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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

AN EXPLORATION OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING IN ADULTS  
AS A RESULT OF ADVENTURE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Michael Bennett

December, 2012

Daphne DePorres, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to...

Joel Robert Bennett  
(November 8, 1952—July 27, 2012)

and

Mary Kim Bennett (Zearfoss)

and

Timothy Andrew Bennett

and

Megan Bennett (Bushell)

and

Clara Eugenia Zearfoss (Nicholson)  
(December 4, 1919—January 9, 2011)

and

Elmer William Zearfoss  
(January 23, 1923—August 13, 2002)

...Whose unconditional love  
and support made this possible.

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Megan Bennett, my wife, partner-in-crime, and rock, who has supported me through thick and thin, good and bad, ups and down, and countless periods of (temporary) insanity. You inspire me to greatness. IFLYBTTFU!

And to the dozens of others who have supported and guided me through the years...

Aaron & Cass & Jack & Collins Bushell, Don & Barbara Bushell, Sarah Gonzales, Karel Kreshek, Gary Mangiofico, Jeanne Zearfoss & Patrick McFeeley, Bob Paull, Kent Rhodes, Rebecca Williams, Christopher Zearfoss, and so many more...

All of my love and thanks!

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative research study was to identify the elements of adventure travel experiences that contribute to the process of transformational learning in adults. A qualitative research design was employed for this study. The sources of data were twelve pre-existing and de-identified interview transcriptions. A textual analysis was performed on the data, using an *a priori* approach to coding and analysis. An analysis of the data identified seven key themes that were critical for transformational learning in adults: (a) A Call to Adventure; (b) Being Open to Experience; (c) Entering a Zone Unknown; (d) Extra-Ordinary & Challenging Experiences; (e) Meaningful Interactions with Others (f) Re-Connecting to Self; and (g) Taking Action. These themes suggested a process for transformational learning in adults. In addition, (a) the authentic nature of the experience and (b) trip length, were also found to be important factors in transformational learning for these interviewees. These findings also suggest that intentionally designing adventure travel programs around these themes and the emergent transformational learning process has the potential to increase the likelihood of participants experiencing transformational learning through adventure travel.

## Chapter 1. Introduction & Problem Identification

*“One’s destination is never a place, but rather a new way of seeing things.”*

*– Henry Miller*

### **Background & Significance**

“Oh my god, I think he’s dead!!”

Those were the words that I heard from my friend and roommate Jon about five seconds after I landed on the rocky, gravelly road outside of San Jose, Costa Rica back in January of 1999. While out jogging with Jon one evening, I had been hit by a car traveling in excess of 40 miles per hour, and was thrown about 30 feet through the air onto the gravel road. The driver, angered about the newly minted hole in his windshield from my head hitting the glass, proceeded to scream at me in Spanish about how I owed him a few thousand Costa Rican Colones for the damages. At least, that is what Jon told me he did. I wouldn’t have a clue—I was knocked unconscious for a few moments.

When I came to, I couldn’t see and could hardly hear thanks to a severe concussion; I could barely walk; and I had rocks lodged in my shoulder, leg, and forehead. I had a broken hand, sprains, scratches, scrapes, bumps, and bruises. Later that night, I got stitched, patched, cleaned, and put back together again at the main hospital in San Jose.

The physical injuries healed quickly; I was able to do pretty much everything I wanted to—work out, go to the beach, even go whitewater rafting—within a few weeks. The memories of the accident, however, and the mental, emotional, and



psychological impact of that experience stay with me to this day. Interestingly enough, I look back fondly on that moment, those days after the accident, and my time spent in Costa Rica in general, and I think about the words of Joseph Campbell from *A Joseph Campbell Companion* by Diane Osbon (1995):

Whatever your fate is, whatever the hell happens, you say, “This is what I need.” It may look like a wreck, but go at it as though it were an opportunity, a challenge. If you bring love to that moment—not discouragement—you will find the strength is there. Any disaster that you can survive is an improvement in your character, your stature, and your life. ...When looking back at your life, you will see that the moments which seemed to be great failures followed by wreckage were the incidents that shaped the life you have now. Nothing can happen to you that is not positive. (p. 113)

After the accident, I spent several weeks contemplating my life. My thoughts and questions centered on the existential—Why am I here? What is my life purpose? Why did I survive the accident when I could have just as easily been killed? Among the many insights and epiphanies I had were the facts that I had taken my relationships with my family members and close friends for granted; that I needed to live life to the fullest and not be a passenger but the driver of my own destiny; and that life is too short to be unhappy—I must pursue my goals, passions, and dreams, and I must live life on purpose! Would I have taken the time to reflect on my life and my life situation had I not been involved in the accident? Probably not. Was the fact

that I was almost killed by the car in Costa Rica ultimately a blessing in disguise?  
Absolutely—without a doubt.

This experience of being hit—and almost killed—by a car while traveling in Costa Rica, and the subsequent introspective search I began in consideration of my life has been the springboard for the transformations that I have since undertaken. Without having the experience, or without taking the time to reflect on what happened to me and where my life was going, I would not be the person I am today. I would not have the deep, lasting relationships I have with friends and family; I would not be so motivated to inspire others to travel and adventure out into the world; and I would not be writing this paper and doing this important research.

Other travel experiences have also been instrumental to my personal growth and development. Spending two weeks in China—and surviving the 7.9 earthquake of 2008—led me to new levels of cultural perspectives and intelligence, and revealed to me how involved the government of China really is in the regulation and overseeing of everyday life for the people in China. Living in Copenhagen, Denmark, broadened my social and political views, and allowed for new perspectives on things like technology, media, and networking. Backpacking through Europe provided me with challenging opportunities to deepen my sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence, get a better understanding of my place in the world as I experienced new people, places, and things, and become present to my purpose in life as I explored my real strengths, passions, and desires.

These are just a handful of demonstrations of the ways in which my own personal experiences with adventure travel have been the most important part of my

personal transformations. These opportunities to live & travel internationally have opened my eyes to my authentic self and, consequently, allowed me to see others (and the world) more clearly. Through the process of personal reflection, engaging in conversations with friends and strangers, and taking the time to journal and reconsider my thoughts, feelings, and perspectives, I was able to increase my levels of self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-efficacy.

Today, I crave these experiences—the opportunity to travel internationally, or go hiking or whitewater rafting or mountain climbing—and the challenges associated with them. I have found that it is not necessarily the experience itself that is critical, but rather one’s willingness to take time to reflect on the experience that makes the experience so valuable and life changing.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Certain words, terms, and/or phrases will appear more frequently than others throughout this dissertation. As such, it is appropriate to provide the reader with an operational definition of these terms from the author’s perspective. These operational definitions have largely been informed by a review of the literature relevant for each term. Literature-supported definitions can be found throughout Chapter 2. The following terms are listed in alphabetical order.

- Adventure Travel – Refers to any experience that combines the physical movement of an individual from one place to another [travel] with any myriad of experiences that challenge this traveler to push physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and/or cultural comfort zones [adventure].

- Experience – A highly personalized phenomenon, event, or activity that provides an individual with the opportunity for critical reflection, meaning-making, and transformational learning.
- Experiential Learning – A process through which an individual is able to construct meaning and extract learning from a specific experience or series of experiences. Typically, this process is described as having four distinct steps, called the Experiential Learning Cycle: (a) Concrete Experience, (b) Reflective Observation, (c) Abstract Conceptualization, and (d) Active Experimentation (Kolb, 1984).
- Personal Transformation – The application of transformational learning to one’s life. This may include, for example, tangible shifts in perspectives of self or others, taking actions towards manifesting a newfound sense of purpose or passion, or re-arranging time and energy to reflect new priorities.
- Transformational Learning – Learning that takes place as a result of the experiential learning process that is characterized by a significant mental or psychological shift in an individual’s awareness of self and others. This may include re-discovering things about oneself, including passions and purpose in life, or it may include a realignment of one’s priorities in life or one’s perspectives of one’s self and/or other people.

### **Problem Statements**

Transformational learning and subsequent personal transformations are frequently associated with adventure travel (Bennis, 2003; Coffey, 2008; Inkson &

Myers, 2003; Kottler, 1998; Ross, 2010). Indeed, adventure travel lends itself well to introspection, reflection, and self-discovery (Iyer, 2004; Oddou, Mendenhall, & Ritchie, 2000; Robertson, 2002), all of which are generally recognized as key processes in transformational learning. Through adventure travel, individuals challenge themselves physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and culturally, often times coming face to face with their true nature, the world around them, and their own personal boundaries and limitations.

Despite the fact that much research has been conducted on which of the individual or collective components or events associated with adventure travel experiences are most likely to lead to personal transformations and increased levels of self-awareness, no clear recipe for transformational learning has been identified. Study after study have produced lists of critical elements or activities that are foundational components of adventure travel and experiential education programs (Gass, 2003; McKenzie, 2003; Paisley, Furman, Sibthorp, & Gookin, 2008), but little evidence has been found of the catalysts of travel-related transformational learning as a result of these critical elements (McKenzie, 2003; Ross, 2010).

For instance, Sibthorp, Paisley, and Gookin (2007) categorized the variables present in any travel experience into two buckets: participant-level predictors (such as age, sex, previous experiences, and personality) and travel-specific predictors (including others that are on the trip, the length of the trip, the location of the trip, the planned activities, etc.). Yet while this research identified key elements and variables in an adventure program, their research failed to adequately demonstrate or articulate

a process of transformational learning among the young adults who experienced personal growth as a result of their travel experience.

Finally, while much research has been conducted on the causes, effects, and outcomes of travel experiences for youth, adolescents, and young adults, little research has explored the critical events and variables associated with transformational learning and personal transformations via adventure travel experiences within the adult population (Orndorff, 1998). What little research has been conducted with adults has largely been done via the case study method, which has several inherent limitations that restrict the ability of the researcher to make broader and more general statements about the research subject.

### **Purpose Statement**

This research is an exploration into how adventure travel experiences can be catalysts for transformational learning in adults. The goal of this dissertation is to gain a better understanding of which elements or critical events associated with adventure travel experiences are most commonly associated with transformational learning in the adult population. If suggested by the findings, a process for transformational learning via adventure travel may be proposed. Furthermore, elements that detract from one's ability to learn from an adventure travel experience will be identified should they be suggested by the data.

This information would be extremely advantageous for individuals and organizations alike. By identifying commonalities in the ways that adults experience and undergo transformational learning, more opportunities for transformational learning and personal transformations can be created. This applies not only to the

realm of individualized or small group travel, but also to adventure travel companies, experiential education programs, and/or leadership development programs within organizations.

### **Research Question**

The following research question will guide this research in an attempt to better understand the relationship between adventure travel and transformational learning in adults:

Which elements of adventure travel are associated with transformational learning in adults?

### **Summary & Paper Outline**

Personal experiences with travel—both adventure travel and international travel—have been the most important part of my personal transformation journey. Opportunities to live and travel internationally have opened my eyes to my authentic self and, consequently, allowed me to see others (and the world) more clearly through increased levels of self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. They have also led to my interest in exploring commonalities among travelers that have self-described themselves as having had life-changing, transformational learning experiences that have resulted in significant and lasting personal transformations.

Travel experiences have often been associated with increased levels of self-awareness and personal growth and development. Travel lends itself well to introspection, reflection, and self-discovery—generally recognized as key processes in personal growth and development. Through travel, individuals challenge

themselves physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and culturally, often times coming face to face with their true nature, the world around them, and their own personal boundaries and limitations.

Despite the suggested benefits of travel with regard to transformational learning, little evidence has been found of common key drivers of travel-related personal growth, particularly among adults. Thus, this paper is an exploration into how international and/or adventure travel can be a catalyst for making lasting personal transformations. The goal of this dissertation is to gain a better understanding of which elements or critical events associated with adventure travel experiences are most commonly associated with transformational learning in adults.

Chapter 2 will review current literature on relevant fields of study, including adult learning theory, experiential learning theory and the experiential learning cycle, transformational learning, adventure travel, and experiential education.

Chapter 3 will introduce the methods used to analyze and interpret data.

Chapter 4 will present the findings from the research.

Chapter 5 will synthesize these findings, draw conclusions from the data, and discuss implications for both individuals and organizations.



## Chapter 2. Literature Review

This literature review aims to demonstrate that adults can—and most certainly do—learn from experiences; that experiential learning allows individuals rare opportunities to enhance self-awareness through transformational learning; and that adventure travel is a uniquely powerful medium that provides a multitude of opportunities for experiential and transformational learning. Consequently, through transformational learning that results from adventure travel experiences, individuals are empowered to make significant and meaningful personal transformations.

This review of the literature will begin by exploring two broad topic areas in significant depth: (a) experiential learning, and (b) adventure travel. First, a review of experiential learning will be introduced. This conversation will include discussions on adult, experiential, and transformational learning theories, approaches, methodologies, and outcomes. Stemming from the experiential learning literature, an exploration of how adventure travel experiences and experiential education programming provide powerful learning opportunities, and how they can play a vital role in transformational learning and personal transformations, will be presented. Finally, Campbell's (2008) *hero's journey* model will be introduced to tie these discussions of experiential learning and adventure travel together.

### **Adult Learning Theory**

As noted in Chapter 1, the purpose of this research was to identify elements of adventure travel that contribute to transformational learning in adults. The logical first step in addressing this question was to begin looking at the literature on how and why adults engage in and experience the process of learning.

Simply put, *adult learning theory*, or ALT, can be described as an amalgam of methodologies, processes, techniques, contexts, and approaches intended to enhance the ability of adults to learn. Despite the fact that many of the theoretical foundations of adult learning theory date back to the times of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, Lao-Tze, Jesus, and Cicero, et al (Knowles, 1977), it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that scholars began purposefully exploring the questions: Can adults learn? And if adults *can* learn, what experiences are necessary for them to learn effectively?

While it has been made clear that adults do, in fact, learn—“Learning is indeed a natural, normal, organic part of living, as functional a part of living as breathing; Adults do indeed want to and do indeed pursue learning” (Knowles, 1977, p. 205)—what has not been articulated is a unified, singular model explaining everything that we know about adult learners, including fundamental points regarding how adults learning takes place and the environments best suited for adult learning (Merriam, 2001). Instead, we have “...a mosaic of theories, models, sets of principles, and explanations that, combined, compose the knowledge base of adult learning” (Merriam, 2001, p. 3).

**Early research on adult learning.** Early research on adult learning capabilities (Thorndike, Bregman, Tilton, & Woodyard, as cited in Merriam, 2001) showed that adults did not learn as well or as efficiently as most children. However, it is worth noting that at the time of these studies, the vast majority of the adult population did not have the same level of education that most of the children they were being compared to had been exposed to. As such, adults were constrained in

their ability to perform well on various knowledge-based examinations (Merriam, 2001). With the introduction of various forms of intelligence tests in the mid-twentieth century, however, it became obvious that adults do, in fact, have the ability to learn. What also emerged was evidence that adults have many different types of intelligences; some of these types of intelligence continue to develop as people age, while others have a tendency to diminish as people age (Merriam, 2001).

Mid-twentieth century researchers began asking questions about differentiating adult learning from the learning of children. The question of whether or not adults *could* learn had been answered with a categorical yes; the new question was *how* adults learned and the ways in which approaches to adult learning may have differed from classical pedagogical approaches to instruction and learning techniques. As scholars begin inquiring into these questions, two foundational components of adult learning began surfacing: (a) andragogy, and (b) self-directed learning (Merriam, 2001). From this point, we begin encountering some of the more contemporary thought leadership on adult learning, including the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy.

**Andragogy.** Malcolm Knowles (1977, 1980) was one of the first to attempt to differentiate between how children learned and how adults learned. Knowles (1980) defined pedagogy as approaches to helping children learn. Deepening this description, Knowles suggested that pedagogical approaches to learning rely on dependency from the aspiring learners (Knowles, 1977, 1980). Pedagogical learning was seen as dependent, restricted, and forced with little room for creativity or innovation. While not all pedagogical learning is done by children, the techniques employed by many

primary-, secondary-, and even higher-education systems around the world use a pedagogical approach.

