group Cohesion Evaluation Questionnaire (Glass & Benshoff, 2002), and the second was the Perceived Sense of Community Scale (Bishop, Chertok, & Jason, 1997). These instruments were used as they measure perceived group cohesion and
sense of community regardless of context. Several of the participants also took part in focus groups concerning their experiences. From the participants’ surveys, it was found that sense of community increased as a result of participation in wilderness trip (Breunig et al., 2010). From the analysis of data it was found that each aspect of sense of community (e.g., membership, influence, fulfillment of needs and shared emotional connection) as defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986) increased throughout the program. Of the four characteristics, membership increased significantly throughout the program as it was found that wilderness trips provide an opportunity for groups to form and adds to the establishment of association among group members (Breunig et al., 2010).

The information gathered from the focus group sessions revealed details into the participants’ experience as to what aspects of the wilderness program added to or detracted from a sense of community. Participants indicated that group-oriented activities, feelings of escape from society, meeting new people, and a common goal, as well as the wilderness setting itself all contributed to the sense of community. The factors that participants reported as detracting from the sense of community on the trip were: not enough debriefing, inadequate time together post-trip, unequal contributions from group members, too much challenge and not enough time spent on the wilderness experience (Breunig et. al, 2010).

From the findings of this research, recommendations were made on how to maximize the perceptions of a psychological sense of community on outdoor pursuit trips. Of the several recommendations, a more deliberate focus on pre and post trip activities has been indicated as being a key method to building a sense of community and
group cohesion on wilderness trips and outdoor programs (Breunig et al., 2010). The recommendation for a stronger focus on preparing individuals for the re-entry process has been consistently found in re-entry and reverse culture shock research.

The cultural adaptation to a uniquely created group on a wilderness trip is significant as the actions behaviours and experiences that are required of participants often significantly contrast that of their home environment. This allows the experiences found in re-entry from wilderness expeditions to be comparable to international travel and cross-cultural transitions of a much longer stay. The culture created on wilderness expeditions is formed through what is known as “intense residential experiences” (Allison, Davis-Berman & Berman, 2011), where individuals are forced to live and interact in close proximity to one another. Through these experiences the development of a group culture is often accelerated as behaviours and actions have immediate and transparent consequences and the cohesive formation of a group is necessary for the success of wilderness programs (Allison, Davis-Berman, & Berman, 2011; Fabrizio & Neill, 2005).

When participants complete a wilderness trip, they must return to their home communities and cultures, bringing with them the newly learned values and skills as well as newly formed identities shaped through their experiences (Allison & Von Wald, 2010; Sussman, 2002). Upon re-entry, individuals may experience difficulties immediately readapting back to their home environment and may experience a loss of a sense of belonging, loneliness and conflict with their home culture (Adler 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004). Many wilderness expedition programs help prepare participants for the initial shock of entering a wilderness setting, however, there is a lack of attention
given to the process of re-entry following such a significant experience in the wilderness. As expeditions are often experienced at a influential time of development (Allison & Von Wald, 2010), individuals who experience difficulties in returning from a wilderness trip may experience barriers to continued participation in extended wilderness trips, or may even experiences damaging feelings associated to their psychological well-being.

Research has shown that the participation in outdoor pursuit trips and wilderness experiences programs can lead to personal development and an increase in individuals’ sense of community, however these types of programs have often been criticized for being superficial modes of experience with little lasting influence (Brown, 2010; Royer, Mestre & Dufresne, 2005; Simmons, 1999). A significant amount of this criticism comes from early research, which previously indicated that participants’ benefits and new values were short-lived after returning from wilderness group experiences (Ewert & McAvoy, 2000). Although there are still numerous critics of the value of wilderness expeditions, research has shown that extended wilderness expeditions can often be a significant experience and provide transformative opportunities for individuals (Beams, 2004; Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Talbot & Kaplan, 1986). The combination of group activities, unique physical and social settings as well as the isolation from outside influences create an environment that has the ability to increase individuals’ sense of community and promote the development of close interpersonal relationships (Breunig et al., 2010; O’Connell & Breunig, 2005). This sense of community and encouragement of social interactions can be heavily influenced by the trip providers and wilderness guides as a sense of community can help participants feel safe and adapt to the new backcountry environment (Breunig et al., 2010; Ewert & McAvoy, 2000, Mitten, 1999). Many wilderness programs
include the development of a sense of community in their program goals in order to improve participants’ positive and lasting experiences with extended wilderness trips, as well as continued involvement in the field.

While wilderness expeditions are a unique form of travel, there are several similarities between backcountry and other forms extended travel. While wilderness travel is often significantly shorter in length than the time spent abroad in extended personal or business travel, wilderness expeditions require participants to abandon the connections to their social support, cultural identity, and societal norms from their home community and enter a wilderness setting free from the pressures and influences of home (Westwood, Lawrence, & Paul, 1986). The unique social and psychical setting present of wilderness expeditions create opportunities for participants to experience a location very different from their home communities (Allison & Von Wald, 2010). Although this contrasting setting has the ability to promote personal and developmental growth, when participants return to their home community this growth may cause difficulties, as the experiences from the wilderness may not be transferable to their home communities (Adler, 1981).

The experience of re-entry requires individuals to go though many of the same processes and stages as the initial departure into a foreign environment as the transitional experience of re-entry requires cognitive, emotional and behavioural adaptation (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005). The experience of re-entering one’s home community may often be more difficult for individuals than the initial travel, as the presence of barriers and difficulties is not expected in the home setting (Adler, 1981; Mooradian, 2004; Storti, 2001; Sussman, 1986, Thompson & Christofi, 2006; Weaver, 1994). Research has shown that the
presence of unexpected difficulties in the re-entry process can lead individuals to feelings of anxiety, depression, isolation and other negative psychological mindsets as they have lost familiarity with their home culture and environment (Mooradian, 2004; Sussman, 2000). It is important to fully understand the experiences found in both the initial travel and the return home from participants experience in wilderness expeditions, to better understand the entire process of extended wilderness travel and help participants with the transition between home and away.

The next chapter will provide an overview of the research methods that will be used in this research study to explore how the experience of re-entry from wilderness expeditions may impact psychological sense of community.
Chapter Three: Methods

The following chapter will give a detailed overview of the research paradigm and methodology that frames this study. This chapter will introduce the methods that were used in the research process, including participant recruiting and selection, data collection and analysis. The chapter will also examine the ethical considerations and potential limitations of this research and will conclude with a research timeline.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to better understand how the experience of re-entry from wilderness expeditions impacts participant’s sense of community. In the previous chapter, current literature concerned with wilderness experiences, re-entry and psychological sense of community was reviewed in order to build an understanding of the current state of research surrounding this topic. Throughout the review of literature, a wide variety of topics and methods were found to support this research as theories and concepts of re-entry have been explored in cross-cultural business, tourism, recreation and education research. While both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were found in the existing research, the majority of supporting research was found to be qualitative, as the primary focus of the studies were the subjective experiences of the research participants.

This research project used a qualitative approach to build a better understanding of participants’ experience of re-entry following extended wilderness travel. This approach has been selected in order to be able to focus as much as possible on the reported experiences and meanings of the participants. Although qualitative research is
inherently interpretive and based in the researcher’s interpretation of collected empirical data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), the data collected is rich with participants’ descriptions through their own words and lens of experience. This qualitative study was directed by the research question, “How does the experience of re-entry from extended wilderness expeditions impact participant’s psychological sense of community?” This research investigated the meanings that individuals have created about their lived experience of the transition from one situational group to another, focusing specifically on the transition from a wilderness setting and trip group back to a home community.

Through this investigation, it was possible to create a better understanding of the holistic experience that individuals go through in the participation in extended wilderness expeditions. Through a better understandings of all parts of an expedition experience, suggestions for improvements to current field practices and areas or future research significant to the outdoor recreation and wilderness expedition fields is possible. A phenomenological approach with an interpretivist paradigm was used to investigate participants’ re-entry experiences. The concept of sense of community was used as a theoretical framework to guide the research in investigating the impacts these lived experiences had on individuals.

Ultimately, a phenomenological study aims at examining multiple perceptions of an experience until a unified vision of the essence or nature of the phenomena can be discovered (Moustakas, 1994). According to van Manen (1997), “phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experience” (p. 9). Phenomenology is a supporting methodology for an interpretivist paradigm as it is
focused on understanding the perceptions of the person or persons being studied (Willis, 2007).

For this particular study, the perceptions that individuals had toward their re-entry experience and sense of community was the crucial aspect of the data collected. As phenomenological analysis seeks to conceptualize the meaning, structure and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon of a selected person or group of people (Patton, 2002), a phenomenological approach was selected for the methodological structure of this study, as it was able to guide the researcher to compile and identify the very essence of the experience of re-entry from wilderness expeditions.

Research Paradigm

It is important as a qualitative researcher to identify the paradigm or worldview used to guide a study as this has influence on the methods and context of the research (Creswell, 2007), this study was guided by an interpretivist perspective to best answer the research questions. According to Patton (2002), it is the goal of interpretivist research to rely as much as possible on participants’ perspectives and understandings. Interpretivism is not concerned with the discovery of universal laws or rules, but instead seeks to understand how individuals create subjective meanings of the world in which they live (Patton, 2002; Willis, 2007). This paradigm was used to help remain focused on participants’ individual experiences of re-entry, as this research was concerned with gaining a better understanding of the participants’ perspectives and feelings around their experience of re-entry.
A core belief of the interpretivist paradigm is that the reality we experience is socially constructed and therefore, through research, it is only possible to access the meanings and knowledge created by group or social processes through experience (Willis, 2007). Moustakas (1994) stated that interpretation un masks what is hidden behind a phenomenon. Using this paradigm allowed the researcher to interpret and make sense of the recounted memories of participants as they conveyed their experiences of re-entry from extended wilderness trips. This paradigm did not allow for the creation or discovery of any universal generalizations about the experience of re-entry, but helped add to the understanding of the meanings that participants’ create around their post-expedition experiences.

Previous research that has been conducted regarding the process of re-entry has been primarily focused in the fields of tourism, business expatriates and cross-cultural transition. This research is focused on the re-entry from outdoor pursuit trips and wilderness expedition programs, which draw many parallels to the type of experiences that take place within cross-cultural travel and tourism. Participants must adapt to the unique environmental and social conditions of a wilderness trip in the same way that an individual must adapt to a new and unfamiliar country or culture. Although extended wilderness expeditions often only last between 14-35 days, the process of adaptation is accelerated as these trips are what is known as “intense residential experiences” (Allison, Davis-Berman, & Berman, 2011; Fabrizio & Neill, 2005).

Participants are also placed in a unique wilderness environment that is intentionally used by programs to encourage positive outcome and enhance the significance of participants’ experiences (Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Talbot & Kaplan,
1986). Once individuals complete a wilderness expedition they must return to their home culture where they may face a number of difficulties reintegrating and readapting to their home communities (Adler, 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004; Rogers & Ward, 1993). It is in this process of re-entry that an individual’s sense of community may be impacted.

**Participants**

For the purpose of this study six individuals participated in interviews, which explored topics and questions based on the research question and theoretical framework of psychological sense of community. According to Creswell (1998), it is important to understand several individuals’ common or shared experiences of a phenomenon in order to develop a deeper understanding. For phenomenological research, a minimum sample of three to a maximum sample of ten participants is recommended for interviews as the data collected from this method is rich with participants reported experiences and should be enough to be able to identify the essence of the phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 1998). Due to the method of in-depth interviews that was used for data collection as well as the time constraints present, a minimum of six participants is an appropriate sample size to complete this research with sufficient data.

Participants were recruited through word of mouth and the professional contacts of the researcher. This was done by the distribution of letters of invitation (Appendix A) and advertisement (Appendix B) in applicable newsletters. Purposive sampling was used to obtain participants who were best able to provide data that is significant to the research topic. Due to the high level of control in purposive sampling, over the selection of participants and the focused information that is obtained, it is believed to be one of the
most significant forms of sampling (Patton, 2002). In order to increase the chances of collecting significant data able to provide detailed experiences and insight into individuals’ experiences with re-entry, the following criteria must have been met by all participants who were interested in engaging in this study prior to being selected by the researcher for an interview: Participants were required to be between the ages of 18-35 years old, have participated in an extended wilderness trip facilitated through an organization lasting a total of two weeks or longer, and have experienced re-entry to their home communities within the 24 months prior to the interview. Ideally, three participants were to be male and three participants female in order to collect a well-rounded sample of participants’ perspectives on the experience of re-entry. Previous research highlights trends that females experience more difficulties with re-entry than males (Brabant, Palmer & Gramling, 1990), and although this research was not concentrating on gender as a component, it is important to attempt to collect a balanced recollection of experiences in order to compile and identify the most accurate reflections of re-entry. This criteria was developed as it is important that participants had experience with the phenomenon being explored and could articulate their conscious experiences (Creswell, 1998).

After individuals who were interested in participating in this study initiated contact, network sampling, otherwise known as snowball sampling was used, to contact additional potential participants through the recommendation of initial participants who expressed interest (Creswell, 2008). The reasoning for the use of this sampling method was that it was likely that those who responded to the letters of invitation and met the
research criteria were well situated in the field of extended wilderness trips and could provide guidance or have access to other potential participants.

A total of seven participants were interviewed for this research, which included four males and three females. The original proposed participant criterion was expanded during recruitment to attract more individuals to take part in the study. The original participant criteria was individuals between the ages of 18-25 years old who had participated in a wilderness trip lasting a minimum of 21 days in the past year. The participant age criteria was expanded by ten years to include individuals between the ages of 18-35 years old, while the minimum length of the expedition in days was broadened to include wilderness expeditions lasting a minimum of two weeks or longer. The timeframe from which participants would have experienced re-entry to their home community was also extended by 12 months to included individuals who had returned from their expeditions within the 24 months prior to the interview. Expanding the participant criteria was successful in attracting more interest and potential participants to the study, while not significantly altering the scope of this research.

**Sample Demographics**

The participants were between the ages of 19-22 years old at the time of their interviews. All of the participants reported that they had returned from their wilderness expedition in the past 2-44 months. Three of the expeditions were river based canoe trips; these were the shortest and longest trip duration reported by participants, the shortest being a 14-day expedition on the Broadback River located in northern Quebec, Canada. The longest were two, 56-day expeditions up the Mackenzie River, each traveling over
1700km and finishing at the Arctic Ocean. The remaining three expeditions consisted of two, 21-day alpine rock-climbing expeditions; one located in Argentina, and the other in Smith Rocks, Oregon and Yosemite Valley, California. Lastly, one was an 18-day bushwalking expedition in the main range of the Australian Alps. The participants’ demographic data that was collected, as well as their specific expedition logistics, are summarized in Table 1. Note that pseudonyms have been assigned to participants to protect their identity.

Table 1

*Participant Information and Expedition Logistics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Trip Logistics</th>
<th>Group Size</th>
<th>Return Prior to Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>56-day river canoe trip up the Mackenzie river, facilitated through summer camp</td>
<td>12 participants, 2 instructors</td>
<td>23 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21-day rock-climbing trip in Smith Rocks Oregon and Yosemite Valley as mandatory requirement of university program</td>
<td>12 participants, 2 instructors</td>
<td>12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14-day river canoe trip on the Broadback River, Quebec, Canada as mandatory requirement of university program</td>
<td>10 participants, 2 instructors</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>56-day river canoe trip up the Mackenzie river, facilitated through summer camp</td>
<td>12 participants, 2 instructors</td>
<td>23 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21-day rock-climbing trip in Argentina as professionally guided leadership trip/course</td>
<td>5 participants, 2 instructors</td>
<td>15 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mick</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18-day bushwalking trip in main Alps of Australia as mandatory requirement of university program</td>
<td>7 participants, 2 instructors</td>
<td>20 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Three participants indicated that their participation in the expedition was a mandatory requirement of their post-secondary education as they were enrolled in programs associated with outdoor recreation, adventure education or outdoor education. One participant was enrolled in an expedition that was focused on participants’ professional development in the outdoor industry with the idea or purpose of building skills to become a professional guide. The remaining two participants were motivated to participate in their expedition through their involvement with a residential summer camp and their enrolment in the camp’s leadership development program. Of these two participants, one is now enrolled in an outdoor recreation focused university program, which he found following the expedition experience. Each of the participants had a level of personal or professional connection to outdoor recreation and wilderness travel, which served as their motivation for participation or enrollment in an extended wilderness expedition. All of the participants’ wilderness expeditions were facilitated by organizations with the purpose of teaching or exposing participants to skills and experiences that can leave a lasting positive impact, to be used following their expedition.

When discussing returning home, three participants reported that upon completing their wilderness expedition they returned to their childhood home to live with their parent or parents. The remaining three participants, when describing their return, all indicated a home location away from their parents and associated with the location of their post-secondary institution. Five of the participants indicated that they were returning to a familiar place following their expedition while one participant shared that he was returning to new living situation as he had recently moved prior to leaving for his expedition.
Data Collection

For this study, semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method of data collection. This method of data collection was best suited for this study, as it was able to provide rich, thick descriptions of participants’ experiences with returning home from wilderness trips. Interviews allow for the collection of direct quotations of participants’ opinions, feelings and interpretation of an experience (Patton, 2002). In addition, Moustakas (1994) stated that the typical method of data collection in phenomenological investigations is the in-depth interview. The use of a 3-part interview structure has been suggested by Seidman (2006) for phenomenological studies in an attempt to gather enough data regarding participants’ experiences. However, those selected for this study were only asked to participate in one interview in order to comply with the research timeline. Through the use of a single in-depth interview using open-ended questions and probes, participants were able to discuss and reflect on their experiences transitioning back to their home communities after an extended wilderness trip.

Interviews. The interviews all took place in a private location at a time of convenience indicated by the participant. The participants were able to choose to have their interview conducted over the phone if a meeting place or time could not be arranged. However, a face-to-face interview was preferred, as this would have allowed the researcher to build better rapport with the participant. The interviews were estimated to last a total time of ninety minutes. This time has been determined in order to provide participants with an adequate amount of time to thoroughly reconstruct their experience through the interview as well as have enough time for the interviewer to the ask for
clarification if needed. The interviews with participants lasted between a minimum of forty minutes to a maximum of two hours, depending on the participant’s depth and length of response to the interview questions. A single, in-depth interview was adequate to gather enough data for this study as this style of interviewing gave participants the opportunity to provide a thick, rich description of their experience. Open-ended questions were used in the interview process in order to allow participants to freely elaborate and expand upon the meanings and context of their experience. In using a semi-structured interview protocol, the researcher was able to remain flexible throughout the interviews in order to allow participants to clarify experiences, meanings and emergent themes if needed, while also ensuring that each interview remained focused on the purpose of the research (Patton, 2002).

Member checks were conducted once the interviews were transcribed and analyzed by sending participants their interview transcript to review, modify and add clarifying language as well as ensure that the researcher had been able to acutely capture the true essence of their reported experience. The process of member checking is described in detail later in this chapter.

While there are several challenges to the use of interviews as a method of data collection, the quality of an interview relies heavily on the skills of the interviewer (Seidman, 2006). To ensure there was adequate preparation to conduct interviews, a question guide (Appendix C) developed from current literature was used to outline relevant topics to be covered throughout the interview. As psychological sense of community was used as the theoretical framework for this study, one of the primary influences for the question guide is the Sense of Community Index (SCI) created by
Chavis (1990). This 12-item scale was developed to measure an individual’s sense of community by breaking down sense of community through questions, into the four individual subcomponents defined by McMillan and Chavis (1987), membership, influence, fulfillment of needs and shared emotional connection.

The SCI has been reviewed in the past by Chipuer and Petty (1999) who found that the SCI was important not just for its wide spread use, but also its’ supported and elaborate framework and ability to adequately assess both communities based upon geographical location and relational context. Chipuer and Petty (1999) went on to state, “the model of psychological sense of community on which the SCI is based contains rich descriptions of the four dimensions of Membership, Influence, Fulfillment of Needs and Emotional Connection. However, this richness is not reflected in the 12 items of the SCI” (p. 654). For this proposed research project, it was decided that in order to allow participants to properly express their experiences of re-entry and psychological sense of community, a particular instrument or index would not be used, but the SCI would influence the development of questions in the guide (Appendix C) as certain questions relate to the four subcomponents of sense of community (i.e., membership, influence, reinforcement of needs and shared emotional connection) regarding the participants’ experience of re-entry and post-expedition experience. Other questions in the guide have been developed around the initial review of literature regarding re-entry, cross-cultural travel, wilderness experiences, culture shock and sense of community.

Although in-depth interviews are structured to flow from what participants have said, utilizing a question guide can be effective in prompting participants with the reconstruction of their experiences (Seidman, 2006). According to Patton (2002), this will
ensure that there is a minimum amount of variation in the relevancy of the data collected from the interviews, as well as will maintain consistency among the interviews. Interview skills were improved and the question guide was modified throughout the process of data collection based upon the experience with previous interviews. This was done in order to improve the clarity and quality of the question guide as well as the skills of the interviewer.

Another challenge that was present in the use of interviews is the participants’ ability to recall their experience accurately. As a way to mitigate this issue, the participant criteria was developed in such a way to ensure that participants have participated in an extended wilderness trip within the last two years and are able to reflect openly on their experience. Participants, being between the ages of 18 and 35 years old, were also more likely able to accurately articulate and recall their recent experiences. Throughout the interview, probing questions were used and participants were given adequate time to think about their responses if they seemed to be having a difficult time recalling their experience. Seidman (2006) noted that it is important for interviewers to allow participants “space to think, reflect and add to what he or she has said” (p. 94).

As in-depth interviews are concerned with building understanding through interactions of the researcher and participant, it is important that the interviewer is able to establish rapport with the interviewee (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Rapport is a tool used to make the interviewee more comfortable and more likely to share information about their experiences. However, building rapport must remain friendly but professional. One method that is commonly used to build rapport is for the interviewer to share their own experience with participants when they think it is relevant (Seidman, 2006). It is
important that the researcher does not allow the relationship of the interviewer and
interviewee to distort what the interviewee shares of their experiences. For the purpose of
these interviews and building rapport the sharing of personal experiences of participating
in wilderness trips was used when it was felt that it would not distort what the participant
was reconstructing of their own experiences. This sharing of information was only used
to encourage participants to share more in-depth information on the grounds that some
personal level of understanding was shared between the interviewer and participant about
the phenomenon being explored.

A total of five interviews were conducted through Skype while the remaining two
interviews were conducted by phone or in person. Of the seven interviews, only six were
used in this study. Despite previous communication regarding participant criteria upon
beginning the sixth interview, it became clear that the individual did not fit the participant
criteria as she indicated that she was over the age of 35 years old, and her expedition
experience was not adequate in length and was not facilitated through an organization.
The interview was still conducted, as this information did not become known until the
interview had already begun. The interview with this participant was not used, as she was
unable to answer a majority of the interview questions. As a result, when referring to the
participants for the remainder of this study, only the six individuals (who successfully
met all of the participant criteria and whose interviews were used for data analysis) will
be referenced. Once a participant arrived or made contact for an interview, they were
given a copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix D) and it was reviewed
verbally with the researcher in order to ensure that it was understood and agreed upon by
the participant. Once both the researcher and participant were satisfied with the
conditions of the interview, the participant signed the consent form and was able to request a copy for their own personal records if desired. All interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder so they can be transcribed following the interview. After interviews were completed, the audio recording of participants interviews were transcribed verbatim with the exception of words used for pauses in speech, in order to increase the clarity of the transcript interview.

**Data Analysis**

For data analysis, interview transcripts were uploaded into the qualitative software analysis program NVivo10 to assist with the research process. After the interview transcripts were edited for clarity the transcripts were uploaded to NVivo10, which was used to initially code all of the interviews through inductive coding. This program was used to review transcripts and search for significant statements and sentences that provided an understanding of how participants experienced re-entry from wilderness trip. Next, the process that Moustakas (1994) calls “horizontalization,” was used, where the significant statements were categorized into clusters of meaning and developed into themes by the researcher. This was done through constant comparison by repeatedly reading over each interview transcript in an attempt to find common themes and statements made by participants. Through the process of horizontalization, it is the job of the phenomenological researcher to develop both a textural and structural description of the participants reported experiences. The textural description is made up of the descriptions of what participants experienced while the structural description is comprised of the conditions, situations and context involved in how the participants
experienced the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2007). The textual and structural descriptions constructed from the collected data of participants are combined in order to convey an overall essence of the experience being studied (Creswell, 2007). From the 183 codes that emerged in the initial round of coding, a printed copy of these codes, including the encoded participant text, was condensed by hand through constant comparison and phenomenological reduction, to eliminate repetitive and non-significant codes (Moustakas, 1994). To successfully review and reduce the non-significant codes from the first round of data collection, a large white board was sectioned into six segments and used to display the coded quotations of the identified themes for each participant. Each emergent theme was reviewed by filling in each participant’s textural description and significant statements regarding their experiences into their labeled segment of the whiteboard where it was compared among participants to determine if the theme was significant or reoccurring. Each major theme was photographed so the segments could be erased and the next theme could be compared and explored between participants.

From the participants’ textural descriptions of what they experienced throughout their re-entry, a structural description was developed which described the conditions, situations and context involved in how the participants experienced the phenomenon of returning home from an extended wilderness expedition. Both the textural and structural descriptions of all six participants were used in developing an overall essence of the experience which the participants relayed regarding their shared phenomenological experience, or re-entry from an extended wilderness expedition (Moustakas, 1994).
Limitations

While some limitations are inherently present in the research process, attempts were made in order to manage the limitation of this research to achieve trustworthiness, credibility and reliability in the results and methods of research. Reliability can often be a problematic area in qualitative research as the behaviour of participants cannot be predicted or controlled, and individual participants have their own independent understanding of their experiences (Merriam, 2002). In order to establish reliability within the research, it is important to insure that the research process followed what was outlined as research methods in this chapter to ensure that this research could be replicated if necessary.

Trustworthiness. To strengthen the trustworthiness and credibility of this research, member checks were conducted following data analysis. Participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcription in order to verify what was recorded from their interview as well as check the themes from data analysis. In this process, participants were asked to add clarifying language and ideas to the transcript if needed and confirm that the researcher properly captured their experiences and meanings. This also provided a valuable opportunity for to receive feedback from the participants, and conduct follow-up interviews if necessary.

Peer review was also used throughout the research process in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the data analyzed and emerging themes. Regular meetings with the faculty supervisor at Brock University were an integral part in the creation of this study and were a valuable source of feedback and review. The researcher also used a reflexive
journal in order to remain aware of biases and personal opinions that may have arisen throughout the data collection and analysis.

**Reflexivity.** According to Patton (2002), reflexivity is “critical self-reflection and self-knowledge, and a willingness to consider how who one is affects what one is able to observe, hear and understand” (p. 299). As there are many factors that compose a lived experience, phenomenological researchers must attempt to remain grounded regarding their original research question in order to not lose sight of the phenomenon being studied (van Manen, 1997). It is important to strengthen trustworthiness within phenomenological research as all interpretations of the participants’ experiences are filtered through the researcher’s observations and review of the interviews (Merriam, 2002).

It is important when using phenomenology as a research method that the researcher is able to accurately describe and understand the experience of the phenomenon being studied. “A phenomenological question must not only be made clear, understood but also lived by the researcher” (van Manen, 1997, p. 44). This is why it is often suggested that researchers planning on implementing a phenomenological study have a familiarity with the phenomena in which they wish to conduct research. It is difficult for a researcher to make sense of the meanings that participants have of a lived experience if they have not lived it themselves. This level of understanding can also help a researcher to establish rapport with participants as the researcher may choose to share similar experiences to encourage participants to share information. While my previous experience with this phenomenon is limited to wilderness trips that are shorter in length than the expeditions examined in this research, it is my experience with the phenomenon
of re-entry and the experience of wilderness trips that has sparked a research interest on this topic.

For the past 7 years, I have been working in the outdoor industry as a wilderness guide, leading expeditions throughout northern Ontario. I have had the opportunity to work with many different organizations and although I do not have experience with leading expeditions that would be considered extended in length I have extensive experience in shorter wilderness expeditions. Prior to my work as a wilderness guide, I grew up attending a residential summer camp where I participated in several wilderness trips as a youth. As the majority of my academic, professional and personal life has been focused on wilderness trips and backcountry experiences, the process of transitioning to and from a wilderness setting back to a home environment has been a common practice in my life.

As it is important that the data collected from participants is not contaminated by the researchers’ subjective interpretations, precautions were taken through processes of reflexivity to allow the researcher to separate personal thoughts, experiences and bias from the phenomenon being investigated. Reflexivity, according to Lincoln and Guba (2000), is the process of critically reflecting upon the self as a researcher in order to better position oneself with the context of the phenomena being studied. This is important within phenomenological research as it allows the researcher to be able to conduct “Epoche” or bracketing prior to the collection or analysis of data.

Epoche is the process of identifying and bracketing out assumptions, preconceived knowledge and previous experience that a researcher may have regarding the research topic. This is done in order to identify data from participants in a pure and
uncontaminated form (Moustakas, 1994). Although it may not be possible for a researcher to eliminate all personal involvement with the research topic, Epoche is used to gain clarity regarding the researcher’s preconceptions. The process of Epoche or bracketing when conducted reinforces the rigor of the research (Patton, 2002).

Throughout the research, a research journal was kept in an attempt to record any experience or perspectives regarding the research process. Merriam (2002) suggests that a research journal is kept to create an audit trail of the research process; this journal should contain reflections, questions and decisions on the research question, issues, and ideas encountered during research as well as interpretations of the data collected. In keeping this research journal a recorded level of transparency was kept regarding the research process.

**Ethical Considerations**

In order to ensure that the research was conducted in a way that is compliant with the ethical guidelines for research at Brock University, a research ethics application was completed and submitted to the Brock University Research Ethics Board (REB). Once approval was received the process of data collection began, being sure to remain consistent with the research methods originally indicated and submitted to the REB. If anything within the research changed due to unforeseen circumstances the Brock Research Ethics Board would have been notified for a resubmission of approval for ethics.

**Informed Consent.** Before participants engaged in an interview, it was the job of the researcher to ensure that the participant fully understood the purpose of the research
as well as all other important information regarding their participation in the study. This was done to ensure that no harm would come to the participants. This information was clearly written in the informed consent form (Appendix D). This consent form was read aloud to participants at the beginning of the interview and was required to be signed before the interview could commence. The informed consent form communicated to the participant that he or she had the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they wish, without any questions or consequences as well as gave consent to being audio recorded. If a participant chose to terminate his/her participation in the study, their data would have been destroyed in an appropriate manner. All electronic files and recordings would be permanently deleted and any printed transcriptions will be shredded.

**Participants Risks/Benefits.** As interviews can be a stressful experience for participants that may bring about emotional or psychological stress, measures were taken to ensure that participants have information about local resources that were available to them to assist in dealing with these difficult experiences. This information and resources was listed on the informed consent form. The participants were also notified that if at any time during the interview they wished to take a break or for the interviewer to leave the room all they must do is express this openly. These steps were in place to ensure that the risks that participants were exposed to with their participation in this study were properly and ethically mitigated.

**Confidentiality.** All personal information of the participants of this study remained confidential, including any written representation of an individual’s participation in the research. Participants were notified that pseudonyms were implemented throughout the written portion of this research. The names of participants as
well as recognizable organizations were changed to be sure that no connection can be
made back to identifying the participants and any quotes used in the body of the research.
A master list matching participants’ names and contact information to their applied
pseudonyms was kept in order to be able to contact participants for member checking,
and was destroyed once the member check process was completed.

Storage and access of data. All data collected, including interview audio
recordings and transcriptions, were only accessible to the student investigator, and the
thesis supervisor. Once the interviews were transcribed, the original audio recordings
were permanently deleted. Throughout the entire research process all collected data was
kept in the locked office of the thesis supervisor and will remain there for 2 years
following the completions of this study for comparative purposes. Following this period
all collected data will be properly destroyed.

Time Line

The following is a timeline of the completion of the major components of this
research. The research proposal was approved to continue development in March 2013.
The Brock Research Ethics Board gave approval for this study in April 2013; data
collection took place between May and September 2014. Data analysis occurred between
October and January 2014. The final development and writing of this research took place
between January and April 2014. A completed final draft of this research was distributed
for review to the advising committee at Brock in May 2014. Final edits were completed
in June with the thesis defense in August 2014.
Chapter Four: Results

The following chapter will provide an outline of the significant results that emerged from this research following data collection. This chapter will begin with an overview of the categorized themes and subthemes that emerged as significant from participants’ interviews. Later in this chapter, each theme will be expanded upon further, including selected quotes from participants’ interview transcripts that successfully illustrate the theme being explored or are reoccurring statements among participants. This chapter will conclude with a summary of significant themes and results and will introduce the discussion and conclusion chapter of this research.

Overview of Themes

From the interviews conducted with the six participants, a total of twelve main themes and seventeen subthemes emerged. These themes were organized into three categories, which progress chronologically though the individuals’ experience on the wilderness expedition, their return to their home community, and the lasting impacts they have reported feeling in their post-expedition lives. These categories are labeled the following: wilderness community, re-entry, and post expedition life.

This chapter will provide an overview of these themes and subthemes, which include: intense residential experience, isolation, unique shared experiences, sense of community on trip, similar type of people with similar goals, lack of formal re-entry briefing, feeling that re-entry is different for everyone, not wanting to leave the field, transitional location, expectations of re-entry, initial reaction upon re-entry, difficulties with re-entry, sharing and communicating expedition experience, disinterest from home
community, absence of belonging at home, lasting attachment to the wilderness, readjustment, how long it took to feel fully adjusted, returning to reality, impacts from expedition experience, personal growth through self-discovery, new perspective, home communities reaction to growth, post expedition-community connections, post expedition group contact, group death and new outdoor expedition style experiences.

The twelve main themes and seventeen subthemes are organized into their chronological categories of experience in Table 2.
Table 2

Chronological Experience of Main Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wilderness Community</td>
<td>Intense residential experience</td>
<td>Isolation&lt;br&gt;Unique shared experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of community on trip</td>
<td>Similar type of people with common goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-entry</td>
<td>Lack of formal re-entry briefing</td>
<td>Feeling that re-entry is different for everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not wanting to leave the field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transitional location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectation of re-entry</td>
<td>Difficulties expected&lt;br&gt;Difficulties unexpected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial reactions upon re-entry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difficulties with re-entry</td>
<td>Sharing and communicating expedition experience&lt;br&gt;Disinterest from home community&lt;br&gt;Absence of belonging at home&lt;br&gt;Lasting attachment to the wilderness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readjustment</td>
<td></td>
<td>How long it took to feel fully adjusted home&lt;br&gt;Returning to reality/ forced to readjust to home life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-trip Life</td>
<td>Impacts from expedition experience</td>
<td>Personal growth through self-discovery&lt;br&gt;New perspectives&lt;br&gt;Increased confidence&lt;br&gt;Home community reactions to growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post expedition-community connections</td>
<td>Group death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New outdoor or expedition style experiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wilderness Community Themes

Two themes emerged in this first category: *Intense residential experience* and *sense of community on trip*. For each of these themes various subthemes emerged, within the theme of *intense residential experience* the subthemes of *isolation* and *unique shared experience* emerged, and within *sense of community on trip*, the subtheme of *similar type of people with common goals* emerged as reoccurring.