*Andragogy*, on the other hand, was distinguished from pedagogy and described as an approach that strived to enhance adult learning. Looking back throughout history, Knowles (1977) became present to the idea that:

All of the great ancient teachers were teachers of adults (who)... saw learning as being a process of enquiry in which the learner had an active role, in fact the primary role, and the role of the teacher was that of a guide to the enquiry, a facilitator of the enquiry and, where appropriate, a resource to the enquiry. Socrates developed the Socratic Dialogue Method that was used predominantly by the Greek educators —engaging the learner in a process of dialogue, an active process of enquiry. (p. 202)

Knowles' andragogical view of adult learners saw them as individuals who were "autonomous, free, and growth-oriented" (Merriam, p. 7). Six underlying characteristics of adult learners emerged from research conducted by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005). They suggest that adult learners: (a) Have a need to know and learn, (b) are autonomous and self-directed, (c) have prior experiences that will aid in learning, (d) are ready and prepared to learn, (e) can apply the learning to real-life situations, and (f) have the proper intrinsic motivation to learn. Just as importantly, "Establishing a climate that is conducive to learning (and) that is dominated or characterized by trust, by informality, by openness, by mutuality, by mutual respect, warmth, caring, etc." (Knowles, 1977, p. 210) is foundational to

successful adult learning and tends to “produce much more learning in an environment than the opposite characteristics of coldness, aloofness, sterility, discipline, lack of motion, etc.” (Knowles, 1977, p. 210).

The crucial distinction between pedagogy and andragogy lies in the thought that andragogical approaches to learning value self-directedness and self-motivation, whereas pedagogical approaches to learning rely on dependency from the aspiring learners (Knowles, 1977, 1980). Acknowledging that neither pedagogy nor andragogy should be considered right or wrong, Knowles (1977) also suggested that each has its own place in learning. For instance, when dealing with dependent individuals, pedagogical approaches are appropriate even for adults; when dealing with autonomous, self-directed individuals, andragogical approaches are more appropriate, even when children are the learners.

While many scholars and educators have embraced Knowles’ thoughts on adult learning to one degree or another, critics have argued that this approach to learning and education transcends merely adult learning and can—or should—be applied to all types of learning (Merriam, 2001). In fact, this idea of learning by doing and experiencing and then applying the lessons learned from those experiences is the very foundation of the experiential learning movement and associated theories that will be addressed in the next section. Additionally, some suggest that there is no consideration for the personal life experiences, background, education, and social constructs that impact learners in Knowles’ ideas.

**Self-directed learning.** While Knowles was leading the charge for acceptance of more andragogical approaches to learning, others were building knowledge around

the parallel idea of *self-directed learning* (SDL). Simply put, SDL suggests that some people learn better when given freedom to navigate their own educational course, while others are more reliant upon teacher instruction and knowledge-based didactic education. Furthermore, SDL is another way to distinguish the learning that children typically experienced from that of the adult learner (Mezirow, 1991).

Mezirow (1991) believes that self-directed learning is crucial for the continued growth and development of the adult. Adults need to use this self-directed learning to move beyond society's assumptions and norms towards actively and purposefully engaging in reflective practices around their life experiences. If an individual is to develop, they need to be more reflective on their experiences, and consider how a novel experience could expand their thinking and add new perspectives to life. It is only through reflection on, critical evaluation of, and meaning-making from life's experiences that an adult can learn.

**Adult learning theory summary.** Researchers and academicians in the first half of the twentieth century were able to demonstrate that adults can and do learn. They also suggested that the ways in which adults learn differs significantly from the ways in which children and adolescents learn. While children tend to absorb information in a pedagogical, one-way flow of information and data, adults prefer to contemplate the information that they are gathering and compare it previously held beliefs and mental models. If they are able to reconcile any perceived differences, they accept the new knowledge; if they cannot reconcile these differences, in many cases, the new information is seen as flawed and is discarded.

Adult learning theory scholarship indicates that adults learn best through andragogical, or experience-based, approaches (Knowles, 1977, 1980), rather than pedagogical approaches. Core to this process of learning through experience, often referred to as experiential learning, are the processes of reflection & introspection, which play crucial roles in adult development and contribute to enhancing self-awareness. Thus, the next section will introduce and define experiential learning, provide an oversight of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, and discuss the idea of transformational learning.

### **Experiential Learning**

Through the work of Malcolm Knowles and others, adult learning theory (ALT) and its companion, andragogy, suggest that adults can and do learn—they simply do it differently than children. Adults are self-motivated and self-directed, have a desire to apply what they learn to their lives quickly, and have life experiences against which they will inevitably compare and contrast any new experiences (Knowles, 1980). Whereas adult learning theory describes many of the attributes of adult learners, it does not describe the processes through which adults learn.

At about the same time that ALT was being conceived, i.e., in the early part of the twentieth century, a parallel and related theory was emerging from some of the more progressive educational theorists: experiential learning theory (ELT). Unlike ALT, experiential learning theory attempts to articulate *how* adults learn by offering variations of procedural steps for people to learn from their experiences.

Experiential learning is a powerful way to engage in opportunities for reflection, growth, and increased self-awareness (e.g., Bennis, 2003). Still, while

life's everyday experiences in and of themselves offer tremendous learning opportunities, providing adults with purposefully and intentionally designed and/or facilitated experiences—including opportunities to reflect, learn, and grow from those experiences—has proven to be a successful way of encouraging transformational learning and, consequently, enhancing self-awareness (Dirkx & Lavin, 1991).

There are obvious similarities between, and interdependencies within, the two constructs which will be expanded upon in the following pages. For example, central to ALT is the idea of experience, and the ability or desire of the adult learner to take an active role in reflecting on their experiences in order to extract and apply learning (Knowles, 1980). There are also linkages between adult learning, experiential learning, and transformational learning. Simply put, adults learn through experiences, and these experiences can be applied to transformational learning opportunities and, subsequently, the ability to lead oneself (Bennis, 2003).

Keeping in mind that the broader purpose of this research is to identify commonalities among powerful, life-changing experiential learning from travel and adventures, a thorough investigation into the existing literature of experiential learning theory is appropriate.

**Defining experiential learning.** The phrase *experiential learning* is often misunderstood and misrepresented in popular education thought leadership. Even in academia, there is confusion about what constitutes experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Experiential learning includes approaches, techniques, and tools for use in facilitating participant development and learning. However, experiential learning is first and foremost a holistic philosophy of education and learning that is founded on



the work of many of the leading academicians and scholars on educational theory, including Dewey, Freire, Lewin, and Rogers (as cited in Kolb, 1984).

Evaluating the works of these academicians and scholars, Kolb and Kolb (2005) suggest that experiential learning is a model of adult development that has been built on the pillars of six core propositions:

1. Learning is a process that should not be defined in terms of outcomes;
2. All learning is re-learning; that is, learning should be a process that extracts our beliefs and suppositions about life and events and allows us the opportunity to examine their validity and make any necessary adjustments based upon new experiences;
3. Learning is a duality between action and reflection;
4. Learning is a process of development and adaptation to the world within and around the learner;
5. Learning comes from symphonic relationships between the learner and the environment in which the learner finds him/herself; and
6. Learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (p. 194).

Kolb and Kolb (2010) state that, “Individuals engaged in experiential learning are intrinsically motivated to create their own learning path towards achieving intellectual, moral, and ethical integrity. In so doing, they free themselves from some external evaluation based on current moral standards and worldviews” (p. 47).

Building on the momentum established by Knowles (1977, 1980), Mezirow (1991), and other proponents of andragogical approaches to learning and the importance of self-directed learning, Dirkx and Lavin (1991) suggest that the process of experiential learning is core to the field of adult education and learning. From this platform, Dirkx and Lavin (1991) developed their FOUR-thought model of experience based learning, which was an attempt to consolidate much of the literature on experiential adult learning under one umbrella. This model states that there are four ways in which an adult learns about themselves and/or about the world: (a) trial and error, (b) rationality and reflection, (c) creative expression, and (d) discernment. This model suggests that adult learners use all of these tools for learning about themselves and their world, often simultaneously.

Experiential learning theory, then, refocuses the idea of simply having an experience and reacting to that experience to include the process of reflecting upon that experience in order to learn, grow, and develop. Summarily, “The premise of experiential learning is that individuals create knowledge through the transformation of their lived experiences into existing cognitive frameworks, thus causing individuals to change the way they think and behave” (Seed, 2008, p. 210).

**Theoretical foundations of experiential learning theory.** While many contributed to the advancement of the experiential learning theory, none did more for the field and for progressive forms of education than John Dewey, John Tyler, and David Kolb. Dewey set the stage for the future endeavors and research of experiential educators as one of the first—and certainly one of the most influential—advocates of the power of experience in learning and education. Tyler advanced the conversation

by introducing structure and intentionality of programming to experiential learning. Kolb's contribution was the experiential learning cycle model that neatly and succinctly summarizes the cyclical nature of experiential learning, and places particular emphasis on the role of reflection in the cycle. Among the many who have theorized about experiential learning, these three men stand out as the most important and influential.

***John Dewey.*** John Dewey is one of the most widely read and important educational philosophers of the past century. Among his many works are *How We Think* (1910), which describes the ways in which humans think and process information and suggests practical solutions to educational issues (this book may have contributed to the adult learning theory emergence, as well); *Democracy and Education* (1916), which discusses the societal impacts of education and proposes a more progressive approach to our educational systems; and *Experience and Nature* (1925), in which Dewey talks about the inescapable relationship between experiences, and how each experience colors the next. But perhaps his most famous and important work (at least for the purposes of this research) is *Experience and Education* (1938).

While many of Dewey's (1938) ideas are presented in the context of comparing and contrasting a progressive educational system (that is, a more andragogical approach) versus the more traditional structures (more pedagogical in approach), these ideas can be applied to various forms of experiential learning that take place outside of the classroom. The foundation of his philosophies on education and experience are four key concepts that emerge from Dewey's (1938) writing that

continue to influence educators, programmers, and facilitators today (as cited in Seed, 2008).

First, Dewey (1938) suggests that all human experience springs forth from the congruence of two elements: continuity and interaction. Continuity, which Dewey refers to as the “experiential continuum” (p. 38), is the idea that each and every experience a person has influences all future experiences and colors their perceptions of those experiences. Simply put, people constantly and continually experience life, and these life experiences impact our perceptions and the meanings we make of future experiences. This is consistent with findings from adult learning theorists such as Mezirow (1991) and Knowles (1977), and is particularly relevant for aspiring leaders. To be aware of the idea that all of our experiences—and the meanings we make from them—contribute to our future experiences and our ability to respond to those experiences (Covey, 1989) is crucial for personal leadership. Not only does this concept get to the heart of the matter of adult and experiential learning, but it speaks to the capacity that we have as individuals to form our future by creating the meanings from our current experiences. We can choose to see an experience as a distinct event, whether it be positive or negative for us, or we can choose to see that experience as predictive of all future similar experiences. Choosing the latter, we effectively condemn ourselves to a myopic and meaningless perception of similar future experiences and limit our ability to effectively respond to and learn from those experiences.

Interaction, on the other hand, describes the confluence of an individual’s past experiences with the present situation. This union forms a subjective current reality

that is unique to that individual. While continuity details how each experience influences the next, interaction adds the element of the situation at hand to form the complete current experience for an individual. This is particularly relevant for adults and for experiential learning. Dewey (1938) posits that understanding past experiences is critical for successfully learning from new experiences. Specifically, to the extent that both participants and educators can be aware of students' or participants' past experiences and any impact those experiences have had on the individual, they can design current and future learning opportunities for that individual based upon previous experiences. Dewey summarizes this concept of continuity and interaction and the impact on an individual's life experience in saying:

As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part or aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. (p. 44)

The second major theme of Dewey's (1938) work discusses the idea that no experience, in and of itself, should be considered inherently valuable or not valuable, good or bad, right or wrong. With few exceptions, experiences cannot generally be described objectively as either positive or negative. As each individual brings a unique collection of life experiences and personality to the current situation, specific experiences will be extremely powerful for some individuals and less powerful or meaningful for others. The subjective nature of experience dictates that the real value

of an experience lies in the impact that experience has on the individual having the experience. This impact can be measured not only in the immediate effects upon the individual but, perhaps more importantly, on the long-term effects that an experience has throughout one's life. This is a central tenet of experiential education philosophy.

Thirdly, Dewey posits that experiential learning, when done appropriately, not only educates the individual learner but, more importantly, develops the capacity and the desire to continue the process of learning from experiences throughout the individual's life. Dewey (1938) states that the development of competencies for introspection, reflection, meaning-making, and experimentation on these new beliefs and meanings is the end goal of progressive education and experiential learning. The focus should not be on *what* we learn, but rather *how* we learn it. This idea of the *how* of learning has huge implications on the long-term impact of what is learned; it brings to mind the old adage that if you give a man a fish, he will eat for a day. If you teach him how to fish, he will eat forever. Telling someone that something simply *is* tends to be much less powerful than letting that individual experiment with this reality, ask "Why?", and understand *how* this could be. This is the essence of experiential learning.

Finally, the fourth major extraction from Dewey (1938) is the notion that developed capabilities and desires for continued, life-long learning provide an individual with what is perhaps most important in life: freedom of intelligence. By this, Dewey means that an individual has the ability to be aware of and in control of his or her emotions, and has the subsequent competency of managing oneself through self-control. (This is the heart of Emotional Intelligence.) From there, Dewey

suggests that this individual freedom of intelligence provides an individual with opportunities to not only identify personal desires and wants, but to also create action plans aimed at achieving the realization of such dreams. However, none of this is possible without the ability to learn from experience, make meaning from experiences, and then apply these learnings and meanings to future experiences. Thus, Dewey hints at the idea that the real goal of experiential learning is to develop the competencies of introspection, reflection, and experimentation, all aimed at identifying life goals and, subsequently, developing and putting into place action plans for the achievement of these goals.

**Ralph W. Tyler.** While Dewey (1938) championed the idea of learning through experience, and discussed the values and broad goals of experiential learning, he only briefly alluded to programmatic design and structures that effectively empower this type of learning. It was Ralph W. Tyler who developed and advocated for a structural framework for experiential and educational program development in his book *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (1949). Tyler's four-step model of programmatic and curricular development is based upon four essential questions that should be asked of, and answered by, anyone designing any type of educational program, including, but not limited to, experiential learning programs. Despite the pedagogical and dogmatic approach Tyler takes in developing these questions, they nevertheless serve as important landmarks for experiential educators and learners to consider.

The first question Tyler asks forms the foundation for the subsequent three inquiries: What educational purpose (or outcome) is the program trying to attain?

Tyler (1949) states that “If an educational program is to be planned and if efforts are to be made, it is very necessary to have some conception of the goals that are being aimed at” (p. 3). Naturally, these objectives should act as a guide for the selection of course content, activities, structure, and approach taken by the teacher or facilitator, and the management of various course activities and interactions (Tyler, 1949).

When determining what the desired outcomes of any experiential education and learning program will be, a number of influences need to be examined. As adult learning theory suggests, the wants and desires of the participants and learners needs to be carefully considered. In the case of many experiential learning programs, the vast majority of which are voluntary, participants are likely to be self-motivated, self-directed learners who have specific goals in mind when coming to the program. Thus, while the *hows* of the experiential learning process—the course specific activities that contribute to the achievement of the desired outcomes—are best left to the administrators and programmers, the participants’ personal goals, objectives, and desired outcomes should be at the heart of any program design.

Having said that, participants choose a program or course in large part due to the expertise, experience, and past successes of the service provider, programmers, and facilitators. Thus, as subject matter experts, it is appropriate for the facilitators and program designers to include programmatic and experiential learning goals that participants themselves may not be able to identify or articulate prior to the program. For example, while a participant may not state that developing interpersonal communication skills is a pre-program goal, programmers are likely to include that



into the program design not only as a means to an end (for instance, awareness of self in relationship to others), but as an end itself.

From here, Tyler (1949) explores various learning experiences that are likely to achieve these outcomes. For Tyler (1949), a *learning experience* was defined as the interaction of the participant in the learning experience and the environment and external conditions of that environment in which s/he is placed. The essential component of the experiential learning process is what the learner actively participates in achieving or doing, not what s/he observes the teacher doing or is told by the teacher (Dewey, 1938). This idea of active participation in the learning process is consistent with tenets from adult learning theory (e.g., Knowles, 1977) as well as more contemporary scholarship on experiential learning (e.g., Sibthorp, 2003)

The question of which activities should be included in experiential learning programs has been hotly debated in experiential learning cycles for years (Sibthorp, 2003). Different schools of thought advocate different types of experiences, ranging from the introspection- and reflection-based activities like soloing and journaling to the high-adventure activities of mountain climbing and white water rafting. (Again, this topic will be discussed in more detail in subsequent pages.) Regardless of the specific activities included in the program design, Tyler (1949) suggests that the specific activities and various types of learning experiences be carefully selected by the programmers with the desired outcomes and objectives at the heart of the planning process.