**Intense residential experience.** Participants reported expedition group sizes ranging from five to twelve individuals with the presence of either one or two instructors. The most common group size reported was twelve students and two instructors, which was the case with three of the six participants. This small group sized helped participants develop close bonds with their expedition groups through the constant close proximity and reliance on fellow group member necessary for a successful self-sufficient wilderness expedition.

All six participants indicated that the specific type of experiences they had throughout their expedition increased the cohesion of the group throughout their time spent in the wilderness. The participants’ focus, when recalling the group experience, was placed on the isolation of the group, and the uniqueness of the environment and experiences that the small group was able to share together through their participation in the expedition. These two subthemes emerged as isolation and unique shared experiences and will be expanded upon further.

**Isolation.** The majority of participants indicated that staying with such a small group of individuals with little to no outside contact was a positive experience, which aided in participants getting to know each other and helped in building a strong working
community. Two participants described their groups’ bonding as being initiated through a feeling of being “stuck” or “forced” to be together, and therefore having to rely on each other for support and positive group relations. Two participants also expressed that there was a lack of personal space on the trip, which added to the feeling of being “stuck” together, but increased the need for positive group relations. This was clear when William recalled his feelings toward travelling with the same people for an extended period he said “No matter what you only have those eleven other people so you have to count on them there is no I am sick of these people oh I am just going to take my own day and I am going to relax and go sit in a bubble bath and relax for a while. You can go sit in the river for five minutes before we leave again but that's all you had for personal space really.”

While these initial feelings of being forced together were common, they were also indicated as being a catalyst for the groups’ strong bond and positive shared experience. Natalie described her groups’ formation as “a different way of getting to know someone” and being “completely raw” when explaining her isolated group experience she stated

We all became very good friends and we got to know each other in ways where you don't get to know anyone else like that, because you just can't really have that experience with anyone at home, even my best friend I know her but I don't know her how I know the people I went on the trip with. Just because it is a different way of knowing someone, it is completely raw, there was nothing out there to entertain us but ourselves, so that is when you really get to know what people are like.

She explained that she felt this relationship building was the result of spending everyday together with such small group. She expressed that the group bonding occurred in ways that are not possible back home indicating this depth of relationships is unique to
the wilderness experience. William also supported the idea that in being in an isolated

group he was able to get to know his fellow trip participants in ways that were unique to

the wilderness expedition. He felt as if he and his canoe-mates “lived the same life”

while on trip, and therefore had to engage in more personal intrinsic conversations to stay

entertained. For example, he stated, “We lived the same life there wasn't much that Ryan

saw that I didn't. Maybe when he went to the bathroom he saw a wolverine walking around

which is cool but besides that we ate the same things we went to the same places again

there is no running away we had the same life so it wasn't boring at all it was just that you

focused on a lot different of things. I think I learned a lot more intrinsic things about my

canoe mates just because that is what we had to talk about.” Both the isolation of the group

as a whole, as well as the separation of individuals within the group from their home

communities was a significant component of all of the participants’ wilderness

expeditions as there were little to no outside influences impacting the group experience

through their time together.

**Unique shared experiences.** Participants made reference to the specific

uniqueness of the experience that was involved in their wilderness expedition and how

this helped define their group through the sharing of this experience. For some, the

uniqueness of the experience was also was able to create a clear separation or boundary

from those who were left back at home. This was expressed when one participant referred

to his groups’ experience in the wild as “our experience together that nobody else knows

what we had” and “something pretty special to have with only eleven other people.”

Another participant stated that upon returning to camp “it was almost like being a

celebrity but, it was one of those things that we didn't know why we were like that because
we were out in the middle of nowhere for so long and we hadn’t had contact with any of these people.” At this participant’s camp only one group of individuals from the organization is provided the opportunity to go on the expedition each year and while the participants were on trip the members of the camp were updated with the status and experiences of this trip group. Robert felt that the specific form of travel of the expedition (i.e. rock-climbing) as a group allowed unique relationships to form within his group that were unlike those he experienced in his home community, he stated “I think it got a lot tighter a lot closer because we just had been through that experience together and, I just trust them so much more because I have seen every aspect of them and I know what they do. So it really strengthened our relationship because we just had an extra degree of I know this guy, a lot more than I know somebody else because we just climbed together.” William also illustrated this theme of uniqueness when discussing his feelings upon coming to the end of the Mackenzie River with his trip group. He stated,

We all lined up alongside the river and we all pulled in so we would all land at the exact same time and we had all just gone through that experience which not a heck of a lot of people do and we could all just look at each other and not say anything but know exactly how the other person was feeling. We were all sad that it was over but also felt really accomplished with what we had done, paddled 1700km over two months and seen things most people don't.

**Sense of community on trip.** All six participants reported experiencing some level of sense of community among the members of their wilderness expedition. Five of the participants suggested the development of strong sense of community with their trip members while one participant indicated experiencing some difficulties connecting and
did not feel a strong sense of community with his expedition group. Three participants made specific mention that they felt supported, accepted and as if their group had become “like a family” through the course of their wilderness trip. One participant compared the support she felt at home and on her wilderness trip and stated that “it was just different being at home; I think people are still supportive of me it is just a lot different out there.”

All six participants reported an overall experience of positive group interactions and a feeling of community or belonging to their trip group. While some participants indicated that conflict and difficult group situations did arise on trip, they noted that these did not have a lasting negative impact on the group’s sense of community. Isaac described his experience in the community as “I definitely developed some very strong bonds to the people whom I was there with and we all got along so well we had such a good time and the class was really, really well structured.” Isaac continued on to say “we weren't the best of friends before we left and then you get to spend all this time together and you are in such a good place you can't do other wise than just get along so well.” William described his sense of community to be based on the shared outdoor experience. He stated, “It was nice to be in a community that really appreciates the outdoors like you do …. you had to get along most of the time it was good it was just every now and again when something would come up, you would kind of get irritated and shrug it off, sleep it off you'll be out the next day paddling again.” William’s description of the sense of community he experienced on trip was based largely on the common values, close proximity and required functionality of the trip group.

**Similar people, similar goals.** Four participants expressed that they felt as if the members of their trip group were all a similar type of people or a group of people with
similar goals or a common group goal that as a group they were able to help each other achieve. William, Robert and Isaac all felt connected to their trip group through their specific interests in outdoor wilderness travel, which they felt they did not share with those in their home community. Isaac stated that he felt his group was connected through “deep shared interests” which were more significant than the average shared connection. Isaac elaborated on this connection when he was discussing the sense of community he experienced while on trip, he explained

> When you are out there when you are in the field you are sharing interest and I think your interest are way deeper than liking to take a walk in the park and not every body likes sleeping in minus twenty degrees with gusting winds on a glacier that's not what everybody digs. So you share these deep interests and we all have this desire to push your limits and you know we were really tight all together we developed up really nice relations all together.

William also indicated that he felt as if the members of his trip group were all coming from a similar background and experiences, and that they shared similar character traits, which had led them to the expedition. He expressed that he felt it takes a “pretty specific kind of person to want to do that.” William also stated “amongst the ten of us we all kind of had the same thought process and we were similar people to go out and get accepted for the trip and then be willing to follow through with it. It’s beyond just liking the wilderness setting, you sort of have to have the same character traits and those sort of things to carry you on to that point,

Mick, who expressed that he did not feel a strong sense of community on trip, felt as if his group was very diverse with a range of different people, and expressed that his
difficulties connecting with his trip group may have stemmed from the fact that his expedition group was composed of members from a different cohort than the one he belonged to in his university program. “Our group was very mixed in diversity and everyone that was there was very kind of focused on the task and I found it hard to develop a sense of community.”

Re-entry Themes

Seven themes emerged in this second category, including the following: lack of formal re-entry briefing, not wanting to leave the field, transitional location, expectations of re-entry, initial reactions to re-entry, difficulties with re-entry, and readjustment. Themes from participants’ experiences while still remaining in the wilderness setting are included in this section as the process of re-entry begins when participants begin to prepare themselves to return home, but have yet to physically re-enter their home community.

Lack of formal re-entry briefing. When asked about the presence of a briefing focused on re-entry, all participants reported that there was no formal re-entry briefing delivered, but that re-entry may have been mentioned in passing, or in a casual manner near the conclusion of their expedition. When asked about a re-entry briefing Robert describe it as “a more relaxed, casual joking manner, nothing formal, like this is what might happen or something like that.” William and Natalie indicated that the reason for the absence of a re-entry briefing was that the instructors were in the same position as the participants (i.e., had never experienced re-entry from an extended expedition) and therefore did not know what it would be like to return home. When talking about her
instructors’ briefing, Natalie stated “they did their best but at the same time they couldn't give us that because they had never done anything like that either so I don't think they knew what to expect.” William described his briefing in the wilderness as “guessing in the dark” he went on to say,

While we were there we kind of talked about it and we prepared for it as best we could as sort of guessing in the dark because none of us had ever done it before so we were going from other peoples experiences and seeing what we could do from there, it was all second hand because none of us had ever been in the same situation before.

Four of the participants expressed that they felt that re-entry was experienced differently by each individual and that it would not be possible for an instructor to prepare each of the participants for their specific re-entry process. Many participants when asked felt there was nothing the instructors could have done to increase their preparation for re-entry from their expedition, despite several of the participants indicating the presence of unexpected difficulties upon their return home.

**Transitional location.** All six of the participants reported that following leaving the field their group used a transitional location prior to returning to their home communities. The two participants who participated in their expedition through the summer camp, returned to the camp for four days following their expedition to conclude their leadership program, clean gear, and return home. The remaining four participants spent between one and three days in transit from the location of the wilderness expedition to a central location from which they could return home. Isaac, whose expedition was located in Argentina, required a three-day hike out of the alpine environment with his
group who then spent a final night in Mendoza together. Isaac shared that he appreciated the transitional hike required to leave the alpine environment as it provided him time to reflect upon his experience. Following the final night with the expedition group, Isaac remained in Mendoza for seven days for personal travel with some members of his expedition group before returning to his home in Quebec. Isaac described this experience as “so we had a three day hike down which really gives you the time to sort of reflect on everything you learned and then all of a sudden you get into the little village where there is plastic bags and bottles everywhere in the field and pollution and then it is all of a sudden so weird you just see other people.” Shannon, Natalie and William all reported a closing ceremony or final reflection that was facilitated for the group while in this transition location between the wilderness and their home community. Both Natalie and William’s expedition held a final group event at the transitional location, for both the expedition group and members of their home community before the participants returned home. Claire described this experience as being a positive conclusion to her expedition experience, she shared “It ended on a really good note because I think they realized that everyone would be so sad so we had this big pot luck and all the parents came and other counsellors that we knew from camp came and everyone brought good food that we hadn't eaten all summer, so that was cool it ended on a really good note.”

**Not wanting to leave the field.** When ask how the participants felt about returning home, five participants recalled that they did not want to leave the field and that they were not ready for the expedition to end. One participant described the feeling of his last night in the field as a combination of “accomplishment” to be finished the journey and “somberness” that the trip was over. When asked about his thoughts associated with
leaving the field during his expedition, Isaac responded that he had not thought about returning home at all stating, “Did I even think about it?... I think that when I was over there I was totally just embracing the moment and living every moment to its fullest and I wasn’t connected to home.” Shannon shared a negative experience near the end of her expedition as she felt a “shift in priorities” of her expedition group as individuals began to mentally leave the field and focus on concerns and aspects of their home lives, before physically leaving the wilderness, she described this situation as “the whole atmosphere of the trip kind of changed because people went from thinking about the goals of when you arrive at a campsite. Priorities started to shift towards what people wanted to do when they got home.”

**Expectations of re-entry.** Three participants reported expecting there to be difficulties present upon their re-entry to their home communities and three participants reported the presence of difficulties as unexpected upon their return. Isaac, Shannon, and Mick all stated that some level of difficulty was to be expected as they had participated in extended travel before or had known someone who had returned from a similar type experience and had encountered difficulties returning. William, Robert and Natalie did not expect there to be difficulties present in returning to a familiar place. These participants reported the focus of their expectations were placed upon excitement and returning to the physical comforts of home, such as prepared meals, hot showers and sleeping in a bed. Upon returning home, these three participants noted experiencing unexpected difficulties reengaging with their home community members. When asked about her expectation of difficulties, Natalie said,
I think they were unexpected, I thought the hardest thing would be showering again or not sleeping in a tent or being away from everyone. But I didn’t expect not being able to talk about the trip and then when I would try and talk about it I would get so emotional that I would be like ‘No! You don’t understand, I’m not talking to you about it.’ I think that was the most unexpected thing for me.

William also shared a similar experience, where he described the presence of difficulties as “unexpected and unwelcomed,” he also described not thinking about difficulties prior to his re-entry, he shared

I didn't think about what difficulties I would have coming back home, I thought of hot showers and having prepared meals and going back to camp and eating as much as I could and I didn't think so much about what's it going to be like when I am back in school and I have this schedule and there are people around everywhere and it is noisy all the time and I didn't really think about it much so it was certainly unexpected for me it was an unwelcomed expectation.

**Initial reaction to re-entry.** Participants shared two main reactions when recalling their initial reactions to their re-entry to their home environments. These two primary reactions were excitement and overwhelmed. Two participants reported feeling overwhelmed upon re-entry by the large number of people in a concentrated place in comparison to their small expedition group. One participant noted feeling overwhelmed by how much more “complicated” thing are back home, and that life was “just a bit simpler out there.” Shannon used the term “culture shocked” when discussing her experience returning home as this had been her first experience returning from a wilderness expedition of significant length she shared “it’s a bit overwhelming coming
back and I guess just thinking about all the complicated little things that you may get upset or worry about it just seems a lot simpler out there.” Natalie also described being disoriented by being home, and waking up in the middle of the night not knowing where she was and feeling as if she was in a new place. Although Isaac reported feeling excited and happy to be home, he described his return as happening very suddenly and experienced a feeling that “things were very different” and as if “he had changed while everyone at home remained the same.” William and Robert also described being excited upon returning home and being able to reengage with a familiar place and members of their home communities.

**Difficulties with re-entry.** All six participants recalled experiencing some difficulties with their re-entry to their home community. These difficulties emerged as four subthemes within this main theme: sharing and communicating the experience, disinterest from home community, absence of belonging at home, and a lasting attachment to the wilderness.

**Sharing and communicating the experience.** Five of the six participants recalled instances where they felt as if they were not able to successfully share their experience with members of their home community. Participants often felt as if they were unable to share significant aspects about their wilderness experience with those in their home communities or they felt that those at home “just did not understand” when they were discussing their wilderness expedition. Participants shared that these difficulties led to feelings of frustration, as they wanted to share certain aspects of their expedition with members of their home community, but felt this was not possible. One participant recalled being frustrated by his friends as they had stopped him while he was sharing a
story, as they were unable to understand the certain aspect about rock-climbing he was attempting the communicate. He stated “I found it difficult to share really detailed stuff about my expedition or stuff that I was passionate about because they didn’t have the knowledge to really understand what I was talking about.” Several of the participants had more success in sharing photos than attempting to share stories from their expeditions, as these are easily accessible for a wider variety of people to understand and appreciate without previous background information or specific knowledge. Robert expressed this when he shared “it was really good to share photos because, you take a photo at the top of a climb or you get a photo of you climbing something and they can visually see what you're doing. So I found them much more receptive to photos or just the every day stuff without the details of climbing.”

**Disinterest from home community.** All of the participants also indicated feeling some level of disinterest from their home community members toward their wilderness expedition experiences. This was an attribute of the difficulties in which the participants had in sharing their experiences following their return home. William, Mick and Isaac expressed that the disinterest from their home communities was limited and that it was an expected difficulty upon their return. They each also expressed they felt that this disinterest did not significantly impact their experience of sharing their expedition. Mick indicated that he often avoided sharing stories from his expedition with individuals who did not have the background to understand the stories in order to avoid boring people, he stated “now I would tell stories but I have found that if I do tell stories it generally sometimes bores people after all my travels so I generally try to avoid it unless they ask me questions.” Robert, Natalie and Shannon all experienced a significantly stronger and more
impactful disinterest from their home communities. These three participants felt constrained by their home communities in what they were permitted to share, as they felt the members of their home community only wanted to hear highlights of their trip and that they simply “had fun and it was cool” but were uninterested in the specific details of their expeditions. Both Natalie and Shannon expressed coping with these situations by telling their home community what they “wanted to hear” about their experiences or “what they had rehearsed” as they we unable to share the more detailed experiences that they wanted to. When talking about trying to share stories at home Natalie stated “It just got to the point where you just say what people wanted to hear. Like yah it was fine we had really cool experiences and then just say one and they would be happy with that and you would move on.” Shannon also recalled a similar experience trying to share stories from her trip, she shared “I have just learned not to try to go into details that I think were significant because people don't necessarily want to hear it all the time they get bored pretty easily.”

Robert felt that he was unable to share his experiences from his rock-climbing expedition as no one from his home community was interested or could understand technical climbing elements of his experiences, so he felt unable to share these details he was passionate about.

As all of the participants had some professional or personal level of interest in the outdoor recreation industry, many of the participants indicated that they were able to share their experiences on their expedition more successfully with other individuals in an outdoor-focused community. Robert even felt as if his fellow students who were more focused on paddling than rock-climbing or those who were considered “paddlers” were
still more receptive and able to better understand his expedition experiences as they “had that extra knowledge of knowing what an expedition is like.” William also indicated having a particular family member who was “into that sort of stuff” with whom he especially enjoyed sharing photos and stories. Shannon expressed that being able to return to her school community, which was focused on outdoor recreation, helped with her re-entry process as she was surrounded by people who were able to appreciate and understand the experience in which she had just taken part she shared “going back to school again I was surround by people who are in the outdoor field like the outdoor industry and they are going to school for it too so they are interested in what I did so they asked a bit more questions.”

**Absence of belonging at home.** Two participants indicated that they felt there was an absence of belonging at home once they returned from their expedition. Robert experienced this difficulty the strongest of all participants, and stated that he felt as if “I was on the outside, observing, almost like I was a person, me, meeting a group of new people for the first time even though I have known these guys for two years.” He also recalled experiencing feelings of being “unwanted” and “not fitting in” or feeling like “he should be somewhere else” upon his return. He felt as if coming back from his wilderness expedition the previous boundaries of his home community and social circles were unclear, as he needed to “catch up on the last three weeks and break through that boundary so I can be a part of the conversation again.” Natalie also recalled feeling as if she now had a “new home” out on trip and shared that “I don’t think that I will ever be fully adjusted, but that is also how I want it to be because then it’s like I grew on this trip so it’s not back to normal, it’s a different normal.”
Attachment to the wilderness. Several participants also noted a strong feeling of attachment to the wilderness environment as once they returned home they felt a longing to be “out there” back in the wilderness. William shared that he missed the “peacefulness” and “having all the room in the world” as he returned to his normal school schedule. Another participant indicated that his longing to be back out on trip was something that kept him from being able to get back into normal life. This participant’s experience in the wilderness also led him to question his life in the city asking himself “is the life that I want to have to be out in the mountains and out just experiencing wilderness and being in nature and not being in a big city.” Two of these participants also expressed that they felt that this feeling would never completely leave them, but that it was something, which they regularly dealt with in order to function in their everyday life. When asked about her feelings of attachment to the wilderness now that she has returned home, Natalie stated “Honestly I don’t think they have changed, I think they have gotten less intense, but at the time when I came back all I wanted to do was go back and live on the river.”

Readjustment. All of the participants recalled a different number of days in which it took before they felt fully adjusted home. While Robert and Shannon each felt that they had fully adjusted home within the first one to four days, Isaac, William and Mick reported their readjustment process lasting anywhere between two to six weeks before they felt fully readjusted to their home environment. When asked about her readjustment, Natalie could not identify a specific length of time associated with her readjustment where she felt at home again. When asked about feeling readjusted, she stated “I don't think I ever came to a point where I was like, wow, I feel like I am home
now, like I don’t feel awkward anymore. I think it just gradually went away but even still now I think all of us could go straight back to the river and just go right back into our old routine.”

**Returning to reality.** The majority of participants recalled a significant challenge in their readjustment home associated with returning to their everyday schedule, responsibilities and required workload. This resulted in several participants experiencing feelings of being forced and rushed into their readjustment. Four participants reported having to resume school less than five days following their return home, the remaining two participants reported having to return to an internship and leave for summer contract job within two weeks of their return. Mick and Robert both described “not having time” when asked about their readjustment home. Mick even attributed his quick return to his university classes as negatively impacting his readjustment by sharing, “I didn’t have time in a sense to readjust in a very productive or slow way, it was more of a forced re-entry into that community to learn as much as I could for the following year.

Three participants made specific mention of experiencing challenges upon their return readjusting to the routine or schedule of home life. William felt as if his “whole ideology” had to change to settle back into the schedule required of his day-to-day life. Isaac indicated the he felt “disconnected” from his home life upon his return, and struggled with the desire to return to his university studies. He also indicated that his wilderness expedition had influenced the direction of his life and now led him to questioning his career path. He discussed these difficulties returning back to his home life, stating,
I am studying how to double up new manufacturing methods for airplanes out of
carbon fiber, which I love, but it’s not related to this other passion and other part
of my life that I want to be outside and I don’t want to live in big cities or in
suburbs, and it has been hard for me going to school.

Three participants indicated that they struggled with the “busyness” and
“stressfulness” of their home environment, which they immediately noticed upon their
return. When sharing about their return to everyday life, these participants quickly
compared their home environments to aspects of the wilderness such as the
“peacefulness” and “carefreeness,” which they felt contrasted what they were
experiencing at home.

Isaac felt strongly that as he readjusted to the routine of everyday life, the
significant feelings and goals he returned with from his wilderness expedition faded.
When recalling his return home he described the fading feelings he had about his
attachment to the wilderness and his desire to return, he stated “at some point you start
just forgetting and forgetting that feeling and forgetting the importance of that feeling.”
Another participant also expressed that upon his return it was necessary for the “sense of
self” which he had developed on the wilderness trip to be “shoved in a corner” in order to
focus and succeed in his university courses.

Each participant made mention of at least one of these challenges or difficulties
readjusting home through their answers to several open-ended questions. However, when
the participants were asked directly about experiencing barriers to their adjustment home,
four participants suggested that there were no barriers or hindrance to their readjustment.
Two participants expressed that being surrounded by or being able to remain in contact
with their expedition group during their return helped with their adjustment home. However, William shared that talking about his expedition and remaining in contact with his expedition group slowed his readjustment home. He shared “I was still keeping in touch with and talking with those people a fair bit so we were always talking about it thinking about it. As he remained connected to his experiences for a month and a half following his re-entry, he shared that he felt as if he was unable to “completely finish his re-entry.”

**Themes within Post-Expedition Life**

When asked about their post-expedition life, all participants indicated different levels of impacts from their participation in the extended wilderness expedition. Two participants shared that their participation in the wilderness trip has since influenced their choice of career path. William has now enrolled in an outdoor recreation focused university degree and another participant has begun to consider professional guiding as a future career. Three themes emerged within the category of post-expedition life: *impacts from trip, group death, and new outdoor or expedition style experiences.* These themes and their subthemes will be expanded upon further.

**Impacts from trip.** Within this theme, the main impacts that participant indicated from their wilderness expedition emerged as four subthemes: *personal growth through self-discovery, increased confidence, new perspectives,* and *home community reactions to personal growth.* These impacts were reported as being primarily internal or personal changes that the participants felt had been a result of their participation in their wilderness expedition. While the specific degree of impact that the six participates
reported the wilderness expedition having on their life varied, it was common for their experiences to be referred to as being life changing or impactful.

**Personal growth through self-discovery.** The most common post-expedition impact reported by all six participants was personal growth through self-discovery. Participants expressed that the experiences, which took place in the wilderness, allowed them to explore their own ideas of self and experiment with new identities. Isaac shared that in his post expedition life “I felt different the experience has definitely changed my set of values it has changed a bit in how I see life, how I see my future, how I see society.”

Four participants made mention that they were able to work better with others once they returned home. When discussing his personal growth from the expedition William shared “I think I grew as a person for sure I had all those opportunities to really figure out who I was and figure out who these people were around me and how I fit in and then apply that back on a larger scale with more people back home and then see how I fit in with these type of people.” Robert expressed that he felt he had become more self-aware following his expedition, as he was able to become more aware of how other people reacted to his actions and thoughts. Two participants stated that their expedition gave them the opportunities to “figure out who I am” and “realize the person I want to be.” Isaac reported still feeling deeply connected to his wilderness expedition as he felt he was a “different person” while being out on trip. When discussing the importance of the trip experience he later stated that “it’s not just trip, at some point it becomes who you are.”

All three of these participants felt as if their participation in a wilderness expedition and the experiences that took place there were able to help them create or define a new sense of self.
**New perspectives.** Five participants also shared that they felt they had been able to find and bring home with them new perspectives from their wilderness trip. Several participants noticed a difference in priorities upon returning home. For example, Shannon felt a dissonance between her new perspectives and those of her home community. She stated, “it was almost frustrating coming back to society because sometimes it just feels like either me or other people are focusing on the wrong things.” She later shared that she felt there was simplicity to life on trip and that being on trip allows you to be able to “see what is important and put that into perspective back home.”

William also noticed a significant difference when comparing the priorities and perspectives of his wilderness community to those of his home community, feeling that on the wilderness trip, as a community you must be much more reliant on each other to survive and thrive as a group in that environment. When discussing this William stated “It was really big to see the difference in priorities. Back here it's ‘when is the next islanders game, what was the score and what did you get on your exam?’ Out there it is a lot more community based because it has to be. You have to depend on each other on a much larger scale.” It was shared by two participants that their new perspectives were a result of having to cope with the ever-changing conditions on a wilderness expedition, which allowed them to develop a broader perspective that would not be possible at home. When asked to expand on this Natalie shared, “I don’t think we ever put ourselves in uncomfortable enough situations to really learn about ourselves. I don’t think we can ever make ourselves uncomfortable enough at home to make yourself learn like we did on trip.” Isaac felt the strongest impacts of all the participants. His participation in the trip led him to question his future career path and his current way of life. He expressed this
when sharing about how different he felt returning home. He stated, “I felt different, it has definitely changed my set of values, it has changed a bit in how I see life, how I see my future, how I see society.”

**Increased confidence.** Three participants indicated that their participation in their wilderness trip increased their level of confidence both in their everyday life and their presence in the outdoor recreation industry. Two participants shared that they felt much more comfortable and confident being in the outdoors. One of these participants felt much more confident about her place among her peers in the outdoor industry following her expedition. All of the participants’ expeditions had some focus on increasing participant’s outdoor guiding skills, and three participants noted feeling stronger about their skills post expedition. Robert shared that his participation in his expedition allowed him to try new things and apply himself to opportunities he would not have attempted prior to his expedition. He later shared that he was able to advance in his work place to a higher position, which he attributed was a result of his increased confidence gained from his expedition. William also indicated that since he returned from his expedition he has put himself into opportunities where he has been able to meet new people and experience different things. Within a month of returning from his expedition, William applied and was accepted to an exchange program, where he felt his participation in his wilderness trip assisted greatly in his acceptance into the program.

**Home community reactions to growth.** While all of the participants indicated that some form of personal growth took place from their wilderness expedition, not all participants noted that their home communities noticed this growth or development of skills. Three participants indicated that their parents or families who they held close
relationships with noticed some change within them and that they displayed that they were “proud” of what they had accomplished. However, these participants indicated that their friends may have not noticed or accepted the changes or growth they had experienced. The majority of participants indicated that their home communities primary reactions were that they were “happy” or “excited” for the participant in their accomplishment of the wilderness expedition.

Natalie and Robert both shared that they experienced some resistance from their social community when they displayed their newly formed perspectives or skills. Robert expressed that his friends were not willing to accept the knowledge and experience that he had gained while on trip, and Natalie reported that she had “parted ways” with the friends that were unable to accept her new opinions and perspectives following her return. William expressed that he was more willing to share and display his personal growth with new friends or people he had never met, he shared,

…with the people that I knew already, I continued to be that person with them but with new people I meet I can be just a totally new person to them that is post wilderness trip. They didn't know me before hand and they didn't have the comparison to see the change but they only saw the changed person as opposed to just looking back at what I was before the trip and they wouldn't compare so much so it wasn't tough to get used to and then these new people that's all I was, was this post wilderness trip person, they had nothing to look back onto, so they might not notice the difference but I think they sort of get the most different me out of it, because all I am to them is this post wilderness person.
Shannon and Mick both shared that they felt that no one from their home community noticed a significant personal change or growth within them once they returned from the wilderness.

**Post-expedition community connections.** The six participants were asked about their current contact and relationships with their expedition groups throughout their post-trip life. All six participants indicated that they were still in contact with some of the other individuals from their expedition. Three of the participants were taking part in their wilderness expedition as part of their university program and therefore continued to be in contact with those who were on their expedition, throughout their school program. Since their return, two of these individuals remained in their program with some contact with those in their expedition group, while one participant completed his program and has since moved away from Australia to Canada, where his contact with his co-participants has greatly diminished. Shannon indicated that it was comforting to have those who she participated in the expedition with around her once she returned from the field. However, in the two months since their return, the majority of the participants had “dispersed” for the summer for work and their contact was limited until their return to university in the following academic year. William and Natalie both indicated that they remain in contact with other members from their expeditions however their relationship and frequency of contact has greatly reduced in the time since their return. William and Natalie both reported that there are group members they have had no contact with in their post-expedition lives. Isaac also shared that following some time spent together in Mendoza after their expedition, his contact with his trip participants has become limited to
infrequent social media contact with some, and no contact at all with others. However, one member of his group has planned to travel for a personal visit shortly.

**Group death.** Many of the participants brought up the idea of *group death* when discussing their now current relationships and contact with those who were a part of their expedition groups. Following the re-entry and readjustment from their expeditions the participants all shared that their relationships and contact with their fellow trip members had diminished to limited or no contact. As contact with their groups diminished or stopped, their feelings toward their groups evolved to a post expedition state. Isaac described his group as having expectations and plans to visit one another and climb together while in the field. However, once he returned home, he indicated that these plans never came to fruition as “life takes over.” Isaac also shared that his relationship and contact with his group members now only exists through infrequent contact through social media. When describing this experience Isaac shared, “you get so close to someone you share with all those people and then you are like ‘oh well bye bye’. When we left each other we were like you’re going to come to Quebec and you’re going to come to the states and we are going to see each other!” and then life takes over.”

Robert shared that his group had expectations, which never were fulfilled, as upon re-entry his group dispersed with plans to reunite in the coming academic year. When talking about what happened to his trip group at the end of the expedition he stated “we were all from different parts of the globe, we had people from Ecuador, we had a guy from Greece, we had guys from Alberta, guys from B.C, Ontario everyone just split and it was like ‘Hey see you next year’, and half the people didn't come back and half the people did.” Since several of the members of the expedition group never returned to the
academic program or the surrounding community following the summer months. Robert indicated that he was saddened by the failed expectations to reconnect with the group and particular members with whom he felt a strong connection with on trip. Both Robert and Mick were able to remain in close frequent contact with one of the instructors from their expedition, but not the remainder of their expedition group. William expressed that he felt his group had “grown apart for a reason” as they all had “gone their own paths” following the expedition. Although William had felt a strong sense of community with his trip group when discussing his feelings toward his post-expedition relationship with these participants he stated, “we didn’t get along well enough together to spend that time together where we are close friends and we hang out all the time. We became further apart but to a point where I am comfortable with and I am not too sad about it happening.”

New outdoor or expedition style experiences. Three participants shared that shortly after their return from their wilderness trip they were quickly seeking out new experiences similar to those of their extended expedition. William shared that in less than a month after his return, he had applied and been accepted to a yearlong exchange to Thailand. William expressed that having this new experience in which to look forward to, it was able to help him “shift his mindset” from his wilderness expedition to his Thailand trip, which assisted him with his readjustment, as he was no longer focusing on the past trip. When talking about his Thailand trip and his readjustment from his expedition William stated “within a month of coming back I found out about this trip to Thailand and then I was accepted to go there so I had to push through these nine months and then I
would be off again. Not quite the same sort of trip, but I would be off in a different place and I would be moving around and it would be a new life again.”

Mick reported quickly transitioning into another expedition through his university following his return. Within seven days of his return from his extended expedition he was returning to the field for a new component of his program. Mick also felt that focusing on this new expedition was able to help him through his re-entry process, as he was excited to be out on a new trip with a new group. Similarly to Mick and William, Isaac quickly began planning a new expedition following his return, which he felt aided in his adjustment to his home community as he had a new experience to focus on and something to get him past his desire to be back in the alpine environment.

Isaac and William also indicated that following their return they began to associate with a different “type” of people or community. Isaac shared that he began to seek out a community that had similar interests and participated in activities that aligned with his newfound passions so he was able to experience these activities in his home environment. William stated “I think the places, the situations that I have put myself in after this expedition have led me to meet different people. The person that I have become now has put me in situations where I have had the opportunity to meet different types of people.” For these participants, planning and embarking on new expeditions quickly after their return aided in their adjustment home, as they were able to shift focus from the past wilderness expedition experiences to the new experiences they had planned for the future.