Identifying the most effective programmatic activities only begs the next question Tyler (1949) poses: How can these educational experiences be effectively

organized so as to ensure the achievement of desired outcomes? Like Dewey (1938), Tyler (1949) suggests that learning experiences need to be organized in such a way as to promote three key elements: (a) continuity, (b) sequence, and (c) integration.

Continuity of the program refers to the vertical integration of the program, allowing for recurring and continuing usage of the skills gained in the program to be used throughout the program. For example, developing the capability of a participant to effectively be present to his or her emotions might be a skill that participants will use repeatedly throughout the program, and as such it is imperative that they learn this skill early in the experience (Tyler, 1949).

Sequence refers to scalability of programming; that is, learning one skill will enable the participant to develop other skills, as well. Using the example from above, the ability to be aware of one's emotions is likely to be foundational for all of the subsequent activities on an experiential learning trip. It would be challenging to successfully communicate with other participants if one was not able to describe his or her emotional state, for instance (Tyler, 1949).

Integration describes the usefulness of skills developed through the learning experiences in other types of environments, specifically in the participant's daily life. It might be nice to develop mountaineering skills, but if they are useless to the learner in his or her everyday life, there is no sense of integration of learning (Tyler, 1949).

Lastly, Tyler (1949) looks for ways to determine if these outcomes have been met through the programming and experiences. To do so, Tyler suggests a three-tiered approach to programmatic evaluation which includes asking participants (a) whether or not the educational program met its desired objectives or goals, (b)

whether or not the experiences, activities, and courses were appropriate and effective, and (c) whether or not the facilitators and/or teachers were effective.

Furthermore, Tyler (1949) points out that evaluations should also be done a minimum of three times: (a) Before, or in the very beginning stages of, the program to generate a baseline of information against which future evaluations can be compared and contrasted; (b) at the end of the program to gauge the level of change; and (c) at some point significantly after the program to measure the participant's retention and integration of the learning. According to Tyler, no specific evaluation method is more or less appropriate than any other. For instance, asking people to fill out a paper and pencil evaluation is no more or less effective than doing interviews to gain information and insight and provide feedback.

Tyler's approach to programmatic evaluation is still being employed by many in the experiential education and learning fields. And while much of Tyler's experiential learning program design and evaluation techniques may have evolved into newer (and perhaps more effective) approaches for building effective learning environments and programs, Tyler's thought leadership in experiential program design and evaluation set the foundation for the advancement of the field of experiential learning and adult development. The crucial element of building the program around a set of desired objectives and goals (ideally populated in large part by the participant) remains a pillar of experiential educators today. Similarly, the importance of evaluating the achievement of learning objectives and programmatic goals provides critical information for facilitators and program designers alike and allows them to make appropriate programmatic enhancements in the future.

**The experiential learning cycle.** So far, it has been established that adults can and do learn (Dewey, 1938; Knowles, 1977, 1980; Merriam, 2001), and that the process of learning is different in adults than it is for children (Knowles, 1977, 1980). Dewey (1938) continued the relatively new exploration of the idea of experiential learning, and introduced four hallmarks of experiential education, including the notion that one objective of experiential learning is to learn how to learn so that an adult can continue learning—and thus growing, developing, and transforming themselves—throughout their life. From there, Tyler (1949) provided a structure for effectively designing and evaluating experiential learning programs that centered on four questions to be asked in the design, implementation, and evaluation of experiential learning programs. Together, authors such as Knowles (1977, 1980), Dewey (1938), and Tyler (1949) have addressed the *whats* and the *whys* of adult and experiential learning, what has yet to be addressed is the question of *how* adults learn from these experiences.

Experiential learning has been described as a “process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). A plethora of research (e.g., Dirkx & Lavin, 1991; Gass, 2003; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991) suggests that the process of experiential learning follows a distinct and relatively simple formula. Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle is a modular representation of adult and experiential learning processes that neatly and succinctly describes the process through which adults—really, anyone—learn. The cycle contains four distinct yet inter-related steps: (a) concrete experience (CE), (b) reflective observation (RO), (c) abstract conceptualization (AC), and (d) active experimentation (AE). Summarily,

Kolb and Kolb (2010) state that, “In experiential learning theory (ELT), the concept of deep learning describes learning that fully integrates the four modes of the experiential learning cycle—experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting” (p. 27).

The experiential learning cycle model has experienced a bit of criticism in the past decade, as some have argued that the 4-step model is more of an “ideology ... than a philosophy or theory of experiential learning” (Seaman, 2008, p. 4). Nevertheless, while this model may not apply to every experience or interaction, it remains as the most common and well-known model of experiential learning.

***Concrete experience.*** The first step in the experiential learning cycle is having a concrete experience (CE), which, put simply, is the event or the experience that is the catalyst for the subsequent three steps of learning and meaning making. For such a simple word, experience seems to confound many. Fox (2008) ponders, “What exactly is experience? We have no rigorous definitions, characterizations, typologies, or conceptualizations of experience” (p. 39). Nevertheless, Fox (2008) defines experience as “a complex interaction between body, sensory input, and neurological processing—a relationship with the world as humans encounter, interpret, and shape messages” (p. 41).

Three key points about experience should be made. First, experience is a highly individualized and personalized phenomenon (Seed, 2008) that has been described as a “constructed reality” (Fox, 2008, p. 39). How we view, perceive, or understand an event varies from person to person (Dewey, 1938; Fox, 2008; Mezirow, 1991; Roberts, 2008; Seaman, 2008), making experience anything but concrete. This individualized nature of experience is impacted by variables such as

our past experiences, our personalities, our culture, and our current life situations, among others (Mezirow, 1991). As suggested by Fox (2008):

Experience is a multi-layered phenomenon; individuals make sense of experience through cultural, cognitive, subconscious, and personal interpretive layers, by negotiating norms and dominant values, attending to immediate human relationships, and through an individual's context within larger societal and historical positioning. (p. 41)

Additionally, although often referred to as a singular, discrete happening or event (Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991), experience can include a confluence of events that have been occurring over an extended period of time, culminating in an individual's felt need for change or movement (Taylor, 2000b).

Roberts (2008) also posits that experience is largely an personalized event that is "lived through our individual bodies. Experience becomes real because we sense it and live through it, first as individuals, but then also as social beings" (p. 25). In other words, if *how* we experience something is largely shaped by a series of individually dependent variables, then *what* we experience can be different for each individual, even if two people live through the same event.

The second point to be made about experience is that, as adults, we have a tendency to subconsciously filter our personal experiences. We may, in fact, reject certain experiences that we have. Mezirow (1991) suggests that many adults selectively pick and choose to accept the experiences that fit what they think they know, and ignore the experiences that seem to contradict this so-called knowledge. "We tend to accept and integrate experiences that comfortably fit our frame of

reference and to discount those that do not; thus, our current frame of reference serves as the boundary condition for interpreting meaning of an experience” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 32). In other words, our ability to consume and integrate new experiences into our lives and the expansion of our real knowledge can be constricted by external influences such as societal norms and pressures.

The third and final distinction about experience is that if an adult is to successfully learn or transform one’s way of thinking and being, it is necessary to move beyond this state of inertia. In order for an individual to learn, grow, transform, or become more self-aware, oftentimes they need to do something that they have never done before, be someone they have never been before, or see things as they have never seen before (e.g., Walsh & Golins, 1976). It is in getting a fresh perspective of ourselves and of our lives through experience that we begin to change our mental maps and paradigms, and begin the process of learning, growing, developing, and re-connecting with our authentic self. Roberts (2008) states, “A truly transformative experience is that which takes us away from the everyday and the typical” (p. 25). In other words, having an *extra*-ordinary experience is one way to enhance the likelihood of learning from an experience.

Merely having extra-ordinary experiences is not enough to ensure learning, however. One must be willing and able to engage in the second phase of the experiential learning cycle, called reflective observation (RO), in order to continue the process of learning (Leberman & Martin, 2003).

***Reflective observation.*** While having an experience is foundational to experiential and adult learning (Dewey, 1938; Knowles, 1977), the critical

components of development and transformation are the processes of reflecting upon those experiences, extracting meaning from them, and ultimately, making changes in thought patterns and/or behaviors that manifest themselves in everyday life (Mezirow, 1991). According to Leberman and Martin (2003), “The reflection process turns the experience into experiential education” (p. 76). The act of critical reflection is hugely important for the growth and learning of all populations, but particularly for adults. Mezirow (1998) defines reflection by saying that:

Reflection, a “turning back” on experience, can mean many things: simple awareness of an object, event or state, including awareness of a perception, thought, feeling, disposition, intention, action, or of one's habits of doing these things. It can also mean letting one's thoughts wander over something, taking something into consideration, or imagining alternatives. One can reflect on oneself reflecting. (p. 85)

This reflective step, which Kolb and Kolb (2010) describe as “enriching” (p. 27) the concrete experience, is the cornerstone of the experiential learning cycle. Without it, no learning, meaning-making, integration, or transformation can take place (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005, 2010; Mezirow, 1991). Quoting Warren Bennis (2003): “Experiences aren't truly yours until you think about them, analyze them, examine them, question them, reflect on them, and finally understand them. Use your experiences so that (they) empower rather than imprison” (p. 90).

The end goal of reflective observation, then, is two-fold. First, the individual must acknowledge a relevant experience as such, and in doing so, give power, credibility, and importance to the associated event. We are powerless to grow,



develop, or transform if we have no foundational experience or event to think about and reflect upon. The second goal of reflection is to empower the learner to begin considering the idea that their previously acquired knowledge may not be reality (Mezirow, 1991). From here, the participant can begin developing new ideas or concepts, a process called abstract conceptualization (AC) (Kolb, 1984).

***Abstract conceptualization.*** Whereas reflective observation (RO) is the process of identifying experiences as important and subsequently reflecting upon those experiences by asking, “What happened?” or “Why did that happen?”, the abstract conceptualization (AC) stage of the experiential learning cycle is characterized by meaning-making, interpretation, and transformation. “Meaning is an interpretation, and to make meaning is to construe or interpret experience—in other words, to give it coherence” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 4).

Mezirow (1991) suggests that, while adults are often encouraged by society or by teachers to be more self-directed, there exist “approved ways of seeing and understanding, shaped by our language, culture, and personal experience, (that) collaborate to set limits to our future learning” (p. 1). What adults have learned has largely been driven by socially accepted views of life; these limitations rob us of our ability to be self-directed, and instead mandate that we adapt our current experience to our “old ways of knowing” (p. 3). As such, adults tend to perceive new experiences through previously established mental models or preconceived notions of how things are or are supposed to be (Mezirow, 1991).

New experiences are often filtered through these old ways of thinking, and consequently, the learning or growth that is available to someone who has a genuinely

new experience is muted by their inability to see these new events as distinct from previous experiences. Thus, it is imperative that adults engage not only in the process of active reflection upon their experiences but also in building new constructs of reality if they are to experience transformation, growth, or development:

It is in liminal spaces between established patterns of thoughts and behaviors that new definitions and concepts... can be (developed).

Thus, it becomes crucial that an individual learns to negotiate meanings, purposes, and values critically, reflectively, and rationally instead of passively accepting the social realities defined by others....

Adult development is seen as an adult's progressively enhanced capacity to validate prior learning through reflective discourse and to act upon the resulting insights. Anything that moves the individual toward a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable (open to other points of view), and integrated meaning perspective, the validity of which has been established through rational discourse, aids an adult's development. (Mezirow, 1991, p. 7)

Abstract conceptualization demands that we actively challenge what we 'know' based on new experiences. Critical analysis of existing paradigms is the key process at play here. By reflecting on new experiences while considering pre-existing paradigms, people are able to make new and more informed meanings and gain new perspectives that help shape the continued ability to learn, grow, and develop as adults (Mezirow, 1991). According to Mezirow (1991), "Our need to understand our

experiences is perhaps our most human attribute. We have to understand them in order to know how to act effectively” (p. 10).

***Active experimentation.*** The last stage of Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle is the active experimentation (AE) stage. AE represents the integration of the ideas, concepts, structures, and meanings that were developed in the RO and AC staged of the cycle into everyday life. Through this process of AE, individuals begin to proactively transform their lives. This may include physical or social behaviors, ways of thinking about or approaching various components of life, or a multitude of other adjustments that could be made. It is by actively experimenting with new knowledge that we continue the cycle of growth, development, and learning (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2010). As our lives are transformed by action, we continue to have deeper, more meaningful, and more powerful CEs, which consequently lend themselves to more powerful reflection, deepened meaning-making, and additional learning, development, and growth opportunities (Kolb & Kolb, 2010).

**Summary of experiential learning.** Whereas adult learning theory (ALT) demonstrates that adults can and do learn, and articulates several characteristics of the adult learner, experiential learning theory (ELT) proffers a process through which adults learn. Furthermore, ELT suggests that the goal of experiential learning is to learn how to learn, so that adults experience a lifetime of growth and development. To accomplish this, Kolb introduced the four-step experiential learning cycle.

First, we have what Kolb calls a concrete experience. Oftentimes, these experiences are subjective, as we bring our own experiences, personalities, and culture into everything we see and do. Furthermore, literature suggests that having an

extra-ordinary experience is more likely to lead us to the second stage of the cycle, reflective observation. In RO, adults take time to reflect upon and think about what they have just experienced, asking questions such as What happened? and Why did that happen? From here, adults make meaning from these reflections, and begin re-drawing mental maps and paradigms in a process called abstract conceptualization. They begin re-thinking their views of themselves, their relationships, and the world. Finally, armed with these new paradigms and views, adults begin actively experimenting and applying these constructs to their lives. As they do this, they are bound to have new experiences that re-start the cycle all over again. The experiential learning cycle is a never-ending process for growth, development, and learning.

### **Transformational Learning**

An important distinction should be made about the outcomes of experiential learning theory and the experiential learning cycle. Whereas adult learning theory posits *why* adults learn and the necessary criteria for learning, ELT and the experiential learning cycle explain *how* people can learn from experiences. Neither ALT nor ELT, however, discuss *what* people learn from those experiences or from the processes of reflection, meaning-making, and experimentation.

Broadly speaking, ALT and ELT literature suggest that there are 2 types of learning that take place as a result of the experiential learning cycle. The first type of learning “add(s) on to what we already know” (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 16). This type of learning has been called “additive” learning (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 16), “informational learning” (Kegan, 2000, p. 48), “know-that” learning, (Knapp, 2010, p. 277), and the “banking method” of learning (Freire, 2000, p. 53). Essentially, this

type of learning refers to when one learns a new skill, discovers a new place, meets a new person, or learns a new fact. This type of learning adds to our knowledge base of information. Although more prominently found in pedagogical approaches to education (Knowles, 1977; Mezirow, 1991), this type of learning has a place in the domain of adult and experiential learning, as well. This type of learning occurs when adults “extend already established cognitive capacities into new terrain” (Kegan, 2000, p. 48) and build new and important skills, competencies, and knowledge.

The second type of learning that takes place as a result of experiential learning is called *transformational learning*, and describes learning that shifts an individual’s perspectives of oneself, others, or the world (Baumgartner, 2001; Freire, 2000). Transformational learning may also include a re-discovering of oneself and increasing a sense of self-awareness and consciousness through experiences (Dirkx & Lavin, 1991). Furthermore, not only does transformational change *how we know* things, it offers an “increased capacity” (Kegan, 2000, p. 49) for learning and development. That is, not only can transformational learning shift perspectives and paradigms, it can enhance the ability of an individual to think in transformative ways and builds reflective and meaning-making muscles; it empowers the individual for a lifetime of growth and learning (Freire, 2000; Mezirow, 2000). Rilke (2000) said:

(Transformation is) the moment when something new has entered into us, something unfamiliar. Everything within us steps back; a silence ensues, and something new, known to no one, stands in the center and is silent. We are alone with the strange thing that has stepped into our presence. For a moment,

everything intimate and familiar has been taken from us. We stand in the midst of transition, where we cannot remain standing. (pp. 74-75)

Much of the experiential learning theory literature focuses on transformational (rather than “additive”) learning. Using Kolb’s experiential learning cycle as an example, the steps of reflective observation and abstract conceptualization described above detail the transformational processes that adults go through when attempting to make sense of a concrete experience. If successful,

Experience strengthens our personal meaning system by refocusing or extending our expectations about how things are supposed to be.

Transformative learning involves reflective assessment of premises, a process predicated upon still another logic, one of movement through cognitive structures by identifying and judging presuppositions. (Mezirow, 1991, p. 5)

The empowerment that comes from having a transformational learning experience allows individuals to see the world – and their role in it – quite differently than they had in the past. From that vantage point, not only do people strive to continue to change themselves, they work towards transforming the world in which they live (Freire, 2000). This exponential nature of transformational learning is one of the reasons why experiential education and experiential learning are so crucial for the success and survival of both individuals and organizations.

**Fostering transformational learning.** Drawing from adult learning and experiential learning literature, as well as from other disciplines (including travel and adventure literature), a picture emerges that helps to describe the necessary conditions for transformational learning to occur. First, an adult must be intrinsically motivated

to learn, and must be ready and willing to engage in the learning process (Knowles, 1977; Robertson, 2002; Ross, 2010; Taylor, 2000b).

Secondly, it is imperative for adult learners to seek extra-ordinary experiences that challenge them to be present to their current perspectives and paradigms of self and others, as well as those perspectives and paradigms held by others (Kottler, 1998; Ross, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978).

Thirdly, it is crucial to engage in a process of critical reflection on, and meaning making from, those experiences (e.g., Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow, 2000). This includes a re-evaluation of the values, perspectives, and paradigms that one holds relevant to that experience, and consideration of new opinions, beliefs, or paradigms (Mezirow, 2000).

Finally, engaging other people in this process of transformational learning allows opportunities for guidance, feedback, support, and encouragement as one moves through the process of transformation (Taylor, 2000a).

Transformational learning is largely recognized as an individualized and personalized process (Dewey, 1938; Fox, 2008; Mezirow, 1991; Roberts, 2008; Seaman, 2008; Seed, 2008; Taylor, 2000b; Varley, 2006) due to the subjective nature of experiences (as described above). Still, certain elements of the process are enhanced through interaction with other people. Through travel and adventure, perhaps the oldest, most innate of human experiences (Bennis, 2003; Coffey, 2008; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Iyer, 2004; Kottler, 1998; Mayes, 2006; Robertson, 2002; Ross, 2010; Schultz, 2003; Weiner, 2008), adults are able to engage in the types of experiences that lend themselves to transformational learning experiences.

**Summary of ALT, ELT, and transformational learning.** It has been found that: (a) adults can and do learn, (b) the adult learner is typically intrinsically motivated and self-directed, (c) adults are most likely to learn from experience, (d) experiential learning is a process that includes reflecting on events and making meaning from the experience, and (e) transformational learning happens when—through experiential learning processes—we change our paradigms or perspectives of ourselves, others, or the world. It has also been found that transformational learning is a highly personalized process that is most likely to occur in situations where: (a) individuals are highly and intrinsically motivated to learn, (b) people are challenged to have extra-ordinary experiences that push their comfort zones, (c) people engage in critical reflection of existing assumptions and paradigms as a result of these extra-ordinary experiences, and (d) where interpersonal guidance, feedback, and support empower an individual to make changes predicated by reflection and meaning-making.

### **Travel & Adventure**

A review of adult, experiential, and transformational learning suggested that for adults, much of the learning that takes place is via experiences. Still, having an experience and even learning from that experience do not necessarily translate into having a transformational experience. In order for an experience to have transformational potential, it needs to expand our minds, push our comfort zones, and challenge us in a variety of ways: physically, emotionally, socially, culturally, spiritually, and/or mentally. Transformational learning literature (e.g., Ross, 2010; Taylor, 2000b) suggests that certain conditions are predictive of, or at least essential



in creating the possibility of, transformational learning: (a) an intrinsic motivation to learn, change, and grow; (b) an experience that takes one out of their comfort zones; (c) purposefully reflecting upon relevant experiences; and (d) doing so with the help and support of a group of other people

Considering these conditions for transformational learning, it is easy to see how travel and adventure can offer individuals unique opportunities for the type of growth and development discussed in experiential and transformational learning literature (Robertson, 2002). Thus, this section will discuss: (a) a definition of travel, as well as motivating factors for travel; (b) the concept of adventure and what it means; (c) how adventure travel offers opportunities for personal growth and leadership development; (d) the role and importance of others on the transformational learning process; and (e) how the field of experiential education is providing structured opportunities for transformational learning. The framework of the critical elements of Transformational Learning will be used to guide the discussion.

**Travel.** *Travel* is roughly defined in the literature as the physical movement of an individual from one geographic location to another (e.g., Iyer, 2004; Theroux, 2011). This movement has been a central chapter in the storybook of human history; the ability migrate to all parts of the world is evidence of the integral role that travel has played in the survival of our species (Schultz, 2003). Suffice it to say, then, that travel is innate to the human condition (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Mankin & Stowell, 2008; Schultz, 2003; Theroux, 2011) and is embedded deep in the psychological, social, and emotional roots of the human psyche (Brown, 2009; Coffey, 2008).

*Motivations for travel.* Considering the first condition of the transformational learning framework, an inherent drive for development, travel literature suggests that people who engage in any sort of travel are indeed intrinsically motivated to change their lives (Robertson, 2002; Ross, 2010). These motivating factors that create the desire for someone to travel are abundant (Correia & Oom do Valle, 2007; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Ross, 2010).

Some suggest that escaping the routines of everyday life is largely influential on the decision to travel (Brown, 2009; Correia & Oom do Valle, 2007). Taking time to catch up on lost sleep, read a good book, and enjoy the sunshine and some nice weather all contribute to a more relaxed frame of mind. From this frame of mind, people are more likely to be able to re-connect with their inner selves, re-dedicate themselves to their work or career, and re-energize their lives (Correia & Oom do Valle, 2007; Ross, 2010).

More and more frequently, people are looking for more difficult and extreme physical adventures and challenges (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993; Coffey, 2008; Fluker & Turner, 2000; Mankin & Stowell, 2008). For example, BASE jumping ("BASE" is an acronym that stands for four categories of fixed objects from which one can jump: Buildings, Antennas, Spans [bridges], and Earth [cliffs]) (Base Jumping, n.d.), white-water kayaking, heli-skiing, and big-wave surfing are just a smattering of the activities that some adventurers are using to test themselves and to push themselves to the limits (Coffey, 2008). Research suggests that success in physically demanding environments can elevate one's levels of self-efficacy and self-confidence (Bandura, 1997) (and ultimately enhance leadership potential).

Social and/or cultural immersion can be another goal of a travel experience (Mayes, 2006). Through travel, people are able to learn more about different people, places, cultures, and histories (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Mayes, 2006). By exploring other peoples and their ways of life, travelers are given the unique opportunity to compare and contrast their lifestyle with those of others (Robertson, 2002).

Spiritual development (Coffey, 2008; Ross, 2010) and existential introspection (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Iyer, 2004; Ross, 2010; Schultz, 2003; Sugerman, 2003; Theroux, 2011) are also considered to be motivating factors for travel. In fact, travel has been described as a physical manifestation of the existential exploration and process of re-discovery that many people undertake as they attempt to reclaim a long-lost sense of purpose, passion, and happiness (Brown, 2009; Coffey, 2008; Frankl, 2006).

Finally, in too many cases, travel is still necessary for physical survival. It provides an escape from the various forms of political tyranny, economic desperation, and/or other forms of oppression that exist all too frequently in the world.

Regardless of the specific factors that motivate someone to travel, those that do travel are often said to be searching for something—oftentimes personal growth, development, and learning; thus, they are intrinsically motivated to learn (Coffey, 2008; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Weiner, 2008). And while the common (mis)perception of those who travel is that they are trying to escape reality, and that they are “running *away* from something” (Weiner, 2008, p. 329), it might also be said that they may well be “running *to* something” (Weiner, 2008, p. 329). While the specific intended

outcomes may vary from individual to individual, the overarching objective remains very much the same: personal transformation (Robertson, 2002).

**Adventure.** The second element in the transformation learning process is having an extra-ordinary experience that takes an individual out of their usual comfort zones and challenges them to see things from new and different perspectives. In other words, in order for an experience to have transformational potential, it needs to be extra-ordinary. Travel was defined above as the physical movement of an individual from one geographic location to another (e.g., Iyer, 2004; Theroux, 2011). Yet almost all of the travel literature focuses on personal growth, development, and transformations—the shifts and movement of peoples’ beliefs, perspectives, and paradigms—that are created *as a result of* travel. Thus, one can infer that while one of the many benefits of travel *can* be personal transformation, travel is not in and of itself transformative (Kottler, 1998; Robertson, 2002). In other words, travel is a medium through which people have the opportunity to transform themselves (Kottler, 1998). It needs to challenge the traveler to do something that they have never done before and/or to be someone they have never been before (e.g., Leberman & Martin, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). This type of experience is often referred to as “transformative travel” (Ross, 2010, p. 55) or as an adventure (Lande & Lande, 2008; Mankin & Stowell, 2008).

The term *adventure* has been defined as a psycho-social process of exploring something or someplace unknown that may or may not include physical activity as a means of exploration (Lande & Lande, 2008; Mankin & Stowell, 2008). Thus, adventure can be defined as an atypical psychological experience that challenges us to

reconsider our views of ourselves, other people and cultures, and/or the world.

Adventure can have physical, mental, emotional, cultural, social, and/or spiritual components (Mankin & Stowell, 2008; Nadler, 1995; Ross, 2010).

Travel and adventure are not mutually exclusive: You can travel without having an adventure, and you can have an adventure without travelling. When combined, however, travel and adventure amplify one another, so that travel *plus* adventure creates the highest potential and opportunity for learning and personal transformations—much more so than each of these elements individually (Mankin & Stowell, 2008). Together, travel and adventure provide the perfect recipe for stepping out of one’s comfort zone and immersing oneself in challenging situations. By getting us out of our typical, everyday life environment, travel + adventure provides one with opportunities to re-frame and re-program certain beliefs, mindsets, and behaviors (Iyer, 2004; Kottler, 1998; Nadler, 1995; Oddou, Mendenhall, & Ritchie, 2000; Robertson, 2002). As people are physically relocated to foreign places, they are mentally, emotionally, culturally, socially, and/or spiritually asked to accept new paradigms, norms, or rules for accepted behaviors, and thus—consequently—revisit their own (Iyer, 2004; Robertson, 2002).

Subsequently, the term *adventure travel* has been used to describe a “...mix of physical and psychological challenges, combined in different ways and in different proportions, to produce novel, exciting, and fun experiences” (Mankin & Stowell, 2008, p. 11). As such, the term adventure travel will be used throughout this discussion to refer to experiences that include travel, but that also have various types

of challenges for the individual participant that ultimately aid in the transformational learning process.

***Comfort zones.*** Experiences that push people through their so-called comfort zones are aimed at personal development and are the cornerstones of the transformational learning process that adventure travelers undertake (Brown, 2009; Gass, 1993; Nadler, 1995; Robertson, 2002; Ross, 2010). Vygotsky's (1978) *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) is a prime example of how pushing comfort zones can produce transformations. Vygotsky defined the ZPD as "...the distance between the actual developmental level, as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). The notion behind ZPD is that people will develop further and faster when they are pushed beyond their everyday comfort levels. Or, in other words, pushing ourselves into unknown territory provides opportunity for transformational experiences.

***Nature & the great outdoors.*** A common theme found in exploring travel and adventure as a means for personal growth, development, and transformation is the therapeutic importance of the outdoors and the impact that being in nature can have on an individual (Coffey, 2008; Holman & McAvoy, 2005; Rilke, 2000; Ross, 2010; Theroux, 2011). According to Fuller (2006), traveling—particularly in nature—evokes a sense of wonder, excitement, and novelty within most people, and it is through this sense of wonder that one experiences "shift(s) in perception and attention" (p. 27). As our attention and perceptive abilities are heightened, we are enabled to identify and uncover connections and relationships that may not have been

revealed otherwise. In doing so, a traveler can see clearly the connectivity between oneself and others, or between oneself and nature. These connections allow the individual to then see themselves and their role in the world from a renewed perspective, ultimately leading to a transformed sense of self and place (Fuller, 2006).

***Summary of adventure.*** Travel itself is not transformative; it is, however, pregnant with the possibility of transformation. Travel and its counterpart, adventure, can synergistically challenge individuals physically, mentally, emotionally, culturally, socially, or spiritually to push comfort zones in order to have novel experiences. This has been called adventure travel. In doing so, a traveler expands their attention, and engages with the world in a more meaningful and connected way.

### **Adventure Travel & Personal Development**

The third component of transformational learning suggests that in order to learn from these experiences, it is prudent to take ample time to consider the experiences that one has just had and what ideas have been gleaned from these new experiences, and to evaluate how these new ideas fit into one's current views of themselves, others, and the world (Mezirow, 1991; Robertson, 2002; Taylor, 2000b). From there, one can begin making new meanings from these experiences, developing new or shifted paradigms, and adjusting their perspectives.

Having already considered the motivations for, and benefits of, travel, and having discussed the various types of adventures that have the potential to make travel so potent, it should be no great surprise that adventure travel has played a critical role in the spiritual, emotional, and psychological advancement and development of humans (Coffey, 2008). In fact, adventure travel has long been

considered a key ingredient in learning about oneself, about others, and about the world (Bennis, 2003; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Kottler, 1998; Ross, 2010). Adventure travel is often seen as a cradle of personal growth and development (Bennis, 2003; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Iyer, 2004; Kottler, 1998; Mayes, 2006; Oddou, Mendenhall, & Ritchie, 2000; Robertson, 2002; Ross, 2010; Schultz, 2003; Weiner, 2008).

As discussed in transformational learning theory, reflection and introspection play central roles in the personal development, learning, and growth that can be outcomes of adventure travel (Robertson, 2002). Through adventure travel, people are challenged to engage with—and learn about—other people, cultures, and customs; it is in this process of learning about other people that one is able learn more about themselves (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Oddou, Mendenhall, & Ritchie, 2000; Schultz, 2003; Theroux, 2011). As an adventure traveler considers him- or herself in light of their current, extra-ordinary experiences, it is easy to see how one might begin questioning or challenging previously held beliefs, perspectives, or ideas.

One of the most important benefits of adventure travel is that it allows an individual the creative space to be someone that they have never been before—it frees them from the expectations, burdens, pressures, and stress placed upon them by family, work, or society and releases creative energy (Bennis, 2003; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Mayes, 2006; Ross, 2010; Weiner, 2008). In other words, adventure travel “has the capacity to shake us up, to jostle our souls” (Weiner, 2008, p. 329) and necessarily shifts perspectives and points of view—literally (via physical movement) and figuratively (through psychological challenges) (Bennis, 2003).



From these new perspectives, an individual has the opportunity to begin the process of exploring or re-discovering themselves and to emerge from this process with transformed thoughts, ideas, or perspectives (Bennis, 2003). Describing this process of transformation through adventure travel, Schultz (2003) states:

With (adventure) travel, our minds become more curious, our hearts more powerful, and our spirits more joyous. And once the mind is stretched like that, it can never return to its original state (p. xiii). The more time you spend coming to understand the ways of others, the more you'll understand yourself. The journey abroad reflects the one within—the most unknown and foreign and unmapped landscape of them all, the ultimate terra incognita. (p. xv)

It becomes clear, then, that adventure travel goes much deeper than physically moving from one location to another. Many suggest that adventure travel speaks more to the inner mental or emotional journey that we make through our minds and souls than the physical venture we undertake (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Iyer, 2004; Moir-Bussy, 2003; Schultz, 2003; Theroux, 2011).

Says Kottler (1998): “Travel is a reminder of what is possible for you to experience every waking moment your life” (p. 28). Quotes Pascal Mercier (2004):

Why do we feel sorry for people who do not travel? Because, unable to expand externally, they are unable to expand internally either, they cannot multiply and they are deprived of the possibility of undertaking expansive excursions in themselves and discovering who and what they could have become. (p. 243)

In summary, the act of reflection and meaning-making is central to personal growth and development (as was derived from experiential learning theorists). The extra-ordinary experiences encountered through adventure travel lend themselves to reflective exercises. Through these introspective processes, individual travelers can begin to truly challenge themselves to transform their views, perspectives, and paradigms, and to continue the process of personal growth and development.