The twelve main themes and seventeen subthemes that emerged from the participants’ interviews are reviewed and presented in a timeline (see Figure 3). This timeline displays where the themes emerged as participants moved through their
wilderness expedition toward re-entering their home community and through their readjustment to post-trip life. The category of themes have been organized based upon the stages of initial experience, re-entry and readjustment the participants recalled in their experiences with regards to their re-entry from the wilderness. The span of this timeline varied for each participant. While several participants expressed that they felt they had completed their re-adjustment within the first four days back in their home setting other participants indicated that this process took up to six weeks following their initial re-entry.
Figure 3

Timeline of Participants Themes

- Intense residential experience
- Unique shared experience
- Experienced sense of community on trip

Re-entry

- Feeling that re-entry is different for everyone
- Not wanting to leave the field
- Overwhelmed
- Excited
- Difficulties sharing and communicating the experience
- Disinterest from home community
- Absence of belonging at home
- Lasting attachment to the wilderness

Readjustment

- Returning to reality/ Forced readjustment

Post-trip Life

- Personal growth through self discovery
- New perspectives
- Increased confidence
- Home communities' reaction to growth
- Group death
- New outdoor expedition style experiences
The next chapter will discuss the significant findings from the participants’ results in relation to current literature regarding sense of community, extended wilderness expeditions, and re-entry. This chapter will also include recommendations toward field practices in extended wilderness expeditions as well as recommendations for further research.
Chapter Five: Discussion

The following chapter will present the major findings from this study exploring how participants’ experience of re-entry from extended wilderness expeditions impacts sense of community. The results from this study add to the larger body of research on sense of community and wilderness expedition experiences by providing a deeper insight into the process and experiences that participants may go through during their return home from an expedition. Although research has found that a positive sense of community is commonly developed throughout wilderness expeditions and that this is a positive experience for trip participants, the results from this research suggest that these positive experiences and sense of community are not easily transferred out of the wilderness context and back into participants home lives (Breunig et al., 2010; Fabrizio & Neill, 2005; O’Connell & Breunig, 2005). This was evident in the difficulties and barriers many participants recalled in their attempts to share or integrate aspects of their trip community into their home setting. The difficulties faced by participants returning home from an expedition that may negatively impact sense of community at home could possibly be mitigated by better preparing individuals for the possibility of difficulties returning to their previously familiar community. The presence of unexpected difficulties and barriers communicating the experience was found to be some of the most significant impacts to participants’ sense of community upon their return. The sense of community developed on expeditions may also become short lived as participants quickly experience group death following their departure from the wilderness environment and readjustment home as their wilderness community begins to lose its context and importance.
While past research has focused upon the sense of community developed throughout the participation in a wilderness trip and the experiences on wilderness expeditions, this research has continued the investigation to include how the experience of community continues after the expedition ends (Breunig et al., 2010; Fabrizio & Neill, 2005; O’Connell & Breunig, 2005). The results from this study indicated that the re-entry process from extended wilderness expeditions closely resemble the experience of reverse culture shock (Adler 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004). Where the unexpected presence of negative feelings contrasts what many participants expected to feel upon returning to a familiar location such as home. The major difficulties of the re-entry and readjustment experience found in the results include, an inability to share or communicate the significant experience with the home community, a lasting attachment or desire to return to the wilderness, a shift in priorities and perspectives from personal growth, and challenges associated with the death of the expedition community, including the unrealistic expectations of a continued relationships.

All of the participants indicated that there was no formal briefing facilitated around their return to their home communities, this lack of attention to the participant re-entry paired with the unexpected difficulties returning home from the wilderness created barriers for participants to achieve transfer with the skills, knowledge, experience and personal growth gained from their experiences away. These results have led to suggestions for more focused field practices and intentional briefing focused upon re-entry difficulties, how to communicate and share the wilderness experiences at home, and the future relationships of the wilderness community beyond the expedition, these results will be expanded upon later in this chapter.
The discussion from this study will be presented using the theory of psychological sense of community originally developed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) as well as concepts from the updated sense of community theory from by McMillan (1996) as the theoretical framework. Sense of community is defined as “a feeling that members have of 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” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). The original sense of community framework includes four subcomponents, which are: (1) membership, (2) shared emotional connection, (3) influence, and (4) integration and fulfillment of needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This theory was later updated by altering the subcomponent of membership to spirit, and shared emotional connection to art, as well as increasing the importance of the community components of trust, trade, emotional safety and sense of belonging (McMillan, 1996). While this theory update did not significantly change the core concepts of sense of community it did shift the focus of sense of community theory toward the component of community spirit as the possible determining factor in the successful creation and experience of a strong sense of community (McMillan, 1996).

These subcomponents of sense of community will be used as the framework to present and discuss the results from this research and answer the primary research question: How does the experience of re-entry from extended wilderness trips impact participants’ psychological sense of community? The chapter will also answer the following sub-questions:

1. What factors do participants recall as significant to their sense of community during the expedition?
2. What factors do participants identify as being significant in their experience of re-entry?

3. What factors do participants identify as significant in their report about psychological sense community during re-entry and post-expedition life?

This chapter has been organized into four main sections, and will first begin by discussing the experiences associated with a sense of community while on a wilderness expedition. The second section will be focused on participants’ re-entry into the home community, and what impacts are experienced with regards to sense of community. The third section will discuss participants’ post expedition life and the fourth and final section will describe the limitations as well as the implications of the findings from this research, including practical recommendations applicable to the field of extended wilderness expeditions and recommendations for areas of further research.

Community Spirit in the Wilderness

The participants explored in this study all expressed experiencing a strong sense of community among their wilderness trip companions and indicated that this experience of group connectedness was one of the most meaningful characteristics of the expedition experience. It emerged that the sense of community experienced throughout the participants’ wilderness expeditions was focused primarily on the shared emotional connection and strong community spirit members held toward the wilderness community. It is common for the opportunities to develop these meaningful experiences to be intentionally structured and encouraged on expedition through facilitation and purposeful programming that is intended to promote group development and positive experiences.
The significant meaningful connections developed between community members on a wilderness expedition can be understood as the spirit of sense of community, which was added to the original sense of community theory as one of the most defining aspects (McMillan, 1996). This concept of spirit within sense of community places more importance upon the initial experience of friendship between members of a community in their first interactions, and can be the determining factor within a group as to the successfulness of the creation of a strong sense of community. Spirit within a community allows individuals to build connections to other people and create an audience where they are able to openly be themselves and express unique characteristics of their personality, as well as be able to recognize this open and honest expression in the other members of the community (McMillan, 1996).

This initial spark or spirit among a group of individuals is one of the most important parts of a wilderness trip and is often heavily encouraged and facilitated by instructors through the use of purposeful programming such as, icebreakers activities, group initiatives and games in order improve and build group dynamics. With the assistance of professionally trained guides and purposeful programming a group of strangers engaging in a wilderness expedition are able to quickly form relationships and develop a community spirit much more proficiently than through the natural processes present in the home community setting. In addition to the facilitated encouragement of this spirit of community, it is common for basic group norms and participant roles to be outlined by the expedition instructors or program goals at the start of an expedition. This is done to help organize community development in the early stages of the expedition.
The presence of an authority figure in a community who can assist with the processing of group information and maintain order is crucial to the development of sense of community (McMillan, 1996). On wilderness expeditions the development of a strong sense of community initially promoted by the structure and direction provided by the expedition instructors, is later fulfilled by participants through peer leadership once participants have successfully adjusted to the wilderness environment and gained group autonomy. The early establishment of a community structure with norms and order creates opportunities and ideal situations for participants to form common understandings and expectation of the behaviours of others, which is necessary for the development of trust and emotional safety in a group within a community (McMillian, 1996).

According to the participants’ reports of the close physical and social space present throughout the wilderness expeditions, the participants’ expeditions may be described as what Fabrizio & Neill (2005) described as “intense residential experiences.” The close physical contact and level of high-quality interaction promoted through the inherent residential experience of wilderness expedition, provides ideal opportunities for participants to develop a strongly shared emotional connection within the community. This is why the unique physical and social conditions present on wilderness expeditions are utilized as a location for teaching group development and leadership by programs. The shared emotional connection developed between expedition members is increased through the isolation of the expedition group from other communities and external cultural influences (Cashel, Lane, & Montgomery, 1996; Fabrizio & Neill, 2005). Once a newly formed expedition group enters a wilderness setting, it is common for the group to remain isolated, or with little outside contact for the entirety of the trip length. For some
of the extended expeditions explored in this research, this isolation may have lasted up to 55 days. Participants shared that they felt that they “lived the same life” as one another for the duration of the trip. Therefore during social situations throughout the expedition the participants were able to focus upon creating deeper connections and more meaningful relationships between one another. When describing the relationships they formed with other expedition members, several participants used relationships from their home communities as comparisons, and often portrayed their relationships with their fellow trip participants to be stronger or more deeply connected to those in the home community. It is common for individuals who partake in cross-cultural travel to conceptualize their experiences gained while away by comparing them to aspects of their home community (Allison, 2005; Thompson and Christofi, 2006). The use of this dichotomy or cultural comparison between the home and wilderness community to conceptualize and evaluate sense of community on a wilderness trip may not be accurate as it can cause participants to compare the components associated with their sense of community that has been created and experienced in very different and sometimes contrasting contexts and settings.

The unique physical setting of a wilderness expedition purposely removes individuals from distracting and ambiguous elements of a community and places participants into an environment where they are in constant remote physical contact with the other members of the expedition. The social settings present throughout a wilderness trip provide opportunities for participants to form relationships quickly as this process is typically accelerated due to the focus on group task or common group goals. In addition, individuals’ actions and interactions have quick and present transparent consequences
within the community and arising conflicts are often debriefed or managed by the presence of an instructor (Cashel, Lane, & Montgomery, 1996). The experience of community formed on wilderness expeditions is highly structured and by no means an accidental process. Through purposeful programming, such as icebreaker activities, group debriefing and instruction, team building initiatives, lessons in ecological literacy specific to the wilderness being travelled, the presence and influence of expedition instructors and the utilization of the wilderness environment individuals who enter a wilderness setting together to take part in an expedition experience quickly form a community that is able to function strongly and efficiently within the wilderness. While this structure and involvement of instructors may be clear to participants at the beginning of an extended expedition, it is common practice for expedition guides to become less involved in group process and management once the participants have successfully adapted to the wilderness environment (Sibthorp, Paisley, & Hill, 2003). While this practice helps the members of an expedition feel ownership and responsibility for the development of a sense of community on a wilderness trip, the establishment of this community can be heavily attributed to the initial roles of the wilderness guides, deliberate programming and the unique combination of social and physical characteristics present throughout a wilderness expedition. Once participants leave the care and presence of the expedition instructors and embark on their re-entry process home, they no longer have to support, guidance, purposeful programming or share community understanding to help them through their readjustment and re-entry home. While a wilderness guide cannot be expected to return home with a participant, the use of programming and briefing in the field that is focused upon re-entry, along with a developed support system may be able to
provide participants the tools necessary to more successfully re-enter their home communities.

**Shared emotional connection through quality experiences.** In sense of community theory, it is believed that a shared emotional connection is developed through two formulas and is based upon both a group’s shared history and their ability to identify with that history (See Table 3). These formulas give structure to the creation of a shared emotional connection between expedition participants through intense residential experiences and high quality interactions (McMillan, 1996; McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Table 3

Formation of Shared Emotion Connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formula 1.</th>
<th>Shared emotional connection = contact + high-quality interaction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formula 2.</td>
<td>High quality interaction = (events with successful closure – ambiguity) x (event valiance x sharedness of event) + amount of honour given to members – amount of humiliation</td>
</tr>
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A community’s shared emotional connection cannot alone be created through contact but the interactions of individuals must be of a particular quality. It is common for participants to achieve meaningful and positive experiences as part of a community on a wilderness expedition. The achievement of meaningful experiences and a high quality of interactions on a wilderness trips can be attributed to the authenticity of these group experiences as the wilderness and expedition setting is ideal for the achievement of authenticity. Authenticity can be understood in two aspects, first as an individual’s relationship to other people, and secondly as an individuals relationship to the environment (Allison, 2005; Taylor, 1991). The shared emotional connection and group
history of participants on a wilderness expedition is a premiere context for individuals to achieve a positive balance between their relationship with the other expedition members and the wilderness environment. Through authentic experiences individuals are able to freely explore concepts of their identity, relationships, perspectives and gain honest input from other community members to reach a level of quality interaction that is necessary to successfully build a shared emotional connection (Allison, 2005; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; McMillan 1996; Taylor 1991).

When recalling experiences from their wilderness expedition, most of the participants expressed idealized or romanticized views regarding the experiences gained with their wilderness community. This can be attributed to the formation and function of a wilderness community being focused upon the successful completion of the wilderness expedition. It is this community focus that becomes one of the primary goals of the expedition, and when achieved, becomes a centralized valent event shared by community members. The term, centralized valent event, otherwise known as shared dramatic moment is defined as an event that becomes a part of a community’s collective heritage, honours the community’s values, challenges the community to meet its highest ideals and becomes represented in the community’s symbols. In addition to being shared this type of event must also have a dramatic impact where something of significance is at risk for the community or its members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; McMillan, 1996). At the time of completion, and when individuals recall the expedition and sense of community, this dramatic shared event can be used as a positive focal point of the experience and may be responsible for increases in the recollection of a strong and positive sense of community. In sense of community theory the more important a shared event is to members of a
community the stronger the community bond, this concept is illustrated clearly by the strong bond created by individuals who experience a crisis together (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This concept is also supported by the updated sense of community theory with the idea that a community event becomes art when the community members share in the fate of the common experience in the same ways, this shared moment creates intimacy and conveys the sense of togetherness and camaraderie throughout a community (McMillan, 1996). These artful shared experiences become represented in the community stories and memories of the wilderness community. These stories and memories often hold significant meaning for participants as they represent the culmination and highest experienced levels of community from their expedition experience.

Although participants did recall some negative experiences while on trip, all of the participants’ expeditions can be viewed as successful in the completion of the intended expedition itinerary as all the expeditions reached the final location of travel and no participants were evacuated from the field. It was common for participants to focus on the successful aspects of the expedition in their recollections, while the presence of both environmental and social difficulties were minimized or totally eclipsed by the successful completion and accomplishment of the expedition. This existence of a positive dramatic and intensely shared event between group members is able to significantly aid in the recollection of a shared emotional connection and strong sense of community while participating in an extended expedition. Without field observations or interviews at the time of the expedition, it is impossible to know if participants’ recollections of sense of community were accurately correlated to the sense of community truly experienced throughout the expedition.
Wilderness needs and community trade. Within these isolated communities, individuals are very quickly required to rely on one another for social support and must work together as an effective community to overcome the physical challenges of traveling in a wilderness setting (Allison, Davis-Berman, & Berman, 2011; Fabrizio & Neill, 2005). When asked about the adjustment to the wilderness and group experience, participants indicated they initially felt forced or stuck together as a group, but that these feelings quickly evolved into positive group bonding and efficient group functioning. The almost immediate requirement of a group to function efficiently in the wilderness quickly becomes apparent to be able to achieve the basic human needs such as food, water and shelter. As individuals adapt to the physical and social demands of the natural environment, they then create and form a community rooted in the fulfillment of needs that are specific to the wilderness. Individuals’ needs are often commonly shared among wilderness community members as every participant is exposed to the same physical conditions present throughout the expedition. The highly demanding physical characteristics on expeditions often become some of the most frequently shared needs between participants as the physical demands of traveling in a wilderness environment can place a large amount of stress upon individuals. This focus on primitive needs for survival has been noted as being able to increase a groups positive relationships and sense of community by creating a feeling of a simplified life (Jason & Kobayashi, 1995; Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1995). This sharing of fundamental needs also increased the participants’ reinforcement and identification with each other, and creates a stronger shared emotional connection (Breunig et al., 2010; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; McMillan, 1996).
Once a community is able to form some structure an economy or trade is often developed where members can discover ways in which they are able to benefit each other and the community (McMillan, 1996). When taking part in a wilderness expedition participants must work co-operatively to be able to first fulfill the basic survival needs of the community and then work toward the fulfillment of the different personal needs of individual community members after the groups’ basic needs have been met. In a wilderness setting participants must rely on the other members of the community as a primary resource to meeting individual and group needs. It is this community process and continuous mutual trade that becomes central to a wilderness community’s economy and increases the experience of a strong sense of community as the fulfillment of both individual and group needs are reliant upon community interaction and community members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; McMillan, 1996).

**Membership and boundaries in wilderness community.** In addition to a shared emotional connection, participants reported a strong feeling of membership to their expedition communities. Membership can be understood as a feeling of belonging or a shared sense of personal relatedness and can be broken down into five attributes, including boundaries, emotional safety, a sense of belonging and identification, personal investment, and a common symbol system (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

The uniqueness of the shared experiences of a wilderness expedition not only helps define the formation of the wilderness community, but also creates boundaries between those who participated in the expedition and those who remain in the participants’ home outside of the wilderness community. A clear set of boundaries around those who belong and those who are outside of a community can increase the
feeling of spirit and membership with a community and helps members achieve the form of emotional safety that encourages self-disclosure and intimacy (Bishop, Chertok & Jason, 1997; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; McMillan, 1996; Obst & White, 2005).

Individuals on wilderness expeditions are able to explore their personal feelings and history to be able to gain a better understanding of their real self (Allison, 2005; Allison & Von Wald, 2010; Ewert & McAvo, 2000; Fabrizio & Neill, 2005; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983). Without the constant reinforcement of their previous community, individuals freely develop new identifications with the wilderness community absent from the influences of home. An individual’s ability to identify with a community plays a significant role in both the subcomponents of membership and shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The complete isolation of the wilderness community helps individuals to develop strong identifications with the created culture of an expedition community, as there is little to no outside or competing influences from home communities, or structured society (Westwood, Lawrence & Paul, 1986).

Personal investment is one of the five attributes to membership and is an important part of experiencing sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Through the initial personal investment required to spend an extended length of time in the wilderness and the continued investment working as part of an expedition community, participants are able to feel as if their membership in the wilderness community is earned and thus can be felt as more meaningful and valuable. Earning membership within a community often involves “paying dues” or sacrifice from individuals in order to cross the boundaries from an outsider to an accepted member of the community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986: McMillan, 1996). In expeditions the acceptance to a newly created
community can require individuals to sacrifice all external re-enforcements and support from their home communities and change their social identities to meet the membership requirements of a community centered on the unique physical and social conditions of the wilderness setting (Sussman, 2010; Szkudlarek, 2010). With membership to this new setting, individuals are able to develop their own understandings, boundaries, and identities within the group experience and expedition culture (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005). The boundaries that are established around the membership to a wilderness community may also require participants to temporarily sacrifice the connection to their home community by excluding subjects or communication that are outside of their new wilderness community as these stories, memories and communication from an individuals home community cannot be intimately shared by the members of a newly formed wilderness community (McMillian, 1996). These community boundaries define the logistical time and place for a community to exist and function. For the individuals on a wilderness expedition their experience of community is rooted to the wilderness environment and the contained to the length of the expedition.