### **The Role of Others in the Transformation Process**

To this point, there has been no need to distinguish the individual, or solo, traveler from the person who travels as a part of a group. Indeed, the first three conditions for truly transformational and experiential learning apply to the solo traveler and the group traveler alike: They are self-motivated and self-driven; they have extra-ordinary experiences through their travels and adventures that challenge them on a variety of levels—physically, mentally, emotionally, etc.; and they need to take ample time to reflect upon, and make meaning from, these experiences if they are to shift consciousness and perspectives and experience a personal transformation.

It is the fourth and final condition of transformational learning and travel—the interpersonal component—that distinguishes solo travel from group travel. If implemented and facilitated successfully, the added element of social and interpersonal collaboration has the ability to make transformational learning even more powerful, more meaningful, and more impactful, not only for the individuals undergoing the transformation, but also for their communities, families, and for the world. Nevertheless, both solo travel and group travel have their benefits. A brief exploration of both will provide clarification.

**Solo travel.** Travel and adventure literature suggest that solo travel can be immensely transformational (Coffey, 2008; Iyer, 2004; Kottler, 1998; Mayes, 2006; Rilke, 2000; Ross, 2010; Schultz, 2003; Theroux, 2011). People are free from social and societal pressures, are free to act as they wish without judgment, repercussions, or expectation, and can step into a role or a persona that may have been hidden within their soul or psyche. This freedom from expectation and social pressure can also unleash creative abilities and other talents that have been dormant for years (e.g., Iyer, 2004; Mayes, 2006; Theroux, 2011). Additionally, it is not uncommon for the solo traveler to engage in some form of ad hoc, reflective discourse with another person during their travels that in some way helps change or shape their experiences (Ross, 2010).

As suggested by, or alluded to in, experiential and transformational learning literature, travel and adventure are highly personal experiences (Dewey, 1938; Fox, 2008; Mezirow, 1991; Roberts, 2008; Seaman, 2008; Seed, 2008; Varley, 2006). The transformations that one makes from such an experience are derived from a combination of personality, personal life experiences and history, and the current environment (Brown, 2009; Schultz, 2003).

**Group travel.** In spite of the personalized nature of transformational learning, the support of other people can act to magnify the power of the reflective and meaning-making processes by providing opportunities for shared reflective discourse and the sharing of perspectives and ideas (Taylor, 2000b). Having a supportive group of people to engage in the process of transformational learning with can enhance the level of transformation an individual experiences (Kegan, 1994; Kottler, 1998; Ross,

2010; Taylor, 2000b). This includes: (a) an environment that participants feel is “safe, open, and trusting” (Taylor, 2000a, p. 154); (b) “fostering group ownership” of the learning process (p. 155); and (c) encouraging “a critically reflective and social group setting” (p. 155). “People grow best where they continuously experience an ingenious blend of challenge and support” (Kegan, 1994, p. 42). This embodies the fourth environmental contributor to transformational learning: The impact of others on the transformational learning process.

Two subsets of the larger group are instrumental in the transformational learning process: (a) the other participants that are on the trip, and (b) the facilitators or guides who are there to provide structure, support, guidance, and coaching (e.g., Sibthorp, 2003).

***Other participants.*** A typical adventure travel program includes anywhere from seven to fifteen participants (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Sibthorp, Paisley, & Gookin, 2007; Walsh & Golins, 1976). This sized group is ideal because the group is large enough to have diversity and small enough to avoid the formation of cliques; large enough for some type of conflict to emerge but small enough for the facilitators and guides to be able to manage it effectively and relatively easily; large enough to support a “collective consciousness” (Walsh & Golins, 1976, p. 5) while still allowing for individualization and personal reflection and thought. The role of these fellow participants and the broader group dynamics are crucial to the success of the program and the achievement of the program’s and/or the individuals’ objectives and goals (McKenzie, 2003). Joplin (2008) suggests four key roles for the group.

First, the group is the set of people with whom a participant engages with in the various program challenges and activities; therefore, trust and competence is crucial in the success and safety of the entire group (Joplin, 2008). Secondly, the group provides a sense of mental or psychological support for the individual participants as they progress through the activity or engage in any sort of challenge. This support can lead to enhanced feelings of accomplishment, self-efficacy, and personal growth (Joplin, 2008; Sibthorp et al., 2007). Thirdly, the group provides immediate—and hopefully constructive feedback—to one another in support of reaching the team and individual goals (Joplin, 2008). Martin & Leberman (2005) found that the dynamics of the group and its collective ability to provide effective feedback were strongly linked to positive developmental outcomes. Finally, through a debriefing process, the group provides a forum for sharing experiences, ideas, thoughts, and feelings that emerged from an activity or experience, as well as meaning-making and reflective discourse (Joplin, 2008).

While solo or individual reflection approaches such as journaling and meditation are important, research suggests that interacting with other participants enables transformational learning more powerfully (Lindsay & Ewert, 2008; Martin & Leberman, 2005; McKenzie, 2003; Sibthorp, 2003). For example, participants may be asked to share their personal experience of an activity with a partner, and may be prompted to answer questions related to the activity and how it impacted them. Other times, the group may engage in a discussion about the challenge that they have experienced.

***Facilitators & guides.*** Perhaps the most important factor in participant development, however, is the ability of the instructors or facilitators to foster participants' sense of ownership of their own outcomes (Sibthorp, 2003). Creating a sense of responsibility for the outcomes of the experience encourages students to really participate fully in the program (Sibthorp et al., 2007). This relationship between the instructor and the participant has been suggested to be the element of the adventure experience most closely correlated to the perception of personal development by the participants (Sibthorp, 2003). In many cases, experiential education instructors or facilitators can act as career counselors who “assist others in their journeys by helping [them] understand existential frustration, to self-identify values, and to raise up meaning potentialities” (Schultze & Miller, 2004, p. 146), and in doing so, guide them in personal development and transformation.

A core principle of Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the presence of what Vygotsky (1978) called a *more knowledgeable other*, or MKO. This is particularly relevant in transformational learning and experiential education, where oftentimes a teacher, guide, or facilitator is present to foster the growth, development, learning, and comprehension of the adult learner. The MKO serves as the psychological—and in some cases physical—safety net for the adult learner as they push through their existing comfort levels to unknown territory. As the adult has new and potentially transformational experiences, the MKO ensures that the adult is challenged to learn, reflect, grow, and develop in ways that the individual alone could not have done. The key for facilitators is to ask the right question, rather than trying to find the right answer to the wrong question (Knapp, 2010).

Coaching from a guide or facilitator has proven to be an extremely effective approach for enabling the individual participant to challenge themselves even further in pursuit of their goals, and increases the level of perceived development in participants (Paisley et al., 2008). The transformational learning process is a “mythical procedure during which a mentor guides students in a learning journey affected by the student’s social environment” (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 17), and is an “independent relationship built on trust” (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 19).

### **Experiential Education & Outdoor Adventure Programming**

An emerging field and industry called experiential education has successfully merged the four ingredients for transformational learning and formed an industry that is in its relative infancy but is growing in popularity and credibility (Mankin & Stowell, 2008). This field is also commonly referred to as outdoor education, outdoor adventure education, adventure education, and a host of other names (Knapp, 2010). For the purposes of this discussion, the terms experiential education and outdoor adventure programs will be used interchangeably.

Experiential education broadly consists of structured and purposefully designed outdoor programming that aims to empower participants to experience and create personal transformations (Lindsay & Ewert, 2008; Martin & Leberman, 2005; McKenzie, 2003; Sibthorp, 2003). Generally speaking, experiential education programs take place outdoors, often in remote areas of the wilderness, in mountainous areas, or in or near lakes, rivers, or the oceans, because the outdoors is an “especially potent” (Walsh & Golins, 1976, p. 4) learning environment. Facilitators leverage nature and various forms of activities to create learning opportunities for participants

(Chapman, McPhee, & Proudman, 2008; Gass, 1993; Hattie et al., 1997; Knapp, 2010; Walsh & Golins, 1976). Examples of these types of programs include Outward Bound and The National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) (Walsh & Golins, 1976).

Experiential education programs are holistic processes (Lindsay & Ewert, 2008) that are generally designed with multiple participant outcomes as objectives (McKenzie, 2003; Sibthorp, 2003). These outcomes include specific outdoor technical skills (e.g., learning how to set up a campsite, or learning the basic skills of alpine climbing), as well as personal development outcomes including leadership skills, self-awareness, and group or interpersonal communication (Sibthorp et al., 2007). As such, experiential education can be a powerful medium for empowering people to make life-changing transformations (Lindsay & Ewert, 2008; Knapp, 2010; Sibthorp, 2003). While many programs do include technical skill development as a central part of their experience, more and more programs are now focusing on personal development goals as the main outcomes of the participant experience (Chapman et al., 2008; Martin & Leberman, 2005; McKenzie, 2003). The technical activities are not the “ends, but rather the means” (Lindsay & Ewert, 2008, p. 24) for experiencing personal transformations.

To achieve these outcomes, popular experiential education programs such as Outward Bound and NOLS use what has become known as the Outward Bound Method (Walsh & Golins, 1976) of programming. This typically includes high-risk activities combined with individual reflective exercises—all in the context of group work—to build leadership skills (Joplin, 2008; Knapp, 2010; McKenzie, 2003).



**Factors contributing to experiential education outcomes.** Experiential education research concludes that there are several common variables found in experiential education and outdoor adventure programming that are instrumental in achieving the program's desired outcomes (Gass, 2003; McKenzie, 2003; Paisley et al., 2008). Sibthorp (2003) proffers five "widely accepted" (p. 81) components of experiential education programming that are "critical to participant development" (p. 81): (a) the individual, (b) the social environment, (c) the physical environment, (d) the task structure, and (e) the instructor.

What has yet to be clearly documented is the relationships and interactions between these elements, and how they combine to promote or hinder participant development (Sibthorp, 2003). Establishing these relationships is crucial to the continued success of the experiential education and adventure travel industries, and to the successful development of the participants (Hattie et al., 1997; Sibthorp et al., 2007). Quipped Paisley et al. (2008), "How (and what) people learn seems to depend greatly on the complex interactions between participants, leaders, program elements, program goals, educational settings, and contexts" (p. 203).

Sibthorp, Paisley, and Gookin (2007) categorize the variables present in experiential education programming that impact participant development into two buckets: (a) participant-level predictors and (b) course-level predictors.

***Participant-level predictors.*** Congruent with adult learning theory (e.g., Knowles, 1977), experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991), and transformational learning theory (e.g., Roberts, 2008; Seed, 2008; Taylor, 2000b; Varley, 2006) discussed previously, experiential education programs are highly

personal experiences (e.g., Fox, 2008; Sibthorp, 2003) from which individual participants extract meaning and make transformations.

Participant-level predictors that can impact outcome achievement include demographic information such as age and sex, previous life and/or adventure experiences, and personality traits, among other factors (Sibthorp, 2003). Martin & Leberman (2005) posit that each participant in experiential education enters with a variety of unique perspectives based on his or her life experience, and as such, the level of personal development varies significantly from person to person.

Walsh and Golins (1976) suggest that, while the learner's background and the social environment of the program play key roles in determining the effectiveness of a program in reaching its goals, the most important predictor of a successful experience for participants is the motivation to learn and undergo change. This means thinking, feeling, and acting as if something will be gained or achieved. This speaks to the first predictor of transformational learning: an intrinsic motivation to learn, change, or grow.

***Course-level predictors.*** Course-level predictors include the other members of the accompanying group as well as any group dynamics that are at play, the role and skill of the facilitator or instructor, the length of the trip, and course-specific activities such as rafting, debriefing processes, etc. (Sibthorp, 2003). While elements such as physical environment, trip length, and some of the particular activities designed into the program are indeed influential in achieving desired outcomes (Martin & Leberman, 2005; McKenzie, 2003), some have argued that the central component of experiential education programming is the social or interpersonal dynamic that is in

play (Martin & Leberman, 2005; McKenzie, 2003; Sibthorp, 2003; Sibthorp et al., 2007). As mentioned above, this includes both relationships with other participants, as well as interactions with the facilitator.

**Current issues in experiential education programming.** While experiential education programming has been around for decades, but has only recently begun growing in popularity and credibility (Sibthorp, 2003). Despite this recent popularity spike, the field of experiential learning and outdoor education programming has had its share of challenges in recent years. Specifically, many of the traditional components of these programs have been increasingly scrutinized (McKenzie, 2003; Sibthorp, 2003). These components include: program goals and objectives; course- or program-specific activities and how they contribute to the achievement of program objectives; and the element of risk in activities.

In fact, many of the challenges facing experiential education and outdoor education programming today are identical to Tyler's (1949) four key questions for programmatic development. Namely: (a) What are the desired outcomes of these programs?; (b) Which activities contribute most to these desired outcomes?; (c) What program structure should be used to maximize the impact of these activities?; and (d) And how can programmatic effectiveness be evaluated properly?

***Prescribed developmental outcomes.*** Many experiential education programs, such as Outward Bound and NOLS, have traditionally set forth a series of prescribed outcomes that programmers and staff aim to have most, if not all, participants achieve (McKenzie, 2003; Sibthorp, 2003). "Many programs lead to 'black-box'

programming, where it seems that simple participation is assumed to lead to participant development...” (Sibthorp et al., 2007, p. 1).

Sibthorp et al. (2007) list six categories of targeted outcomes in adventure-based programming: (a) leadership, (b) self-concept, (c) academic, (d) personality, (e) interpersonal, and (f) adventure-seeking. Getting the participants to achieve these goals can be a difficult task, however, as the mix of experience, personalities, and other variable factors collaborate to create undeniably unique conditions for each and every program (Sibthorp, 2003).

This question of prescribed programmatic outcomes has been hotly debated in recent years (McKenzie, 2003). While it was originally assumed that all participants could—and should—reach certain prescribed outcomes as a result of their participation in experiential education programs, that hypothesis has come under increasing criticism of late (Sibthorp, 2003; Sibthorp et al., 2007). While most adult participants achieve some level of transformation from an experience-based program, perhaps even achieving some of the program-driven prescribed outcomes, few participants achieve all of these outcomes, and some do not attain any (Sibthorp, 2003).

That is not to say that they do not gain very significant insights, perspectives, or paradigm shifts—they do; rather, their developmental outcomes may simply be different from those prescribed by the program (Sibthorp, 2003). More recently, researchers are finding that participants are experiencing different types of positive outcomes, and yet are still describing their experiential education adventures as being highly successful and transformational (Sibthorp, et al., 2007).

For instance, two participants from the same program can experience varied outcomes (Sibthorp, 2003); participant A discovers something about himself that will help mend broken relationships, while participant B decides to move to another country to start a new company. Both have experienced a significant level of transformation, and both would likely describe the experiential education program as being highly influential in the learning and transformations that they experienced and therefore a successful program, but they did not have the same learning outcomes.

Correspondingly, the notion that an experiential education program should have prescribed outcomes or program objectives has softened somewhat as a result of these findings. While programs clearly maintain objectives and goals, they are often found to be much broader in scope and much more participant-driven and –dependent (Chapman et al., 2008). For example, learning (or re-discovering) something about oneself that could lead to a life-changing transformation might be a program objective.

Finally, this idea of participant-driven outcomes and objectives is in alignment with adult, experiential, and transformational learning theories, as well as with findings from travel and adventure literature, which call out the individualistic and personal nature of learning and of transformation.

In summary, literature suggests that individual participants often achieve personal, rather than prescribed, developmental outcomes (Sibthorp, 2003; Sibthorp et al., 2007). Thus, attempting to use a one-size-fits-all approach toward establishing program objectives and/or desired outcomes in adult programming has proven to be largely unsuccessful. Instead, experiential education programmers have begun

providing participants with a carefully designed process for exploring an experience, along with meticulously implemented reflective processes, all of which opens space for the individual participants to make unique personal meaning and transformations from these activities.