It is believed that the search for similarities between individuals is an essential dynamic for community development. As bonding begins with the discovery of similarities if a community is created with people who have similar perspectives, feelings and ways of being, then the community will be a place where these members can safely and freely be themselves (McMillan, 1996). Participants in this study felt that the members of their wilderness community were a “similar type of people.” When asked about their motivation for participation in the expedition, all of the participants shared some personal or professional connection to outdoor recreation or outdoor wilderness
travel. For several individuals, the participation in the expedition was a requirement of a university or post-secondary program, and the remaining participants were motivated by personal interest or professional development in the outdoor field. The presence of similarities such as these is quite common between members of an expedition group and would increase feelings of membership though personal identification, personal investment, and a common symbol system associated with the outdoor industry.

Another important aspect of sense of community is the creation of a common symbol system to help define boundaries around membership. A common symbol system is able to help members more clearly and effectively understand one another and the community as a whole (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). As the wilderness expeditions that were explored in this study were focused upon developing skills and experiences related to outdoor recreation or education, the language, skill sets and daily routines to which participants were required to adjust and adapt throughout their expedition are what became the common symbol and value systems of these wilderness communities. In learning the expected routines, required skills and roles on an expedition individuals develop an understanding and mastery of community knowledge which translates into social, emotional and leadership potential within a community (McMillan, 1996). For participants to effectively experience a feeling of membership while on the expedition, it is important for them to display and reinforce community symbols through the use of particular language or behaviour which reflect the values of the community in order to achieve membership and feel a sense of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). As conditions surrounding participants’ home environments and communities are very different to those present on a wilderness expedition, participants must adjust to the
wilderness environment and form a wilderness centered community supported by a new common symbol and value system, which slowly takes the place of the symbol systems each participant brings into the wilderness from their home community. This may mean that individuals must temporarily reject or suppress the symbols and values of their home as well as relinquish their active membership to this community. This is done in order to develop the sense of community required for a functioning wilderness community.

Several of the participants reported that the experiences of isolation contributed greatly to their group’s formation and sense of community as without the competition or distraction of other communities, individuals were able to form a community based upon the physical and social needs present in the unique wilderness environment. The isolation from external sources and participants home communities lessens the possibility for conflict to arise between membership to a home community and the required membership and values of a new wilderness community.

The formation of a wilderness community throughout an extended expedition is often a powerful and significant experience for members, as the conditions and experiences associated with these communities are intense, especially when compared to the conditions surrounding the formation of the common home community. Sense of community on a wilderness expedition is primarily formed through the reliance of members on one another through a unique physical and social environment, a shared emotional connection through a high quantity and quality of community interactions and the focus upon the successful completion of the expedition route which later becomes a shared dramatic moment central to the community history. While the formation and memberships associated with the strong sense of community formed throughout
wilderness expeditions can be extremely valuable and rewarding to participants, the accelerated and intense formation of this community is often met with a rapid community departure and community death which can leave participants with feelings that negatively impact their sense of community.

**Re-entry and Re-adjustment**

Upon completion of a wilderness expedition, participants must prepare to return to their home communities. This preparation for transition begins while individuals are still present in the wilderness environment but nearing the end date of their expedition. Within the literature, it is believed that the experience of re-entry begins while an individual still remains away from their home location but begins to prepare and conceptualize the departure from their current environment (Adler, 1981; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Oberg, 1960). For all of the participants in this study, a location of transition was used as an intermediary between leaving the wilderness environment and re-entering the home community. While transition locations between the wilderness and home environment could be used as the primary place to prepare participants for a successful re-entry, no formal discussion or briefing activity was used to help ready participants for the transition between these contrasting environments.

Within re-entry and culture shock research, it is believed that individuals will face two stages of negative experiences within their transitions, the initial introduction to an unfamiliar environment and the re-introduction to the home environment (Adler, 1981; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Oberg, 1960). It has been recommended that individuals returning home from a significant time away be over prepared for the presence of
difficulties upon their return as the presence of unexpected difficulties can negatively impact participants re-entry and readjustment process (Rogers & Ward, 1993).

When asked about their mindsets toward leaving the field the participants shared feelings of sadness and a desire to remain in the wilderness. Upon returning home, participants reported feeling a sense of attachment and desire to return to the wilderness, stress on their personal relationships, as well as feelings of excitement, frustration, displacement and sadness which are all identified as being a part of reverse culture shock (Adler 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004). This presence of negative feelings contrasts what many participants expected to feel upon returning to a familiar location such as home, and creates a desire to return to the wilderness where individuals felt a more positive sense of community. The concept of home can be defined as familiar environment where an individual feels accepted and understood, a place where one feels they belong, and is predictable regarding their interaction with people and places (Mooradian, 2004; Storti, 2001). When participants return from a wilderness expeditions and are met with difficulties and emotions that do not reflect their previous positive feelings experienced in this place, it is possible for individual to feel a loss of home. While many participants felt initially exited to return to a familiar place, the unexpected presence of difficulties and negative feelings in a once comforting place has the ability to decrease the sense of community experienced at home.

**Lack of preparation for re-entry and group death.** While it is common practice for instructors to assist with participants’ adjustment to the wilderness environment, little is commonly done to assist with participants’ transition and re-entry home. Throughout the expeditions explored in this study, no formal briefing was reported
as being facilitated regarding re-entry, however participants recalled re-entry was mentioned casually to them on the expedition. An important element in the creation of a shared emotional connection is the presence of high quality interactions, which must include positive closure and a lack of ambiguity regarding the community interactions (See Table 3) (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, McMillan, 1996). Without the preparation and reflection that would take place on a briefing regarding re-entry, individuals may not be able to achieve proper closure regarding the end of their expedition experience and departure from the wilderness community. As participants may not be able to fully conceptualize the end of the wilderness expedition experience, which includes the re-entry process, then and participants’ may not be able to prepare themselves for the difficulties that can be associated with the loss or death of a community.

The concept of group death is mentioned within the National Outdoor Leadership School’s Leadership Educator Notebook (2004) as a topic for discussion within the final briefings of an expedition. In this briefing activity; the participants are encouraged to openly discuss the end of the expedition, the deconstruction of the expedition community, and the return to their post-expedition lives. The formation of realistic expectations and an understanding of how the relationships formed on the expedition will evolve following re-entry are emphasized as being an important factor for individuals’ to discuss in order to successfully achieve positive closure of the expedition experience. Without the presence of a formal re-entry briefing, this understanding and closure is something many participants commonly lack upon re-entry and leads to uncertainty regarding the future of their wilderness community and the relationships formed throughout the expedition.
The majority of the participants expressed that prior to leaving the field they had established plans to continue close relationships with their trip community members. However, upon returning and readjusting to their home communities, the relationships and interactions quickly changed to infrequent or non-existent contact. The unrealistic expectations for wilderness community members to continue relationships at the same degree of interactions and intimacy following the end of the expedition can leave individuals with feelings of disappointment and sadness, as not only are they unable to re-experience with what was once a strongly established wilderness community, but are unprepared in the conceptualization of the death of the wilderness community, and the subsequent change in relationships.

This idea of group death can also be conceptualized through Tuckman and Jensen’s (1977) model of group development, which presents a group’s lifespan through stages associated with the initial group formation, creation of group norms, the emergence of group conflict, group transformation, positive performance and group conclusion. These stages are commonly labeled as: forming, norming, storming, transforming, performing and adjourning. This model of group development is commonly used to understand the development of groups on wilderness expeditions and has similarities to the processes associated with the adjustment and adaptation to the experience of culture shock (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005). Reflection and debriefing is one of the key tools used on wilderness expedition to promote growth (Kolb, 1984; Leberman & Martin, 2004). While expedition participants transition through these stages together with the guidance of instructors they are able to reflect upon the development of the community and the progression though these stages. In the absence of a purposeful
briefing or reflection the concluding or adjourning stage of a wilderness community may not take place for individuals until they have already returned to their home environment where the do not have the support of other wilderness community members. This ambiguity of the lifespan of a wilderness community can leave individuals with unrealistic expectations of this community and uncertainty about their own involvement within this community. This uncertainty toward their social roles can lead to feelings of isolation, rejection, frustration and homesickness toward the wilderness community (Westwood, Lawrence & Paul, 1986).

Wilderness communities are formed due to the necessity for group functioning in the wilderness environment, while individuals may have positive experiences in this setting, a wilderness community is not intended to continue on in an equal capacity after the wilderness trip has ended which makes the sense of community experienced on expeditions difficult to transition into individuals post-expedition life. The boundaries that are created around the development of a wilderness community contain it to the setting and length of the expedition. Participants may be reluctant to accept the inevitable end of their community while on the expedition and this could be why a re-entry or group death briefing is often avoided in order to help shield participants from the possibility of negative feelings while concluding the expedition. Upon returning home individuals are faced with the barriers and challenges associated with attempting to keep this community alive and must experience group death and the adjourning stage without the support of others who can understand this experience.

**Expectations of returning home.** The expectations of re-entry have been regarded as a crucial factor in the adjustment of individuals who re-turn home from a
significant amount of time away (Adler, 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004; Rogers & Ward, 1993). Of the six participants interviewed, three participants reported that they expected the presence of difficulties upon their return home. These three participants went on to explain that they had previous personal experience with re-entry or had closely known someone who had previous experience with returning home from an extended time away. The three participants who did not expect difficulties retuning to a familiar place expressed that they initially felt overwhelmed upon returning home, while the participants who expected the presence of difficulties experienced excitement upon their re-entry. In addition to the absence of expectation toward re-entry difficulties from expedition participants, members of individual home community’s often do not expect participants to have readjustment issues when returning home. This can result is a lack of understanding and social support for the home community for participants who experience difficulties throughout their readjustment home (Thompson & Christofi, 2006). The majority of participants felt that there was nothing that the expedition instructors could have done to better prepare them for the re-entry process, despite all six participants experiencing difficulties throughout re-entry. This has been reported in other re-entry research as individuals have felt that they would simply “slip back into” their everyday life (Adler, 1981; Thompson & Christofi 2006; Westwood, Lawrence & Paul, 1986) This illustrates that the re-entry process is something that is not only overlooked by wilderness expedition instructor and programs, but is underestimated by participants as to the presence of difficulties and the possibilities of preparation.

Within re-entry research, it has been suggested that individuals are over prepared for the presence of difficulties upon re-entry, as there is a wide spectrum involved with
individuals’ expectations of experience with re-entry (Rogers and Ward, 1993). It has also been stated in research that the lack of debriefing and an inadequate amount of time together post-expedition are all factors that have been identified as detracting from an individual’s sense of community created on wilderness expeditions (Breunig et al., 2010). These issues surrounding re-entry experiences will be discussed further in the practical recommendation for the field of extended wilderness expeditions later in this chapter.

**Sense of place and attachment to the wilderness.** Many of the participants expressed a strong personal connection to the wilderness environment and shared that returning to an urban community presented challenges throughout re-entry. One of the largest reported challenges associated with re-entry was a desire to return to a wilderness setting. Participants shared that they missed the presence of physical and spiritual aspects of the wilderness, such as physical beauty, open space, peacefulness and the simplicity of life. These types of feelings have been previously reported as a common experience of participants returning from wilderness trips in other research (Allison, 2005; Turley & Goldenberg, 2013). Throughout wilderness expeditions participants are able to develop a strong attachment and value toward the wilderness space in which their community formed and functioned. Upon re-entry it is common for participants to feel the absence of the positive unique characteristics experienced in the wilderness environment and feel as if their home environment may not be able to deliver the intrinsic value the wilderness setting provided. It is believed that nature, culture and social relations are all aspects that are taken into consideration when developing a sense of place. With this in mind it is possible that some places are richer in these elements than others, and communities that
form and interact in these places are able to develop unique community attachments based upon the natural qualities present in the wilderness environment (Steadman, 2003).

Within sense of community, reinforcement is believed to be an essential component of an individual’s fulfillment of needs within a community. As the makeup of every community is complex, it is difficult to fully assess the presence of all reinforcements inside a community and provided by individual community members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; McMillan, 1996). However, a shared sense of value is believed to be one of the strongest reinforcements within a community’s ability to fulfill the needs of its members. When individuals who hold similar values form a community it is more common for their goals, needs and priorities to align and be more readily fulfilled by the community (McMillan & Chavis 1986). As previously mentioned, the participants in this study all shared some professional or personal relationship to outdoor recreation or wilderness travel. In addition to this common motivational factor participants expressed that they felt as if the other members of their expeditions were a “similar type” of people. These commonalities, were able to help the development of strong sense of community while in the wilderness, but upon re-entry participants were no longer able to experience the same level of connectedness through shared values and perspectives within their home community members. Within the experience of returning from the wilderness individuals must undergo an evolution of their relationships with the other expedition members and well as a change in their relationship with their environment in addition to the reconnection and reestablishment and of relationships with the members of their home communities. One of the most shared values expressed was an appreciation for the outdoors and an attachment to the wilderness. It is common for participants of extended
expeditions to hold a unique value for the wilderness environment, prior to their participation, which partially serves as motivation toward their participation and personal investment into this type of program. Following extended expeditions it is also typical for individuals to hold an attachment toward the wilderness environment as they have spent a significant amount of time and gained meaningful experienced within this setting. This form of attachment can be understood as sense of place, which refers to the complex relationship one forms with a particular environment (Hutson & Bailey, 2008; Steadman, 2003; Tuan, 1977). In other expedition re-entry research this concept has also been referred to as place attachment, which is defined as the link or connection people develop to specific environments, which provide emotional safety and create positive affective associations (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Turley & Goldenberg, 2013). When participants come together on a wilderness expedition, this value is shared and reinforced by the members of the expedition. However, upon re-entering the home community, individuals are no longer met with the reinforcements of a common value in the wilderness and the needs associated with this importance can no longer be fulfilled.

When recalling the experience of returning home it was common for participants to be focused upon the physical comforts of a familiar place, such as sleeping in a bed and eating prepared meals, however many participants did not expect to be unfulfilled by being back in urban environment as it was unable to satisfy their newly identified value for wilderness experiences. While individuals quickly adjust to the physical differences between the wilderness environment and their homes, the emotional adjustment required of returning home is much more difficult to complete. In returning to their home environment individuals must undergo both a physical and spiritual adjustment in relation
to their connection to other people and their environment (Allison, 2005). As sense of place is not linked solely to a physical setting, but is attributed the interpretations of a setting that are linked to an experience (Tuan, 1977). The participants’ sense of place which remains after their re-entry may be toward the general wilderness environment and not liked specifically to the wilderness setting of their expedition. The development of a shared place attachment among a community is something that is significant for an expedition community as the majority of their interactions and group development takes place within this setting. This level of environmental relationship and connectedness shared by an expedition community is not commonly present in individuals’ homes and a lower sense of community upon re-entry may be associated to this absence of a sense of place and environmental connection.

When participants return home they leave behind a community where they were able to experience a strong sense of identification with other members through shared personal values toward wilderness and outdoor travel and enter a community that may not be able to reinforce of even understand these values. The inabilities of the home environment and community to fulfill some of these more specific needs becomes apparent upon re-entry and can creates challenges for individuals to reintegrate themselves back into a home community, as they may no longer feel as if their home community will be able to meet their needs in the same capacity as before their expedition.

**Inabilities to share wilderness experience.** Although participants were able to experience a strongly shared emotional connection and membership to their wilderness communities, upon returning home many participants reported difficulties that were
detrimental to their experience of a sense of community. Some of the most significant difficulties that emerged within the results that were connected to sense of community were a difficulty sharing and communicating the expedition experience, disinterest from the home community and the absence of belonging at home.

While a shared emotional connection is partially based upon a shared group history, it is not required for all members to be present for this history to be, but they must identify with it in order to strengthen the sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Upon re-entry, one of the most significant difficulties reported by participants was a difficulty in sharing and communicating the expedition experience, which was met by a disinterest from the home community toward their expedition experiences. Initially, the majority of participants expressed that members of their home communities displayed excitement and interest in the sharing of stories photos and experiences from the expedition, but reported that this response quickly devolved to a feigned level of interest or complete disinterest. The stories and memories that individuals leave the wilderness with hold significant value for participants, as they become the symbolic representations of the accomplishments, dramatic shared moments and overall essence of their wilderness community (McMillian, 1996). When individuals are unable to share these stories they may feel as if their entire expedition experience is undervalued or not respected within their home community.

Several of the participants felt that they were unable to share aspects of the experience that they were really passionate about with their home communities because the members of their home communities were unable to understand the language or symbol systems used throughout the stories or memories. One participant experienced
difficulties in sharing a particular story from his climbing expedition and was asked by friends to stop, as they were unable to understand the specific climbing jargon he was using is his story. In this particular circumstance, the participant experienced a conflict between the common symbol systems that were a part of his wilderness community and his home community’s inability to understand this terminology and experience. Other participants reported similar experiences where their home communities quickly exhibited disinterest toward the sharing of stories and experiences from their wilderness expedition. Some of the participants felt that they were more successful in sharing their experiences through photos from their expeditions as their home communities were able to more easily appreciate and understand the experiences represented in a physical form.

Several participants shared that in order to cope with the disinterest from their home communities and avoid boring or upsetting this community, they would only share easily understandable highlights, or what they felt the home community members wanted to hear regarding their expedition. This left several of the participants with negative feelings associated with their home communities such as frustration or sadness. To cope with these negative feelings, several participants sought out new outdoor-focused communities in which they were able to share their expedition experiences. One participant expressed that although some individuals with whom he shared his climbing expedition were considered “paddlers” and not “climbers,” they were still able to identify and understand the significant stories he shared from his rock climbing expedition.