*Activities.* Another hot topic in experiential education literature is the identification of specific programmatic activities that lend themselves to the successful attainment of the stated goals or objectives of the program. Much research has been done in the hopes of identifying specific activities that are strongly correlated with program goals (e.g., Hattie et al., 1997; Sibthorp, 2003). This research is usually centered on personal development and transformational learning goals (Sibthorp, 2003). That is to say, academicians have been looking for linkages between specific program activities and desired personal development outcomes.

Recently, for example, studies have been focused on finding out more about the processes and mechanisms used by experiential educators to assist in the personal development and learning of the participants travel (e.g., McKenzie, 2003; Hattie et al., 1997; Sibthorp et al., 1997). Still, while many of these authors are in agreement with one another about the central course components in experiential education, no clear indications of which elements impact the development of the participants most exist (Hattie et al., 1997; Paisley et al., 2008). Unfortunately, there is no list of specific activities that will ensure that the participant reaches the desired growth and developmental objectives.

What the literature has demonstrated is that the activities that are most often linked to developmental outcomes are the reflective activities, rather than the physical

activities (Hattie et al., 1997; Sibthorp, 2003; Sibthorp et al., 2007; Paisley et al., 2008). This includes both personal forms of introspection such as meditation and journaling, as well as interpersonal and/or group reflection and conversations.

Akin to the personal nature of program outcomes and goals, research suggests that individual participants find specific components, activities, and elements of the experiences to be transformational (e.g., Hattie et al., 1997; McKenzie, 2003). For example, one individual may find that the group discussions were the most powerful in changing his or her perspective of a particular situation or experience, while another may have found the group discussions to be monotonous and boring; conversely, this second individual may have gained the most from the solo activity at the end of the program, while the first individual found it to be frustrating and unhelpful.

*The element of risk.* Embedded in the on-going conversation about the effectiveness and impact of specific program activities on reaching the stated goals of the program is the debate on the role of risk in achieving these program goals. While traditional experiential education programs have included some element of risk—real or perceived by the participant—in the overall design of the course, this tenet of outdoor education programs has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005; Leberman & Martin, 2003). Traditionalists claim that the added element of risk creates the necessary conditions for transformation (Leberman & Martin, 2003). In other words, the perceived risk pushes the participants past previously established comfort zones into unknown physical or psychological territory and thus mandates that they think and act in novel ways in

order to survive the challenge (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005; Leberman & Martin, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Without risk, traditionalists believe that the ability of participants to create transformations is significantly limited.

Contemporary theorists, on the other hand, suggest that risk negates the ability of the participant to have any sort of transformational learning experience (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005; Leberman & Martin, 2003). Considering Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs, safety and security needs trump actualization and personal growth needs. Thus, it would be nearly impossible for a participant to have a transformational experience while experiencing risk that is perceived to be a threat to their safety and security. Leberman and Martin (2003) claim that the core of experiential learning is the thought that the participant grows through reflecting on challenging experiences that take them out of their comfort zone. These adventure experiences are intended for personal development and growth through pushing personal boundaries of the participants.

Many outdoor development or experiential education programs use the element of physical risk to create the disorienting impact on the participants. However, this has proven to be counterproductive in many cases, as participants are too afraid or disoriented to undergo any transformations or experience and learning. The risks need not be physical but can also be mental challenges or internal struggles that necessitate introspections and critical reflection (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005; Leberman & Martin, 2003). For example, Berman & Davis-Berman (2005) suggest that the element of physical risk or danger only hinders development:



It is quite possible that participating in an outdoor development program represents a dramatic departure from the comfort zone, and that any other push [perceived risk] would be harmful. Based on the idea of positive psychology, this perspective suggests that the greatest amount of change and growth comes from a place of comfort, security, and acceptance. This is consistent with Maslow's ideas about the hierarchy of human needs; the imperative being that for healthy growth and functioning, the basic needs of security and love must first be met. (p. 22)

Berman and Davis-Berman (2005) go on to suggest that outdoor and experiential education programs—whose goals typically include personal development—should do what they can to reduce, not increase, the perception of risk in their programs. Thus, the literature surrounding experiential education has increasingly advocated that physical risk can be an unnecessary element to experiential education programmatic structures (Martin, Leberman, & Neill, 2002).

### **Summary of Travel & Adventure Literature**

Adventure travel is one medium through which an adult can have transformational experiences. Travel—the physical movement of an individual from one geographic location to another—is one of the oldest and most innate of human experiences, and has been a platform for personal growth and development since the dawn of man. Adventure, on the other hand, has been described as any experience that challenges us to learn more about ourselves, other people, and/or the world. It can be physical, mental, emotional, psychological, social, cultural, and/or spiritual in nature. Combining travel and adventure provides individuals with unique

opportunities for transformational learning by utilizing experiential learning processes such as reflection and introspection. Through reflective exercises, one can gain new perspectives of themselves, others, and the world.

While highly personal in nature, literature suggests that reflective practices undergone in communion with others offer the most transformative potential from an adventure experience. Through experiential education and outdoor adventure programming, participants are able to harness the power of groups to provide powerful opportunities for exploring, discovering, embracing, and transforming themselves and their world.

### **The Hero's Journey**

A beautiful illustration of the power of adventure travel and the opportunities for transformational learning and personal transformations that they create can be found in Joseph Campbell's (2008) construct of the hero's journey. Campbell, a sociologist, anthropologist, and mythologist by training, found a common theme that runs throughout seemingly every story ever told, from Jesus to Buddha to Mohammad to the epic quests of the knights of the Middle Ages to ancient tales from the Greeks, Romans, and Jews (Roberts, 2005). He called this story the *monomyth* or the hero's journey. This monomyth not only symbolizes the human experience, it is the story of the human condition and the lives that we lead (Roberts, 2005).

At the most macro of levels, the hero's journey consists of three meta-phases: (a) the departure, (b) the initiation, and (c) the return (Campbell, 2008). Each phase consists of a variety of sub-stages, conditions, or elements that can be, but are not necessarily, present throughout the journey (Campbell, 2008).

In the first phase, the departure, we find the hero-to-be confronted with a significant problem, challenge, or opportunity. Campbell (2008) refers to this as the “call to adventure” (p. 28): the individual is presented with an opportunity for transformation, and it is up to the individual to decide whether or not to accept this challenge or call to adventure. If the call is accepted, the hero often receives some type of support or aid from another in the preparation for the adventure (although this help can also take place in the process of deciding to heed the call in the first place). Finally, the hero crosses what Campbell calls the *threshold of adventure*, indicating that the real adventure has started and the hero is now committed to the journey and has no choice but to continue with the adventure (Campbell, 2008).

In the second phase, called the initiation, the hero is faced with a variety of challenges, some of which threaten his or her life. Oftentimes, the hero meets another person who assists them in their adventure and in overcoming the challenges. Along the way, the hero is developing crucial skills, knowledge, and/or relationships. Finally, after enduring hardships and trials, the hero is faced with the ultimate test, where they are forced to use everything that he or she has learned in overcoming the final obstacle (Campbell, 2008).

The final stage is called the return. If the hero survives the final test, he or she then re-crosses the threshold of adventure back to their everyday life. However, the hero now has with them the elixir or the boon or the knowledge that they acquired and learned. Upon their return, the hero uses the elixir, boon, or knowledge to create transformation, change, or improvement in themselves, their community, and/or in the world (Campbell, 2008).

**Application of the hero's journey.** There are clear parallels and congruencies between organizational and personal leadership, adult-, experiential-, and transformational learning, and the hero's journey. Applying the hero's journey to the literature, it becomes obvious that the individual hears the call to adventure when there is a felt need for personal leadership development and growth, specifically in self-awareness, with the ultimate goal of improving their organizational leadership skills. By accepting the call to adventure and making the commitment to transforming themselves, the behavior of the hero-to-be is consistent with ALT, which suggests the intrinsic motivation of the learner and the need for experience to enhance learning. Acceptance of the call can take many forms, one of which is the decision to embark on an adventure experience.

Next, the hero heads off on their journey and crosses the threshold of adventure. This journey necessarily involves travel, adventure, and extra-ordinary experiences and challenges. Comfort zones are pushed, the hero is forced to confront their true selves, and is commonly challenged by forces of nature. This can take the form of a mountain climbing tour, a white-water rafting expedition, a trek through the jungles of South America, or a trip to China where cultural differences test the hero. As suggested by ELT, the hero reflects on their life, and on the experiences they have on the journey, and begins to learn, grow, and transform. Oftentimes, they do this with the help of others—a guide or facilitator, or even other participants in the adventure. In fact, without these helpers they would not be able to achieve the level of personal growth, learning, or skill development needed to conquer the final obstacle or challenge, as pointed out in TLT. With the help of others, our hero is indeed

victorious, and is able to slay the proverbial dragon, win the boon, find the magic elixir, and/or learn the critical lesson. After this final trial, the hero returns home, where they are able to apply the lesson learned or use the prize that they won for the betterment of themselves and others.

The hero’s journey neatly illustrates how travel and adventure, when combined with reflection, meaning making, and the assistance of others, can be transformative not only for the individual participant, but also for the organization, the community, and/or the world.

Table 1

*Transformational Learning, Adventure Travel, & the Hero’s Journey*

<b>Transformational Learning</b>	<b>Adventure Travel</b>	<b>Hero’s Journey</b>
Intrinsic Motivation	Purposeful Travel	Call to Adventure
Extra-Ordinary Experiences	Adventure Experiences	Challenges & Tests
Critical Reflection	Reflection, Conversations	The Ultimate Test
Supportive Environments	AT/EE Programs	Helpers & Aids

Table 1 above illustrates the commonalities between three of the core constructs found in the literature and discussed throughout this chapter. It is clear from this table that adventure travel is a valid and powerful approach for an individual to engage in the transformational learning process; The hero’s journey is a tidy metaphor and graphical illustration of the steps, stages, and experiences within adventure travel that have the potential to lead someone to transformation.

## Chapter 2 Summary

A review of adult learning theory (ALT) suggested that adults learn best when: (a) They have a need to learn, (b) the learning is self-directed, (c) prior experiences aid in the learning, (d) they are ready and prepared to learn, (e) the learning can be applied to real-life situations, and (f) they are intrinsically motivated to learn. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, adult learning theory suggests that adults learn best through experiences.

Experiential learning theory (ELT) is built on the foundation of six key principles: (a) learning is a process and should not be defined in terms of outcomes; (b) All learning is, in actuality, re-learning; (c) Learning is equal parts action and reflection; (d) Learning is a process of development and adaptation to the world; (e) the learner and the environment are in a symbiotic relationship with one another; and (f) learning is the process through which we transform thoughts, ideas, and knowing.

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle model demonstrates the process of learning that individuals cycle through: People have (a) concrete experiences; (b) reflective observations; (c) abstract conceptualizations; and (d) active experimentation. In other words, we have experiences; we think about those experiences and reflect upon why they happened and what they mean; we re-consider what we know and may change our paradigms and perspectives based upon our reflections; and we apply these newly formed ideas and perspectives to our world.

An exploration of transformational learning, derivative of both ALT and ELT, found that certain variables could significantly enhance the individual's ability to increase self-awareness and make personal transformations. These variables are: (a)

An intrinsic motivation to learn, change, or grow (as suggested in ALT); (b) an extraordinary experience that takes one out of their comfort zone and challenges them to re-think their views of themselves, others, and the world; (c) purposeful reflection upon those extra-ordinary experiences (as suggested by ELT); and (d) the criticality of the help and support of a group of other people.

Adventure travel is one medium through which an adult can have transformational experiences. Defined as the physical movement of a person from one place to another, travel is one of the oldest and most innate of human experiences, and has been a platform for personal growth and development since the dawn of man. Its counterpart, adventure, has been described as any experience that challenges us to learn more about ourselves, other people, and/or the world. It can be physical, mental, emotional, psychological, social, cultural, and/or spiritual in nature. Combining travel and adventure provides individuals with unique opportunities for reflection and introspection. Through reflective exercises, one can gain new perspectives of themselves, others, and the world.

While highly personal in nature, reflective practices undergone in communion with others offer the most transformative potential from an adventure experience. Through fields and industries such as experiential education and outdoor adventure programming, participants are able to harness the power of groups to provide powerful opportunities for exploring, discovering, embracing, and transforming themselves and their world.

In conclusion, then, adventure travel offers individuals unique opportunities for the type of growth, development, and transformational learning described in ALT

and ELT. That is, an exploration of self, of one's perspectives and paradigms and mental maps of not only self but of other people and cultures, and of ways of looking at the world. As an individual increases their self-awareness and becomes clearer on who they are and how they operate, they are better prepared and more skilled at not only leading themselves, but at leading people and transforming the world.



### **Chapter 3. Methodology**

This chapter provides an overview of the specific steps and processes undertaken in this study. Included are: (a) a review of the research problem, the general purpose of the study, and the research question; (b) a description of the research design of the study; (c) a discussion of the sources of data, the research instrument, the population, and the final sample; (d) an introduction to the proposed data analysis technique; (e) methods for ensuring internal validity; (f) plans for IRB submission; and (g) a chapter summary. It should be noted that this research project will utilize existing data as the sole source of data.

#### **Research Considerations & Design**

The following information regarding both the review of the literature and the pre-existing data set was crucial in designing a valid approach to conducting this exploratory research, as well as the subsequent data analysis processes.

**Research problem.** While research on the topics of transformational learning via adventure travel and experiential education programming is increasingly abundant, little evidence has been found of key drivers of travel-related personal growth (McKenzie, 2003; Ross, 2010; Sibthorp, 2003). In fact, “Many researchers and practitioners have indicated a need for further research on the means by which outcomes are achieved” (McKenzie, 2003, p. 10). To this end, several points relevant for this paper should be mentioned.

First, and most critically, most of the research that has been conducted has attempted to: (a) evaluate the effectiveness of a program in achieving a series of

prescribed outcomes, (b) identify future prescribed outcomes for experiential education programs, or (c) identify the activities that most effectively promote learning and development within the context of experiential education (e.g., Sibthorp, 2003). As discussed in Chapter 2, the highly personalized nature of travel and adventure makes it difficult to identify specific, prescribed outcomes of adventure travel experiences. Similarly, because each of the various elements present in an adventure experience have variable personal impacts on each individual participant, attempting to create an activity-based recipe for personal growth also has proven to be fruitless. Rather, research (e.g., Sibthorp, 2003) has suggested exploring the broader critical elements of an adventure experience that contribute to positive outcomes. These elements may include program participant-level considerations and/or course-level considerations (Sibthorp et al., 2007).

Secondly, while much research has been conducted on the causes, effects, and outcomes of travel experiences for youth and adolescents, little research has explored the critical events and variables associated with transformational learning via adventure travel experiences within the adult population (Orndorff, 1998). Finally, almost all of the research that has focused on adults who participated in an adventure experience has been of the case study variety. Thus, little to no research has been done that examines transformational learning in the adult population and provides a meta-analysis of the various adventure experiences of individuals (Orndorff, 1998).

Summarily, “Few studies have examined elements of travel that contribute to transformative experiences” (Ross, 2010, pp. 54-55). Thus, one might conclude that

the causations or catalysts of transformational learning as a result of adventure travel for the adult population have not thoroughly or sufficiently been explored.

**Purpose statement.** The purpose of this study was to explore the various activities, components, or critical events often found in adventure travel experiences that are commonly associated with transformational learning in adults through the use of secondary data.

**Research question.** The following research question guided this research in an attempt to better understand the relationship between the many elements of adventure travel and transformational learning: Which elements of adventure travel are associated with transformational learning in adults?

**Research design.** The primary research design was a secondary analysis of pre-existing data in the form of twelve de-identified interview transcripts. While the use of pre-existing data has a tendency to come with a series of issues for qualitative researchers, in particular the fit of the data with the original design or intention of the research project (Morse & Richards, 2002), no such issues exist in this research project. In addition to the general alignment of the pre-existing data with the original conceptual design and intentions of the researcher, the specific research design and methods that were implemented have been tweaked to align with the pre-existing data. For instance, the semi-structured interview questions asked by the original researcher helped inform the *a priori* coding process that was utilized in the analysis of the data, which will be described in additional detail later in Chapter 3.