Following the return home, it was also common for expedition participants to seek out new or similar experiences to those of the extended wilderness expeditions. Some participants used this as a coping strategy to confront the difficulties present upon
re-entry, as they were able to focus and look forward to a new, upcoming expedition-style experience in the near future. Other participants sought out new communities that were focused more on outdoor culture, where they were able to more successfully share experiences and memories from their trip as members of these outdoor communities may not have shared in the participants’ expedition experience but were able to identify with the experiences and stories shared by the participants. Within these new outdoor communities, individuals were provided opportunities to take part and display the practical skills developed on their expedition such as rock climbing, or alpine travel, and achieve some level of transfer from the wilderness to parts of their post-expedition life.

The inability of the home community to understand and identify with the expedition experience created difficulties for many of the participants to be able to successfully transition from the wilderness community and re-entry the home community. Many of the participants gained an extremely significant experience and positive sense of community through the expedition, with high degrees of personal investment, shared values, and opportunities to fulfill individual needs associated with an appreciation for wilderness. The re-entry to a community with little to no understanding or association to these experiences impacted participants’ sense of community and created difficulties or barriers to fully completing re-entry.

Another significant difficulty shared by participants was the absence of belonging upon returning to their home communities. Belonging is one of the components that makes up membership – one of the four sub-components of sense of community outlined by McMillan and Chavis (1986). Several participants expressed feeling like an outsider or as if they did not belong among their friends following re-
entry. This can be attributed to the loss of membership with their home communities or the remaining conflicting presence of membership to the wilderness community, and the lack of reinforcement of the newly accepted common symbol system that were connected to the wilderness community (Church, 1982). In addition, while participants were absent from their home communities, the shared history, symbol systems and boundaries of these communities changed and evolved without the participants causing the groups boundaries to be altered. Several participants felt that they were able to develop new perspectives while on their expedition and that upon their return these new perspectives or ideas did not align with those of their home community. Both the membership in a new community and the absence from their home community created difficulties and opposing barriers for participants to successfully reintegrate themselves back into their home communities.

This experience is similar to what participants must undergo in the formation of a wilderness community where in order to gain membership individuals may be required to limit communications and subjects to only those which can be shared and understood by other community members (McMillian & Chavis, 1986; McMillian, 1996). In this process of readjusting and reintegration, individuals may be required to sacrifice their new membership to their wilderness communities in order to avoid conflicts between the misunderstood values and unshared history gained through the wilderness expedition experiences. The disinterest from the home community members and inability to share the experiences gained from their expedition was reported by participants as being one of the most difficult aspects of the re-entry process. Participants reported highly significant and meaningful experiences on their wilderness trips where they were able to achieve a
strong sense of community, but upon returning home were actively required to alter or cease in their attempts to communicate these experience or their newly formed cultural identities to their home community in order to reestablish membership at home (Sussman, 2000; Sussman 2002). While having to sacrifice membership to a wilderness community may be necessary for participants to be able to readapt to everyday life, it can be a difficult experience for individuals to undergo and may be one of the most difficult aspects associated with re-entry and sense of community.

**Returning to reality.** The length of time it took participants to feel fully adjusted to home ranged from one day to six weeks, while one participant shared that she did not know if she would ever feel fully adjusted to home. The adjustment period for individuals returning home seemed to be closely connected to the external pressures placed on the participants from the requirements of daily routines and the day-to-day responsibilities of what many participants referred to as “reality.” Many of the participants brought up the theme of being forced to “return to reality” upon readjusting to their home communities. Several participants felt forced in their readjustment period by the requirements of their school programs, jobs or home communities. For these participants, the imposition of responsibilities associated with their home communities required them to adjust and return to the roles and behaviours associated with being a functioning member of their community quickly. This imposition or forced experience of readjustment provides little to no time for a healthy readjustment. The majority of the participants returned to their normal routine of work or school within the first few days of returning home. Several participants felt as if they had to push aside or sacrifice some of their new perspectives and personal development gained from their wilderness experiences in order to
successfully readjust to what was required of them in their home community. This experience can be associated with group conformity and the need for consensual validation within a community. Group conformity has been defined as the alteration of personal behaviours, beliefs and actions to meet those that are accepted and shared among a group (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). As individuals progress past the initial stage of re-entry, the pressure to conform to the previously established group and societal norms places pressures on individuals to realign their perspectives and behaviours to those that were previously displayed as being a part of their home communities.

Within re-entry research, it has been stated that the larger the differences between the sojourning and home environment the more difficulties may be present for individuals upon their re-entry and readjustment (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005; Thompson & Christofi, 2006; Weaver, 1994; Westwood, Lawrence & Paul, 1986). While individuals were able to more easily readjust from the physical difference between the wilderness and home environment, the social differences between the two settings played a larger role in the presence of difficulties in the participants’ readjustment and re-entry. A focus on the transition between the obvious physical differences between these two contrasting environments acts as a distraction for individuals prior to, and throughout, re-entry and may be what leads participants to the unexpectedness of difficulties upon re-entry.

Many participants expressed forming new ideas and perspectives toward their life and society while on the extended expedition. Upon re-entry some individuals felt frustration toward their home communities, as their new perspectives did not align with the previously held perspectives or views of their home community. Here it is possible that participants experienced a diminished sense of influence through a lack of
consensual validation from the home community. This idea refers to the notion that individuals within a community possess as inherent need to know that the things they see, feel and understand are experienced in the same way by others (Byrne & Wond, 1962; McCrae, 1982; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In trying to quickly readjust home, it is possible that individuals may adopt an active coping attitude where they attempt to change themselves through conformity in order to fit back within the home environment and experience consensual validation (Adler, 1981).

**Lack of transfer and influence at home.** Far transfer occurs when an individual is able to transition the knowledge and skills obtained in one context and apply this learning to a subsequent context, which may not hold any similarities to the original place of learning (Royer, Mestre, & Dufresne, 2005; Simons, 1999). While an active coping attitude through conformity may be useful for individuals to more quickly readjust and re-enter the home community, it does not allow participants to achieve far transfer with the skills, knowledge and personal perspective gained from the extended expedition.

When asked specifically about the ability to transfer the skill and knowledge gained on the expeditions into their home community, many of the participants reported that there was a lack of opportunities to display or practice the technical wilderness skills gained on the expedition. A similar experience has been previously identified in business expatriates who reported gaining enhanced skills and knowledge from working abroad, however felt a lack of opportunity and recognition toward this learning once home. This experience was attributed to the different frames of reference between the environment in which the skills were learned and the environment the individuals returned to (Adler, 1981). While the traveling individual may be able to hold a value for this learning as they
have experience between both settings, the members of the home community may not be able to easily understand, value or provide the opportunities necessary for returning individuals to achieve transfer across the major differences between the wilderness and home environment.

Some participants from the wilderness expeditions made attempts to encourage members of the home communities to participate in similar outdoor recreation activities to those on their expedition, such as rock climbing or canoeing, but reported resistance or unsuccessful attempts to integrate these learned skills and activities into the home community. Other participants indicated seeking out new outdoor focused communities in order to find opportunities to utilize the experience gained from their expedition but still indicated an overall lack of transfer with regards to the skills gained in the wilderness. This lack of transfer and resistance of the home community to new outdoor recreation activities is a significant impact upon the experience of influence among the participants sense of community at home. Influence is defined as a bidirectional concept and is the notion that a member of a community has some influence over what the group does and that the group must also have influence on what the members do (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In this situation, the participants were unable to feel any successful influence upon their home communities following the return from the wilderness expedition.

The transfer of learning from the wilderness environment into participants’ home lives is one of the primary focuses of both outdoor professional and outdoor education and experience research. If participants are able to successfully achieve far transfer of the skills, knowledge and positive personal development gained throughout a wilderness
expedition than these individuals are able to utilize these leanings to gain positive outcomes in their post-expedition lives. Overall the participants of this study indicated that they felt there was little opportunity to display or use the skills learned on their expedition and were met with difficulties from their home communities when they attempted to influence their home communities activities in order to create opportunities to display and share these wilderness skills and knowledge. This lack of influence within the home community can create significant difficulties and barriers to the intended positive outcomes set forth by expedition program objectives and goals with relation to the participants’ post-expedition lives.

**Post-Expedition Life**

While leaving the expedition community and wilderness location, participants may often display a great deal of personal growth, skill development and sense of community, little is commonly done to follow up with participants once they depart from the end of an expedition to understand how this growth transitions with participants back home. Participants in this study indicated some significant personal impacts from the participation in the wilderness expedition, and of the most commonly reported lasting impacts were increased confidence, new perspectives and personal growth through self-discovery. These personal impacts from the participation in wilderness trips have been found to be common impacts in other research (Sibthorp, Furnam, Paisley, Gookin, Schumann, 2011). While the participants in this study shared that they felt they has made great personal gains throughout the expedition, when asked if these changes were noticed by members of their home communities, many participants felt as if their personal growth
went unnoticed. Some participants described feeling constrained in their ability to display this growth, as they reported feeling limited by the ways in which their home community knew and understood them prior to the wilderness expedition. One participant felt as if he was able to more easily display this personal growth with people he had met for the first time following the expedition as he was able to freely display his new perspectives and growth, while when interacting with the previous established members of his home community he was confined to his pre-trip roles and pre-trip identity.

While taking part in wilderness expeditions, participants are exposed to unique opportunities to explore their own personal concepts of identity and form new ideas regarding who they consider themselves to be (Allison & Von Wald, 2010). As previously mentioned, this is achieved through the experience of truly authentic experiences where individuals are able to freely explore concepts of their identity, relationships, perspectives in relation to their environment and other people (Allison, 2005; Taylor 1977). This is considered to be one of the most significant experiences that result from the participation on a wilderness expedition. Although participants are awarded the freedom to grow and explore new roles as part of a wilderness community in the return to post-expedition life, individuals often struggle to keep the parts of new identity alive as they feel constrained to the previous established roles and identity formed through their home community boundaries and shared group history (Mooradian, 2004). This connects to the concept of emotional safety within a community, which refers to a community’s ability to provide acceptance, empathy and support for members to speak their truth and be themselves. If a community is unable to provide this to its
members a sense of community cannot be created (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; McMillan, 1996).

If participants are unaware of the potential presence of difficulties surrounding the integration of this new knowledge and personal growth into their post-expedition lives, they may be unable to successfully achieve positive outcomes and the far transfer of skills and their new identity. As an individual identity and perspective may change and evolve throughout a wilderness trip when individual return from an expedition it may be important for a conscious decision to be made as to what aspects of their new identity they would like to integrate into their home community and which aspects they are willing to leave in the wilderness. This is something that could be easily discussed within a re-entry briefing prior to returning home and could help individual better transfer and display the positive growth gained from an expedition. If participants are not able to reflect upon their personal growth and remain unaware of the possibilities of difficulties integrating parts of the new identities and perspectives into post-expedition life they may end up developing an identity dichotomy between their ‘trip-self’ and ‘home-self’ and thus would not attempt to transition their positive growth from the wilderness to home. This idea has surfaced in research by Allison and Von Wald (2010), which examined the social and personal developments, which take place throughout wilderness expeditions. As expeditions provide opportunities for participants to restructure, explore and develop new identities in an environment which often contrasts an individual’s home community, this new identity which is formed and supported in the wilderness may not be able to transition back into the home environment and remains trapped for participants within a wilderness context (Allison & Von Wald, 2010).
The existence of unexpected barriers can lead to individuals abandoning the learning, growth and identities gained while on an expedition in order to more easily reintegrate themselves back into their home community. It is possible that this is a partial explanation as to why lasting outcomes from extended expeditions are often criticized as being short lived and nontransferable into participants everyday lives (Beams, 2004; Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Talbot & Kaplan, 1986).

**Post wilderness-community contact.** Despite the reports of a strongly formed sense of community among the expedition groups, the intentions to stay in contact and post-trip plans to visits one another, quickly dissolved and contact and relationships between trip members diminished to limited or no contact in the participants’ post-expedition lives. As an individual re-enters the home community and fully readjusts to being in this environment, the feelings and relationships formed throughout the expedition experience often evolve to a post-expedition state. Once immersed back into the home community, it is easier for participants to let go of the relationships formed within their wilderness experience as they are faced with the challenges of integrating these relationships into the home community.

With such major difference between the home community and wilderness community, as previously stated, it may become easier for individuals to cease all contact to other members of the wilderness community to be able to regain membership and re-enter the home community (McMillan, 1996). Individuals may also not feel the need to continue contact or relationships with those from the wilderness community as they were serving as surrogates for members of their home community throughout their time away and following re-entry no longer require these relationships to fulfill an emotional need.
There appeared to be a major dissonance between the significance of relationships recalled by participants regarding their wilderness community members and the feelings toward the devolution of these relationships in their post-expedition life. While the relationships formed throughout the expedition were often praised as being significant and strong and were readily compared as being more rewarding and connected than those relationships in participants’ home communities, it was not common for participants to continue contact or be distraught by the devolution of these relationships in the time following their complete re-adjustment to post-expedition life.

This disconnect in participants recollection could be attributed to participants’ ability to focus on the common successful dramatic event of completing their expedition when recalling the shared group history. As participants were exposed to what can be considered successful community development and experiences while in the wildernesses, when recalling the sense of community present throughout this time, their recollections reflected an overly positive experience, however, when asked about the existence and experiences associated with post-trip relationships among the wilderness community, the lack of community and lack of ongoing relationships were easily accepted, as this community and relationships could not exist in the same capacity outside of the settings and conditions present throughout a wilderness environment.

While individuals who participate in extended wilderness expeditions are able to achieve and experience a high degree of sense of community while in the wilderness environment, it is extremely difficult to transfer this experience of community into individuals’ post expedition lives and home communities. When faced with the challenges associated with maintaining contact and significant relationships with
expedition members following re-entry, it becomes common for individuals to abandon these relationships without proper closure or resolve. The experiences of community purposely built and structured throughout an extended wilderness expedition provide individuals with a very unique and intense exposure to community constructs and subcomponents such as spirit, sense of place, shared emotional connection and history, and identification and fulfillment of needs (Breunig et al., 2010; Ewert & McAvoy, 2000, Mitten, 1999). While these experiences of such a unique community are valuable and rewarding while in the wilderness, when participants are required to leave these wilderness communities and return home they are often faced with difficulties and challenges readjusting home which can have negative impacts to their sense of community. As individuals have achieved the experiences of a new sense of community they have gained the ability to compare the unique and significant sense of community experienced on an extended wilderness expedition to the sense of community felt in the home environment. It is believed that the absence of a strong sense of community is a common aspect in modern life (Bender 1982; Putnam, 2000; Sarason, 1974). It is the new perspectives and experiences gained from the participation in an extended wilderness expedition that has the ability to leave participants with a heightened awareness or sensitivity to the lack of community experienced in the home community, which can negatively impact sense of community upon re-entry and within their post-expedition lives.
Implications from Findings

The implications from the findings of this research are able to build a better understanding of the holistic experience of participating in extended wilderness expeditions, as this study has focused upon the commonly overlooked experience of re-entry. The findings from this research have been able to provide further suggestions for field practices in relation to the programming and instruction of extended wilderness expeditions. The findings from this research have also been able to provide direction for further research regarding sense of community, extended wilderness expedition experiences and re-entry. These findings may also be able to help wilderness expedition programmers understand the nature of experiences that take place for participants after they leave the supervision of the expedition program and return to everyday life. This knowledge can help programmers understand how to better prepare individuals to successfully achieve the intended positive outcomes associated with wilderness expedition participation, such as personal growth, self-discovery and the far transfer of knowledge and skill into individuals’ lives. Recommendations for both the field practices associated with extended wilderness programming and facilitation and directions for future research are presented in the following sections.

Recommendations for field practices

Through this research, it has become clear that more purposeful attention needs to be provided to the experience of re-entry that take place for participants once they complete an extended wilderness trip. Of the most important recommendations for field practices is the use of a purposeful briefing regarding re-entry from extended expeditions.
and the potential for difficulties upon individuals’ return home. This topic of discussion need to be integrated into expedition programming in order to adequately prepare individuals for the transition home from the wilderness. In order to effectively conclude a wilderness expedition and assist with the successful transfer of skills and a positive sense of community, it is important that closure is brought to the end of a wilderness experience and participants are provided opportunities to discuss the deconstruction of the wilderness community, the evolution of relationships and make realistic expectations regarding community contact. This is a discussion that would be focused upon the concept of group death and the subsequent change in relationships that is to come upon the conclusion of such a significant community experience. This group discussion needs to happen prior to participants returning home as following the end of a wilderness expedition the trip community begins to deconstruct itself as the community is moved out of the wilderness environment and back to an urban setting.

It is recommended that more time be spent at a transition location between the wilderness environment and the participants’ home communities where individuals are able to reflect up their experience and make realistic expectations with fellow group member regarding the continuation and evolution of their relationship (Breunig et. al, 2010; Rogers & Ward, 1993).

The use of a formal re-entry briefing is recommended as a strategy to be focus on outlining the possible presence of difficulties upon re-entry. These difficulties would primarily be communicating the wilderness experience, disinterest from home community members, a strong desire to return to the field, and the absence of belonging at home. From the reports of participants in this study these difficulties resulted in
emotional responses such as feelings of frustration, sadness and alienation that were similar to those of reverse culture shock (Adler 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004; Rogers & Ward, 1993). It has been recognized in previous cross-cultural and re-entry literature that the presence of unexpected difficulties returning to a familiar place may be more difficult for individuals than the initial travel to a foreign environment (Adler 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004). It would be helpful for a re-entry briefing to additionally focus upon strategies participants could use to better transfer the knowledge and skill from the wilderness community to the home community as well as be translate their wilderness experiences into terms that their home community members can easily understand and share. If this knowledge and skills could be passed on to participants before leavening the guidance of instructors and the wilderness community it is possible to promote and continue the positive transformation from the expedition into the participants home lives. The results indicated that it was common for participants not to think about their return to their home life or re-entry process prior to leaving the field, if participants are provided to opportunity to openly discuss this process and the possibilities of difficulties with the guidance of instructors who have a developed understanding of returning from and extended expedition than participants may be able to build support systems, identify ways to better communicate and share their experience at home, and make a plan for how to successful reintegrate themselves with the positive outcomes gained from their expedition back into the home community.

If participants are better armed with constructive coping methods and are able to positively manage the difficulties present upon re-entry, they may be able to more effectively transition home bringing with them the new skills, knowledge, positive
impacts and sense of community gained from the expedition participation. Although the experience of re-entry is complex as each individual is different and is returning to a unique home community, simply being aware of or prepared for the possibility of these common difficulties that may arise throughout re-entry could help with promoting successful re-entry, the retention of skills and knowledge, and a lasting sense of community. (Adler 1981; Gaw, 2000; Mooradian, 2004; Rogers & Ward, 1993). It is also recommended that prior to leading extended wilderness expeditions, guides and instructors undergo training, which outlines the possible difficulties participants may face in their re-entry and how to properly facilitate a structures re-entry debrief to prepare individuals for the transition back home.

If possible, it is recommended that members of a participant’s home community be integrated into a pre-expedition information session or a post-expedition debrief as this may greatly increase participants’ positive re-entry experiences and limit the negative impacts on sense of community associated with re-entry. The involvement of members of an individual’s home community would allow these individuals to gain important knowledge regarding the wilderness expedition and potentially meet members of the wilderness community. Through this interaction members of the home community could also be made aware of the difficulties that may be present upon re-entry in order to more adequately supply the social support and understanding that is needed for the healthy readjustment of participants (Thompson & Christofi, 2006). With more transferable knowledge and understanding between the two communities, participants would be able to more successfully share experiences and group history, and may feel that their experiences are valued and understood by their home community post expedition.
In addition, following up with participants throughout their post-expedition life may be able to help extended wilderness programs understand what positive impacts and transfer participants have been able to successfully achieve in their post-expedition lives. Following up with individuals after their participation may also allow participants to report any significant difficulties experienced with re-entry or post-expedition life and could allow programs to continually adapt expedition programming to better serve participants’ positive learning experiences. Past participants of expeditions could also be used as a resource to help first time members of a wilderness community understand the upcoming experiences of re-entry. The use of reunion events planned by the program provider would also be helpful for individuals to make realistic expectation regarding their post-expedition community contact and could help participants retain the positive relationships formed on the expedition. This type of structured continued community event would be an ideal time to follow up with participants about their expedition and re-entry experiences as they have had significant time to reflect up these experiences. This type of continued reconnection with a wilderness community may also help break the boundaries of being a wilderness community and allow the entire group or subset of members to transform their relationships into a community able to exists and function in new ways in their post-expedition lives.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research is required in this field to better understand the experience of re-entry from extended wilderness expeditions. Research can be expanded to explore re-entry experiences from shorter expeditions as well as expanding the population of
participants beyond the limitations of this research, which were participants between the ages of 18-35 years old. Quantitative or mixed method research would assist in collecting a wider sample of participants from a more diverse background and travel experiences. The use of quantitative or mixed method research could help identify what experiences or difficulties are most commonly shared throughout re-entry from a variety of extended travel experiences by reaching a larger sample size through the use of surveys or questionnaires. Research exploring the sense of community experienced by participants who return to the wilderness environment for additional expedition experiences would also be able to provide important information with regards to the experiences associated with returning to a wilderness environment and if individuals are able to recreate the same levels of sense of community as experienced on their first expedition. This direction of research would also be able to explore the repeat experience of re-entry to a home environment and be able to more clearly understand how the expectation and previous experience of re-entry difficulties can impact an individual’s return and readjustment and explore if the repeat experience of re-entry impacts sense of community in the same ways as the initial re-entry from the wilderness.

In addition to research regarding expedition participants, it would be beneficial to better understand the experience of constant re-entry and departure experienced by wilderness instructors who lead extended wilderness expeditions. Being able to explore and understand the impacts continued re-entry has upon an instructor’s sense of community may be able to identify methods to increase social support and positive work environments for the extended wilderness expedition industry.
Limitations of the Findings

While this study was able to build a better understanding of the essence of the experience of re-entry from extended wilderness expeditions, and how this experience impacts sense of community, the results and findings of this research are limited to the experiences recalled by the six participants used in this study. While the expedition and re-entry locations of these participants were varied, the particular sample of participants was not widely diverse. The six participants’ ages only span four years (19 to 22), and all of the participants were Canadian citizens. No other demographic information regarding the participants was collected. While the experiences of these participants may be shared or resemble the experiences had by others returning from an expedition, the focus of this research was to exclusively explore the re-entry experiences of the six participants of this study.

Additional limitations regarding the findings of this research are focused upon the data collection and data analysis of this research. All six participants were of a relatively young age and had experienced their expedition and re-entry within a span of the 2-23 months prior to the interview. The interviews were conducted through several different mediums; four interviews were conducted through Skype while the remaining two interviews were conducted over the phone and in person. While some limitations may have been created through the use of Skype and telephone interviews as there was no physical presence between the interviewer and participant, the use of semi-structured interviews and the development of personal rapport through the sharing of similar experiences between the researcher and participants was able to create an interview
environment where participants were comfortable and encouraged to freely express and share their recounted experiences.

The data used in this research was collected, transcribed and analyzed by a single researcher and the understandings and concepts developed throughout this study have been limited to those of a single researcher whose perspectives are based within personal wilderness trip involvement and experiences, although not of the extended length. This may have influenced the researcher’s ability to tease out themes that potentially could have emerged from the data. Efforts were made by the researcher to remain reflexive throughout the research and writing process through the use of a reflexive journal.

Conclusion

While there has been an ongoing focus for decades on the outcomes associated with the participation in outdoor recreation programs such as extended wilderness expeditions, there has been an overall lack of attention provided to the ways in which these participants re-enter home communities and the experiences that are present throughout this journey. Wilderness communities and the learning formed on a wilderness expedition are not easily transferred into participants’ post-expedition lives as the context, environment, symbols and culture are rooted in the particular and unique components of an outdoor expedition and wilderness environment. As wilderness communities form for the purpose of the successful completion of an expedition route and expedition goals, the continued existence of a community formed on a wilderness trip has generally not been a concern of wilderness programs and wilderness expedition instructors. The participation in an extended expedition is often an experience of great
significance for individuals, and being able to better understand the inherent experiences associated with leaving this experience behind and returning home can provide insight into how to better prepare individuals to more successfully transition home. With this increased understanding participants may be able to more successfully bring with them the positive experiences, knowledge and sense of community gained throughout their time in the wilderness.

This research project has been able to provide insight into sense of community and the experiences that participants may have following their return from a wilderness expedition. While additional research is required in this topic, the results from this study have pointed to a presence of difficulties and challenges that may be present upon participants’ re-entry. Through a larger variety of research such as a longitudinal study on post expedition experiences and sense of community it is possible to better understand the lasting outcomes with regards to the sense of community developed from wilderness expeditions and the experience of re-entry. The results from this study have provided a start to a better understanding of participants’ post-expedition experiences and have helped build suggestions for better field practices to strengthen the quality of experiences, positive outcomes and level of transfer for participants of extended expeditions.

Throughout the research process, when asking participants questions regarding the sense of community felt on the wilderness trip, it was clear that the experience of a strong sense of community between individuals on an expedition is one of the most significant aspects of these types of experiences. When participants recalled their experiences, they felt a strong attachment to the places associated with their expedition, and a significant longing to return to the experience. While it appeared easy for
individuals to hold a special place for this wilderness community and setting in their memory, there are many challenges in attempting to transfer that sense of community from the wilderness to individuals’ homes. The focus of a community formed for the successful functioning required of group wilderness travel, is able to develop a community that shares a sense of place or place attachment, which contributes to the experiences of a strong sense of community in the wilderness. Upon returning home, individuals can be met with a community that may be absent of a developed environmental relationship such as the deep connection and attachment that is experienced when living and traveling in a wilderness setting.

Overall, an increased attempt to prepare individuals for the challenges associated with returning home may be able to help better arm these individuals with positive coping methods to transition through the difficult stages of re-entry where they may feel a negative impact upon their sense of community. While a more modern understanding of sense of community involves being a member of more than one community, the conflict of membership that can arise from opposing communities can have negative impacts upon sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Storti, 2001). Some of the most significant difficulties associated with re-entry included challenges in communicating expedition experiences, which were met with disinterest from the home community that negatively impacted participants’ value of experience and shared emotional connection. A lack of membership or a feeling that individuals did not belong at home resulted from the absence of identification and similarities between home community members and lack of reinforcements associated with the experience gained in the wilderness. While the participants in this research project were able to achieve a strong sense of community
throughout a wilderness expedition, these experiences provided the participants with a new understanding and comparative experiences of community, which as a result, created difficulties and challenges when they were required to re-enter their home communities.

The interest in this research project topic has stemmed from personal experience of this unique type of sense of community that only seems to exist in the wilderness. While spending a great deal of time being a part of expedition communities, as both an instructor and participant, it is easy to become very aware of the significance of the communities that are formed in these wild locations. Although these groups of people often begin as strangers, they are able to achieve an incredibly strong sense of community in settings that have a great deal of social and physical power in the creation of meaningful experiences. While these communities form fast and strong, they are often short lived and end without proper or realistic closure. The abrupt death of such a significant community experience has the ability to leave its’ members with a great deal of unresolved feelings and impacts once the expedition ends.

This research project attempted to shed light on the essence of the experience participants must go through when they leave the wilderness and attempt to re-enter the home community from which they once departed. In summary, participants reported that although they were able to experience a strong sense of community while participating in a wilderness expedition, upon re-entry many participants were faced with difficulties transitioning and communicating that sense of community into their post expedition lives which lead to a lack of transfer, feelings of an absence of belonging at home and lasting attachment to the wilderness environment. While these findings are significant in building a better understanding of how to participants’ personal growth, expedition
experiences and personal relationships continue once they return from an extended expedition there is much to be explored within post-expedition experiences and re-entry with a larger and more diverse sample of participants and experiences from alternative forms of travel. Although some important findings were unearthed from this research toward wilderness expeditions, re-entry experiences and sense of community, it is important to continue investigating the post-expedition experiences of individuals in order to better understand how to more effectively promote and serve the lasting impacts that the participation in extended wilderness expeditions has upon individuals once they return from the wild.
References


Appendix A

Letter of Invitation

Title of Study: Returning home from the wild: Exploring participants’ experiences of re-entry following extended wilderness trips.

Principal Investigator: Lucas Cooper, M.A student, department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Timothy O’Connell, Associate Professor, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University.

The purpose of this research project is to explore how the experience of re-entry to the home environment from extended wilderness trips impacts participants’ psychological sense of community. Extended wilderness trips are commonly used as teaching experiences for participants to develop skills in leadership, communication and decision-making. These types of experiences often focus on the experiences of participants while involved in the program on the wilderness trip. This study intends to explore participants’ experiences post-trip and the lasting impacts the transition of experience may have had. This study seeks to better understand the meanings that participants have regarding their experience of re-entry following an extended time in a wilderness setting.

The expected duration of participation in this study is estimated to be 90 minutes of your time. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded. You have the choice of taking part in an in-person or phone interview and can decide the date and location of the interview based on your convenience.

This research should benefit participants in providing an opportunity to reflect on your experience on your wilderness trip as well as your return home. Additionally, this research will benefit the outdoor recreation field by contributing to current research and field practices. This study is being conducted as a Graduate Thesis at Brock University.

If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact the principle investigator Lucas Cooper at lc07qr@Brocku.ca or (289)-668-2702. Or the supervisor, Dr. Tim O’Connell at toconnell@brocku.ca or (905) 688 5550 ext. 5014. If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, reb@brocku.ca)

Thank you

Lucas Cooper
Appendix B

Recruitment Advertisement

Are you between the ages of 18-35 and have participated in an extended wilderness expedition over the past 2 years, spending 14-35+ days in the field?

If you meet this criteria you are invited to participate in the research study: Returning Home from the Wild: Exploring participants experiences of re-entry following extended wilderness expeditions.

The purpose of this study is to build a better understanding of participants’ experiences of re-entry following extended wilderness expeditions by exploring how the experience of re-entry may impact an individual’s psychological sense of community. Individuals willing to be a part of this study will be asked to participate in one 90-minute interview, exploring their experiences of re-entry following their wilderness trip.

With a better understanding of individual post-expedition experiences it may be possible to assist participants of extended wilderness expeditions with the process of re-entry in the hopes to increase repeated participation in wilderness expeditions and increase the retention and transfer of the skills, identities and values gained from the participation in an extended wilderness expedition.

If interested please contact Lucas Cooper at Lc07qr@brocku.ca
Appendix C

Question Guide

1. Tell me about your wilderness expedition?
   a. How many days was it in length?
   b. How many participants were on it?
   c. Where was it located?
   d. Tell me about your adjustment to the wilderness environment?

2. When you completed your wilderness expedition where did you go/return?
   a. How long ago was that?
   b. Can you describe this place to me?

3. What is sense of community to you?
   a. How do you know when you have a sense of community?

4. Describe step-by-step your experience of returning home from the wilderness trip starting with the last day in the field?
   a. What feelings do you associate with this time? How did these feelings change?
   b. How did you feel about returning home while you were still in the field?
   c. Did you experience any difficulties or barriers with your re-entry?
   d. Can you think of a specific story where you had to overcome difficulties returning home?
   e. Were these difficulties/barrier expected or unexpected?
   f. Were you able to overcome these difficulties/barriers? How?

5. When did you feel that you had fully adjusted back to your home, and what made you feel this way?
   a. What helped you with that adjustment?
   b. What hindered it?

6. Tell me about what it was like reengaging with a group of friends or family once your returned from your expeditions?
   a. Was it easier or harder than before?
   b. Did you feel that anything was different? What stayed the same?
   c. How long did it take to get back to the same level?

7. What was it like talking about your expedition experiences with others after your returned?
   a. How did explain your experience to other people?
   b. How did others react to your stories and memories from the trip?
8. What were some of the most important things you learned on your expedition? Have you been able to use these learning since your return?
   a. Can you think of a story where you used something you learned from the expedition, at home?
   b. Did you try to introduce or share anything you learned from your expedition to others? Why did you try to do this? Do you feel you were successful in doing this?
   c. How did others receive this?

9. Did you have any goals for yourself on the expedition? Did these goals continue once you returned home?
   a. Did you achieve these goals on the expedition?
   b. Did you have any goals that you set for yourself once you returned home? Why or why not?
   c. Did you achieve these goals at home?

10. Do you feel that anything changed within yourself while on your wilderness expedition? If so what?
    a. Did others notice this change in you once you returned home? What were their reactions to this?
    b. How has this change impacted your life at home?

11. Did spending this large of an amount of time away, cause you to miss anything that you feel was significant at home?
    a. How did this make you feel after your re-entry?

12. Tell me about how the expedition ended?
    a. What happened to the group?
    b. Have you kept in touch with the other group members or instructors?
    c. How do you feel your relationship with them has changed/evolved/ since the trip?
    d. Do you hope to continue contact with them? Why?

13. At any point in the wilderness trip did the instructors/guides discuss anything about your re-entry process?
    a. If so what did this entail?
    b. Do you think that they provided a clear representation of what the post-trip experience would be like?

14. Is there anything else you would like to add?
Appendix D

Informed Consent

Project Title: Returning home from the Wild: Exploring participants’ experiences of re-entry following extended wilderness trips.

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Brock University  
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INVITATION
You have been invited to participate in the study: Returning home from the Wild: Exploring participants’ experiences of re-entry following extended wilderness trips. The purpose of this research project is to explore how the experience of re-entry to the home environment from extended wilderness trips impacts participants’ psychological sense of community. Extended wilderness trips are commonly used as teaching experiences for participants to develop skills in leadership, communication and decision-making. This study intends to explore participants’ experiences post-trip and the lasting impacts the transition of experience may have had. This study seeks to better understand the meanings that participants have regarding their experience re-entry following an extended time in a wilderness setting.

WHAT’S INVOLVED
As a participant, you will be asked to participate in an interview. The interview will be conducted in person or over the phone (your choice) by an interviewer, and with your permission, will be audio-recorded. You can also decide the location of the in-person interview. Participation will take approximately 90 minutes your time. You will be given the opportunity to review your transcribed interview.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS
Participation in this study will allow you to reflect on your experiences of re-entry from an extended wilderness trip. The outcomes of this study will contribute to the knowledge surrounding the impacts these experiences may have on participants’ psychological sense of community. There also may be risks associated with participation. You may experience emotional discomfort by discussing experiences of distress or others involved in your lifeworld. In case of any psychological stress, participants will be directed to the faculty supervisor for any assistance. Information about counseling services on campus will be readily available if necessary.

CONFIDENTIALITY
All information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study; however, with your permission, confidential quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be stored in a secure location for 2 years when not being used by the researcher. Access to this data will be restricted to Lucas Cooper (Principal Researcher) and Dr. Tim O’Connell (Supervisor).

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time at which point your data will be destroyed.

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS
Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available through Lucas Cooper or Dr. Tim O’Connell, who can be contacted via email at lc07qr@brocku.ca or toconnell@brocku.ca.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE
If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the Principal Investigator /Faculty Supervisor using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (12-238). If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.
Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

**CONSENT FORM**
I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made the decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name (Please print): ___________________________

Date:_______________________________________

Signature: ________________________________