As is often the case with secondary data (Creswell, 2009; Morse & Richards, 2002), and in order to attempt to address the research question, a qualitative approach

was found to be most appropriate. Certain characteristics of qualitative research methods lend themselves to its utilization in this research. First, qualitative research is most effective when data can be collected in a more natural setting, such as a conversation or interview rather than through a more formal situation such as a survey or a laboratory experiment. Qualitative research is also appropriate when the researcher is the instrument being used to collect data; that is, for example, through interviews. This allows the researcher to extract inductive themes or commonalities from the data. Qualitative research also allows for expanded exploration into the meanings behind particular responses and permits the interviewer to inquire into how the respondent came to those conclusions, thus deepening the learning and enhancing the ability of the researcher to make valid observations from the data (Creswell, 2009). Finally, qualitative studies can help uncover or describe the types of transformational learning that an individual has experienced, the extrapolation of these new perspectives or understandings, and the ultimate application of the transformational experience (Hoepfl, 1997).

A constructivist worldview was employed in conducting this research. A constructivist worldview ascertains that people “seek understanding of the world in which they live and work,” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8) and that they translate experience into subjective interpretations and new meanings. This is appropriately aligned with qualitative research theory (Creswell, 2009) and applies to the specifics of this research for several reasons. First, the transcripts described how the individuals that were interviewed attempted to make sense of and understand their world as they lived through the experiences of their adventure travel. As such, these individuals then

made subjective, highly personal interpretations and constructed and individualized meanings from their experiences. Each person brought intimately personal backgrounds and influences to their experiences, which helped color the experience for them. These include, but are not limited to: social, cultural, emotional, and interpersonal backgrounds and influences. Finally, other external influences such as the setting, the group they were with, and a myriad of additional possible variables could have played a role in their experience. In the end, and with all of these influences playing a role, each person did their best to interpret their experience, construct meaning from it, and ultimately applied that meaning and these learnings to their life. As such, a constructivist worldview was found to be appropriate.

A few final but important distinctions should be made about this research. This research was inductive; that is, themes and meanings will be built by reviewing pre-existing data in the form of transcripts. The design was naturally emergent. Although an a priori approach was used to initially code the data, inevitably additional codes, and ultimately themes, became apparent. The process itself was also emergent. Finally, the research can be said to be interpretive. Just as the interviewees brought highly personal backgrounds to the trip that helped shape the interpretation of their experiences, the researcher who interpreted the data undoubtedly brought personal history, perspectives, and experiences to the analysis process.

**Sources of data.** The sources of data for this research were twelve pre-existing, de-identified interview transcriptions. Consequently, these transcripts served as both the population and the sample for this research study.

Don Mankin, Ph.D., originally collected the data used in this research. Dr. Mankin describes himself on his website, [www.adventuretransformations.com](http://www.adventuretransformations.com), as:

A psychologist, educator, futurist, writer, consultant, and world traveler (whose) years as a professional psychologist, educator, and adventure travel enthusiast has led him to a deep understanding of how adventure travel experiences can transform our lives, work, relationships, and organizations. (Adventure Transformations, n.d.)

Dr. Mankin was introduced through a mutual friend from Pepperdine University who knew of our concurrent interests in adventure travel and transformational learning. In conversation with Dr. Mankin, it emerged that in 2009, Dr. Mankin had embarked on a process of collecting data via interviews for the development of a proposed book to be published by National Geographic. The book proposed to investigate, explore, and develop themes around personal transformations in the adults interviewed that directly resulted from the specific adventure travel experience. Dr. Mankin intended to look for themes or commonalities in the type of personal transformations that happen via adventure travel, as well as the conditions that contributed to those changes.

Dr. Mankin's original exploration into personal transformations from adventure experiences was phenomenological in nature, albeit for the purposes of writing a book rather than conducting research. Phenomenological research is most useful when the intention of the research is to explore the lived experiences of a small group of individuals, through which the researcher may be able to "develop patterns or relationships of meaning" (Creswell, 2009, p.13). Again, while the initial intent of

Dr. Mankin's interviews was not to perform phenomenological research, the data itself does align with the phenomenological tradition.

***Population.*** The population that was considered for this study was adults who have experienced personal transformations through adventure travel experiences. In order to filter that population down to a manageable sample size for his research, Dr. Mankin engaged three groups of people: (a) Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) member organizations and their clients, (b) individual members of the ATTA, and (c) non-ATTA members that he knew had experienced personal transformations through adventure travel.

Dr. Mankin, in conjunction with his friend and co-author Shannon Stowell, President of the ATTA, sent an email announcement out to organizational members of the ATTA that stated that Dr. Mankin was looking for ATTA member organizations who knew of adult clients who had had a life-changing, transformational experience on their adventure trips. It was made known to the ATTA member organizations that any identified individuals would potentially be interviewed regarding their experiences for research to be conducted by Dr. Mankin and Mr. Stowell.

In addition to adventure travel clients, Dr. Mankin invited individual members of ATTA or organizational members of ATTA (that is, employees of the travel companies) to participate in the study. In total, the ATTA serves over 2,000 adventure travel companies as well as hundreds of individual members. The announcement was sent to each company and to each individual member via the ATTA website and email list-serve.

Finally, in addition to the ATTA-based respondents, Dr. Mankin also considered interviewing people that he had personally interacted with through his travels and adventures. These individuals were not associated with the ATTA.

Dr. Mankin received a significant number of replies from individual ATTA members, clients and customers of ATTA tour operators, and from ATTA tour operators themselves who had experienced a transformation. All replies that were sent to Dr. Mankin included the individual's contact information, basic demographic data about the individual, and a brief description of their transformational experience.

***Sample selection.*** In deciding which of the nominated interviewees to select for his sample, Dr. Mankin reviewed the information supplied to him regarding the person's demographical data and their specific adventure travel experience. Dr. Mankin established a set of criteria that each of the potential interviewees would need to meet in order to be considered.

First and foremost, the individual must have had a self-described transformative experience. In other words, the person must have made a significant change in their career, relationship, or perspective of themselves, others, or the world. Secondly, Dr. Mankin was looking for diversity and variety in his population. For example, demographically, Dr. Mankin was looking for a mixture of male and female interviewees, as well as for variances in the ages of the population (i.e., some younger people and some older). Furthermore, having participants who had engaged in different types of activity or adventure travel was important; for instance, a mixture of *hard-adventure* experiences such as mountain climbing or white-water rafting and *soft-adventure* such as cultural tours or voluntourism. Finally, several of the ATTA



member organizations had nominated anywhere from three to five people that they believed would be good candidates for Dr. Mankin's study. In order to ensure sufficient diversity among operators, Dr. Mankin selected no more than one individual from each tour company.

*Data collection processes.* The selected research instrument for this study was the personal interview. Dr. Mankin chose to use the personal interview for several reasons. First, the personal interview gives interviewees an opportunity to expand on their answers while allowing the interviewer to probe for additional data. Secondly, interviews allow people to discuss and describe lived stories and experiences. In doing so, Dr. Mankin was able to obtain glimpses into the meaning-making process for the individuals. Finally, the personal interviews allowed Dr. Mankin to gather background about the interviewee that may influence personal construction or meaning-making.

From the wide variety of people nominated by ATTA operators, friends, and family, Dr. Mankin elected to contact approximately 38 individuals to set up an initial interview for his exploratory research. Dr. Mankin then called or emailed the individuals and introduced the idea of the interview and the possibility of the book to them. The individual provided a brief overview of their experience and the transformation that they had. If there was mutual agreement that a more structured interview would be appropriate and useful, Dr. Mankin followed up by sending the individual a list of the type of questions that could be asked in the interview. This was done in order to allow the interviewee an opportunity to adequately prepare for the interview.

Dr. Mankin conducted a total of 38 interviews. Each interview took approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Many of the interviewees live outside of the Los Angeles area. Thus, most of the interviews were conducted over the phone since it was more convenient for the interviewee. However, some interviews were conducted in person if time and geographic proximity allowed. Dr. Mankin asked each interviewee for permission to record their conversation, and, once approved, recorded the interviews on an audiocassette recorder. Finally, Dr. Mankin informed the interviewee that no one would listen to the tapes of the interview other than Dr. Mankin without the permission of the interviewee. Dr. Mankin received verbal consent from all interviewees.

In conducting the interviews, Dr. Mankin used a semi-structured interview protocol. The following four central questions were asked in the interviews:

1. General demographic information including age, gender, profession, etc.
2. Describe the trip(s) that changed, impacted, and/or transformed your life.
3. How did this trip (these trips) change you? What were you like before the trip(s)? What are you like now, as a result of the trip(s)?
4. What was it about the trip[s] that led to the change?

In addition to these core questions, Dr. Mankin also probed for additional information by asking additional, follow-up questions. Samples of these questions might have included:

- Were there particular incidents that profoundly impacted you? If so, please describe the incidents and characteristics as specifically as possible.

- Was it the quality, nature, and/or characteristics of the overall experience that impacted you more? If so, please describe the overall experience and the impact this experience had on you as specifically as possible.
- Please describe what you were experiencing psychologically, physically, spiritually, emotionally, etc. during and following the aforementioned incidents, or in response to the trip's critical characteristics you describe?
- Do you have anecdotal stories that illustrate the incidents, impacts, etc.?

Broadly speaking, the purpose of each interview was to generate good stories to be used in a book as well as to uncover psychological processes of transformation. To focus primarily on the latter, the questions may have been changed or at least probed differently.

***Processing the data.*** After the interviews were conducted, Dr. Mankin wrote a summary abstract for each interview that included his thoughts on the relevance and richness of the content of the interviewee's experience and the subsequent likelihood of the interview being included in his final selection of interviews. Dr. Mankin then reviewed the interview abstracts, and developed four themes or categories for the types of transformations the interviewees experienced. Referencing experiential education literature, these categories would be akin to outcomes.

The four themes or categories identified by Dr. Mankin were: (a) Self-Development, -Discovery, -Exploration, -Awareness; (b) Connections with Friends and Family; (c) Connections with History, Other Cultures, Nature, and the World; and (d) New Careers and Callings.

Dr. Mankin was able to confidently place each interviewee into one of these 4 categories. This was the extent of the processing that was performed on the data.

*Selecting the final sample.* In order to select the interviews that would be included in the book, Dr. Mankin established a set of selection criteria. The primary criterion was richness of the interview. This included factors such as: (a) how much information the interviewee presented, (b) the clarity of description of the experience, (c) the quality or richness of the content, (d) how much insight the interviewee had about the experience, the impact, and the subsequent transformation, and (e) the degree of psychological insight that the interviewee demonstrated. Dr. Mankin was also looking for diversity in his selections. This included demographic consideration such as age and gender, as well as experience-specific information such as length and type of experience, and type of transformation. Ultimately, Dr. Mankin identified a total 12 interviews that confidently met his criteria for richness, diversity, and transformation that were to be included in the book.

**Extended permission to use pre-existing data.** The publishing company never picked up the book proposal. As such, the interview recordings were quite literally sitting on a shelf collecting dust. Dr. Mankin offered to allow the use of the interviews for dissertation research purposes, if appropriate. Since the interviewees were informed that only Dr. Mankin would only review the data, it was important to receive extended permission from each interviewee for the use of the interview transcription in this research. Dr. Mankin emailed or called each of these individuals to ask for extended permission for another person to listen to and potentially analyze the interview tapes. Each of the twelve interviewees granted permission for additional

usage of the interview. Subsequently, Dr. Mankin de-identified each of the twelve interview transcriptions.

**IRB considerations.** This research involved the use of pre-existing data that was not publically available in which the subjects cannot be identified by the researcher. According to federal guidelines, specifically the Code of Regulations provided by the Department of Health and Human Services, Title 45 (Public Welfare), Part 46 (Protection of Human Subjects), item 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4), this research met the established criteria for an Exempt Review. As such, the primary researcher submitted an Exempt Review Application with all appropriate and supporting documents as indicated by GPS IRB guidelines. The form was first submitted to the dissertation chairperson for review and approval. Once the chairperson approved the application contents, attachments, and form, it was then submitted to the Pepperdine GPS IRB Coordinator. Approval was received on June 7, 2012 (see Appendix A).

**Ethical considerations.** Dr. Mankin carefully thought through relevant ethical considerations prior to the interviews being conducted. According to Dr. Mankin, possible risks included an interviewee experiencing negative psychological reactions to reliving a particularly traumatic or life-threatening event, or to surfacing potentially suppressed feelings, emotions, thoughts, or actions. For these reasons, all interviewees were advised that they could stop at any time should they feel the need.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The general data analysis approach that was taken in this research was a textual analysis of pre-existing data. Textual analysis is the review and analysis of

pre-existing data that is in some form of text, for example a transcript. It is an emergent and inductive process (Creswell 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Morse & Richards, 2002). As the data that was analyzed was pre-existing data in the form of text-based de-identified interview transcripts, textual analysis was found to be the most appropriate data analysis approach.

More specifically, thematic analysis—a specific type of textual analysis—was employed in this research. Thematic analysis has been described as the process of “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis typically involves a process of reviewing textual data (in this case, the de-identified transcriptions), coding the data, and identifying emergent themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Morse & Richards, 2002). This process may, but does not always, result in the development of theoretical models or constructs from the data (Creswell, 2009).

An *a priori* approach was taken in the initial coding of the data. Stemming from both the review of the literature, specifically related to transformational learning, and from the semi-structured interview questions asked by the original researcher, the following seven codes were used to initially review the data:

1. Basic demographic and personal background information;
2. Basic information about the adventure travel experience;

3. Motivation for going on the trip;
4. Evidence of the participant pushing some comfort zone;
5. Evidence of reflection or meaning-making;
6. Interactions with other people; and
7. Evidence of transformational learning.

**Steps in the data analysis process.** Qualitative research literature suggests a multi-step approach to analyzing the data that will take the form of content analysis (Creswell, 2009; Morse & Richards, 2002). The following process was used in this research project:

1. The de-identified interview transcripts were electronically transferred from the original researcher to the primary researcher.
2. The transcripts were uploaded into MS Word and NVivo9 software programs and prepared for analysis.
3. The primary researcher thoroughly read the twelve transcripts in order to develop a general sense of the pre-existing data.
4. The primary researcher then coded the data using a series of *a priori* codes, described above. Throughout the coding process, notes were taken to capture emergent thoughts, ideas, and abstractions. The primary researcher employed a bracketing technique throughout the coding process. This technique, described as the act of viewing each transcript as an independent data point without allowing meanings or interpretations from other data points (i.e., transcripts) to color its' interpretation (Bednall, 2006), will help ensure intra-rater reliability and consistency

in coding across the transcripts. Furthermore, the primary researcher engaged in an on-going process of code refinement, development, and application that has been referred to as *constant comparison* (e.g., Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, the primary researcher holistically evaluated all of the transcripts and the coding system to determine if any additional codes were emerging from, and needed to be applied to, the data. This process, sometimes called *epoche*, was “dynamically integrated into the sequential progress of the whole research method from the very beginning of the study” (Bednall, 2006, p. 124).

5. Upon completion of the coding, the primary researcher conferred with two secondary researchers, who had individually reviewed the coded transcriptions for consistency and accuracy prior to the meeting. The primary researcher described the process used to code the data for the secondary researchers, shared relevant notes or memos captured in the coding process, and articulated the rationale for the codes assigned to each transcript. The primary researcher and the secondary researchers then engaged in a critical evaluation of the coding done by the primary researcher. In this conversation, the secondary researchers asked questions about or commented on the coding, and made recommendations for adjusting the codes and how the transcripts had been coded.

6. Per the conference with the secondary researchers, the primary researcher then made the appropriate changes to the codes or coding process and did a thorough review of the coding of the transcripts.

7. Once all transcripts had coded and reviewed, themes were developed based on the frequency and groupings of codes, the aforementioned notes and memos,



and/or the primary researcher's broader inductive interpretation of what was said both within and across transcripts, how something was said or communicated, and what was meant by the persons being interviewed. Themes also emerged after reviewing each of the transcripts and identifying commonalities and patterns among the codes in the transcripts.

8. Findings can be found in Chapter 4.

9. Interpretation of the findings can be found in Chapter 5.

**Data analysis tools.** The software programs Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and NVivo9 were all utilized in the analysis of the data. NVivo9 is a program from QSR International that provides researchers with the tools to easily and effectively organize large amounts of qualitative data, such as interview transcripts. The software allows a researcher to code the data, develop themes, and identify similarities across and within transcripts, ultimately enhancing the researcher's ability to extract inductive conclusions, generalities, and summations from the data (QSR International, NVivo9 Overview). This program was used in the a priori coding of the data, as well as in the development of demographic information and trip-specific data. Microsoft Word was a tool also utilized in the coding process, while Microsoft Excel supported the development of all tables, figures, and calculations that were necessary throughout the data analysis process.

**Presentation & interpretation of the data.** Findings from the data can be found in Chapter 4, while a discussion about—and interpretations from—the findings can be found in Chapter 5. Included in this discussion are: (a) a procedural description of the steps of adventure travel that can be a catalyst for transformational

learning; (b) a discussion of whether or not the findings from the data were in alignment with the existing literature; (c) the identification of elements of the adventure travel experience not previously identified by the data that played a central role in the transformational learning of the adult participants; and (d) a discussion of the relevance and implications of the findings for organizations and individuals.

**Means to ensure internal validity.** Validity of data refers to the accuracy of the researcher's findings and conclusions (Creswell, 2009). The validity of the data and subsequent analysis process is a top priority for this research. In order to ensure internal validity, several approaches were taken:

1. Having a clearly defined analysis process that included the use of an *a priori* coding system helped to ensure internal validity.
2. The use of multiple transcripts is a form of triangulation that added credibility to the research (Creswell, 2009), as the codes and themes that were developed and conclusions that were drawn were informed by more than one transcript.
3. The primary researcher worked diligently to ensure intra-rater reliability by employing a variety of techniques including bracketing, constant comparison, and *epoche* approaches to analyzing the data, as described above.
4. Two secondary researchers were employed to review and critically evaluate the coding of the primary researcher (as described above). This process added to the inter-rater reliability of the transcript interpretation.

5. Anomalous data that was in any way contradictory to the major findings or themes was presented, as well. In doing so, the account is deemed to be more holistic, comprehensive, and realistic (Creswell, 2009).

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

The purpose of the research was to explore the various activities, components, or critical events often found in adventure travel experiences that are commonly associated with transformational learning in adults. The specific research question that guided this research was: Which elements of adventure travel are associated with transformational learning in adults? In order to answer this question, a qualitative research design was employed. The sources of data for this research were twelve de-identified interview transcriptions. A textual analysis was performed on the data, using an *a priori* approach to coding and analyzing the data. A variety of software programs were utilized as tools to assist in the coding, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the data. The primary researcher coded the data using a series of *a priori* codes that were developed from a review of the literature in conjunction with the semi-structured questions posed to the interviewees by the original researcher. Two secondary researchers then critically evaluated the codes and coding process to ensure validity. Based upon feedback and suggestions from these secondary researchers, appropriate changes to the coding and coding process were made. After the transcripts were coded, emergent themes were identified and described in Chapter 4. Finally, these themes were found to consist of a formulaic process that is described in detail in Chapter 5, along with a discussion of expected findings from the literature, as well as the relevance and implications of the data.

## Chapter 4. Findings

This chapter will present findings that have been extracted from a detailed textual analysis of the data. After a brief re-introduction to the literature and the methods used, a summary of the demographic and trip-specific data from the transcripts will be presented. Next, seven emergent themes will be described. Finally, several additional findings of note will be discussed.

### Review of Literature & Methods

A review of relevant literature found that: (a) adults learned most effectively from authentic experiences that they can apply to their current situations and issues, and that (b) engaging in experiences that demand critical reflection on existing assumptions and perspectives and subsequent meaning-making from that reflection was central to all transformational learning. The literature also suggested that adventure travel is one of the most common and powerful mediums through which an adult can increase self-awareness and have transformational learning experiences.

Pursuant to the literature review, the purpose of the research was to explore the various activities, components, or critical events often found in adventure travel experiences that are commonly associated with transformational learning in adults. The research question that guided this research was: Which elements of adventure travel are associated with transformational learning in adults? To address this question, a qualitative research design was employed. A textual analysis of the 12 de-identified interview transcriptions was performed using an *a priori* approach to code and analyze the data. Once coded, the transcriptions were thoroughly analyzed to identify commonly cited critical factors and/or emergent themes.

## **Summary of Data**

In total, twelve interview transcripts were analyzed in this qualitative research project. The transcripts represent a diverse group of individuals who were interviewed: There is a significant range and mixture of age; gender; experience level; trip length, location, and type; and transformational learning in the data set. The transcripts ranged in length from 15 pages up to 38 pages.

The broad range of quality of the interviews was stark: Some interviewees' responses did not address the questions asked, were tangential to the topic at hand, and/or needed further prompting from the interviewer; other interviewees were eloquent in their reflections and needed little prodding to elicit exciting responses. The richness of the data housed in the transcripts mirrors the ability of the interviewee to adequately address the questions in an intelligible format. For the most part, the transcripts are thoroughly descriptive of the interviewees' lived experiences: the places where the experience took place, the events that occurred, the people that impacted the experience, the personal reflections and meanings that emerged, the transformational learning that occurred, and ultimately, the personal transformations that resulted from the experience.

Brief descriptions of each of the individual transcripts and the associated interviewees, their adventure travel experiences, the transformational learning that they experienced as a result of their adventure travels, and the outcomes of this learning can be found in Appendix B.

**Demographic data.** Of the 12 interviewees, seven were male and five were female. The ages of the interviewees at the time of their adventure travel experience ranged from 23 years up to 61 years old, with an average age of 37.5 years old and a median age of 38 years old. The average age for men at the time of the adventure travel experience was 43.3 years old; the average age for women at the time of the adventure travel experience was 29.4 years old. More demographic data can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

*Demographic Information for Interviewees*

<b>DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION</b>			
<b>INTERVIEW</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>AGE GROUP</b>
INT1	Female	24	< 30
INT2	Male	23	< 30
INT3	Female	27	< 30
INT4	Male	51	50 < 59
INT5	Female	32	30 < 39
INT6	Male	61	> 60
INT7	Male	50	50 < 59
INT8	Female	23	< 30
INT9	Male	40	40 < 49
INT10	Male	42	40 < 49
INT11	Female	41	40 < 49
INT12	Male	36	30 < 39

**Trip-specific data.** A summary of the specifics of individual adventure experiences of the interviewees can be found in Table 3. Included in this description are key variables such as: Trip Location, Trip Length, and a brief description of the adventure that the individual participated in.

Table 3

*Trip Information for Interviewees*

<b>INTERVIEW</b>	<b>LOCATION(S)</b>	<b>LENGTH</b>	<b>ADVENTURE</b>
<b>INT1</b>	Copper Canyon [MX]	8 < 14 Days	Cultural Tour
<b>INT2</b>	Costa Rica	> 14 Days	Conservation
<b>INT3</b>	Cambodia	> 14 Days	Bike Trip
<b>INT4</b>	Vietnam	8 < 14 Days	Cultural Tour
<b>INT5</b>	Iran, Iraq	> 14 Days	Cultural Tour
<b>INT6</b>	Zimbabwe	< 7 Days	Safari Trek
<b>INT7</b>	Grand Canyon	< 7 Days	Rafting Trip
<b>INT8</b>	Patagonia [Chile]	> 14 Days	Horseback Riding
<b>INT9</b>	Alaska	8 < 14 Days	Backpacking
<b>INT10</b>	Portugal, Peru	8 < 14 Days	Cultural Tour
<b>INT11</b>	Nepal	> 14 Days	Mountain Climbing
<b>INT12</b>	Latin America [Tour]	> 14 Days	Cultural Tour

Travel destinations for the particular experiences described by the interviewees were well distributed around the globe. Five destinations were in South

and/or Central America; three travelers went to Asia; two of the destinations were in North America; and one each went to Africa and the Middle East.

In terms of trip length, six of the adventures lasted longer than two weeks, with several being several months long. Four trips were between one and two weeks in length; two trips were one week or less. Women were more likely to take extended travel times: four of the five women traveled for more than two weeks; only two of the seven men went on excursions longer than two weeks. Finally, it is interesting to note that younger travelers had a tendency to engage in longer trips, while older travelers spent less time traveling.

The types of adventures that these individuals engaged in represents a broad spectrum. As detailed in Table 4, many chose to head off on a life-changing cultural tour of a specific location or region, while others chose to challenge themselves physically through bike, whitewater rafting, backpacking, and mountain climbing excursions. The diversity of these adventure types certainly adds an element of validity to the forthcoming findings, as they are all so unique yet so strikingly similar in terms of results and process.

### **Emergent Themes**

Emerging from the data are seven themes that represent the common experiences of the individuals who engaged in adventure travel experiences that contributed to their transformational learning. In most cases, these themes were represented in each and every interview; a small collection of these themes were found in most, but not all, of the transcripts. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, these themes consisted of a formulaic pattern of approaches, events, and interactions that



ultimately led to transformational learning for these adults. The seven themes identified through an analysis of the data are: (a) experiencing a call to adventure; (b) being open to experience & transformation; (c) entering a zone unknown; (d) immersion in extra-ordinary & challenging experiences; (e) engaging in meaningful interactions with others; (f) re-connecting to self; and (g) taking action.

**A call to adventure.** The interview transcriptions revealed that 11 of the 12 individuals were intrinsically motivated and inspired to engage in adventure travel experiences in order to do something new, exciting, and different with their lives. Joseph Campbell (2008) referred to this motivation as a call to adventure. For the individuals whose stories comprise the data for this research, the decision to go on an adventure travel experience was prompted by a variety of factors. In some cases, this call was the result of a particular experience or event that prompted the need or desire to travel and change. In other cases, the call was the manifestation of a series of events over time that, when combined, left the individual with a need for transformation.

Six of the interviewees knew that they were looking for something different out of life, but didn't have any specific goals or expectations as they began their travels. They were compelled to seek out something new, something strange, something adventurous, without knowing what that something was, what form it would take, and how it might impact them. Quite simply, they wanted to learn, change, and grow personally and/or professionally. For example, Interview4<sup>1</sup> and his

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<sup>1</sup> All direct quotes used in this dissertation were obtained from pre-existing interview transcriptions from personal interviews and communications with participants in the Transformational Travel Interviews data set collected by Don Mankin, Ph.D.

wife were successful financiers on Wall Street whose children had left the family nest. They were both looking for passion and inspiration in life: “We were already at that point in our lives to do something different. We wanted to do something far away (and) adventuresome.” A friend happened to be going to Vietnam on business, and invited them along on the trip. This “call” was exactly what they needed at the time.

Interview11 had become restless with her work as a teacher and administrator and in her relationship with her husband; her literal call to adventure came from a friend who made a sudden decision to go to Nepal for a three-week hiking and cultural excursion: “One of my friends phoned and said, ‘I am going to Nepal. Are you coming?’ And I said... ‘Hmm. I guess if you are going, I am going.’”

Three adventurers had very specific goals in mind for their adventure experiences. For Interview2, the goal was to get experience in his chosen field of study, renewable environmental resource economics. Thus, he chose to go to Costa Rica for six months to gain some field experience, as everything he knew about the topic was from textbooks and lectures. He described his desired outcome this way:

I realized when I graduated that everything I knew about saving the environment, quote, unquote, was out of books and magazines, and I really didn’t know what it really meant. So I decided to do a volunteer program, a voluntourism thing. I said to myself, “I am going to go down there [Costa Rica] and get a little bit of experience, kind of see what it is like, then come back to the States and get my desk job working for, you know, Sierra Club”—that was my plan.

Interview5 found herself at a crossroads in her life and wanted to re-dedicate herself to her passions through her travels to Iran and Iraq, places she had heard much about from friends and former professors. Deep down, she wanted to be an artist and a filmmaker, but her career path was divergent from those goals. She says: “This trip was absolutely about affirming my affinities in life. This trip was me giving myself the gift that it is ok to pursue [my passion] in life. I really went with the intention of it being transformative.”

For Interview7, the series of trips that he went on with his children had a very specific outcome in mind: To develop closer bonds with them. He states:

I decided that I needed to reorient the focus of my life not to put more into it than I knew to be meaningful and important and purposeful. And right at the top of the list was more time with my family. My thought was, or my hope was, that in a way I would be kind of building the alchemy for intimacy. The idea was, “Let’s go off and have an adventure. Let’s do something different than we normally do.”

Two of the interviewees were simply looking to have fun and enjoy themselves on their respective trips. For instance, Interview9, who is an experienced outdoorsman who has taken several backpacking and mountaineering expeditions with his close friends, was simply looking to get outdoors, go on another adventure with his traveling companions, and have fun.

Finally, one individual went on her trip because she was the trip leader and guide, and was being compensated for leading the excursion for a group of travelers to Copper Canyon, in Mexico. As a professional tour guide, she clearly had a passion

for travel and adventure; still, as she was being compensated for going on the trip and was not intentionally pursuing a transformational experience, it would be inaccurate to suggest that she was intrinsically motivated. Table 4 summarizes the theme of experiencing a call to adventure.

Table 4

*Summary of a Call to Adventure*

THEME	DESCRIPTION	SAMPLE QUOTE
A Call to Adventure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The intrinsic motivation or catalyst for going on an adventure travel experience</li> <li>▪ Often stems from a feeling of discontentment with life; something is ‘missing’</li> <li>▪ Can – but does not need to – include a specific intended outcome for the adventure</li> </ul>	<p>I realized when I graduated that everything I knew about saving the environment, quote, unquote, was out of books and magazines, and I really didn’t know what it really meant. So I decided to do a volunteer program, a voluntourism thing. I said to myself, ‘I am going to go down there [Costa Rica] and get a little bit of experience, then come back to the States and get my desk job working for, you know, Sierra Club’ – that was my plan.</p> <p>– <i>Interview2</i></p>

**Being open to experience & transformation.** Simply having a call to adventure and being intrinsically motivated to go an adventure experience was not enough for these travelers. Examples abound of people being motivated to learn, yet for some reason not fully immersing themselves in the experience, therefore retarding the possibility of growth and learning. There is an important distinction to be made,

then, between being motivated to learn and actually being willing to engage in the transformational learning process.

Each of the individuals interviewed was found to be fully open to the myriad of experiences that they encountered throughout their travels, and, just as importantly, open to the possibility of transformation from those experiences. This sense of openness—including having both an open mind and an open heart as they engaged with foreign lands, peoples, and experiences—was found throughout the transcriptions and played a central role in the transformation process of these people. This openness manifested itself as a mental approach to their adventures, as an attitude that they embodied as they launched into the unknown, as a sense of adventure, as someone who has no expectations, and as a willingness to throw caution to the wind and go wherever the current of the experience took them.

For Interview1, being open to experience was a critical part of her work as a travel guide and played a crucial role in her rededication to her career:

This experience opened my eyes to the fact that ... all I had to do was let the unexpected happen; to be open to it. I think it opened my eyes also to the reason why we need to experience the unexpected and that as adults we don't lend ourselves to learning opportunities as easily in our home lives, and when you are traveling it becomes easier to say, "OK, I am ready for whatever comes my way, or I would like to learn about, blah...." I just needed to be open minded enough.

The topic of trip expectations arose several times under the theme of being open to experience. Expectations—or the lack thereof—helped the individuals be

more open to experiencing all that their respective trips had to offer. Interview 1 espoused her thoughts on the role that expectations play on a trip when she said: “When you have no expectations, everything works. When you have a lot of expectations, often nothing works.”

Interview 2 says of his experience leading up to his time in Costa Rica: “I probably should have done some research before I went, but I am glad that I didn’t because I didn’t really have any expectations. I (threw) caution to the wind and said, ‘Let’s go experience some of this stuff!’”

Interview 9 demonstrates that being open to experience and not letting expectations get in the way of learning was the keystone to his transformation:

I think it is important to realize that I didn’t seek this [transformation].

This was an involuntary byproduct of the adventure or the environment that opened the door. Whatever I went there looking for manifested itself in ways I never thought was going to happen.

In unique ways, the interviewees each articulated how being open to experience was a critical component of the transformational learning process that they experienced from their travels. For these interviewees, being open to experience was a mindset and a way of approaching their travels. As Interview 5 so eloquently states: “Look, you [can] sit and wait for something amazing to happen... [or] you can sort of set the odds in motion of it happening by getting yourself off somewhere where something magical could happen. Table 5 summarizes the theme of being open to experience and transformation.

Table 5

*Summary of Being Open to Experience & Transformation*

THEME	DESCRIPTION	SAMPLE QUOTE
Being Open to Experience & Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A mindset and approach that the traveler takes throughout the adventure experience</li> <li>▪ Having a sense of adventure</li> <li>▪ Willingness to immerse oneself in experiences and activities without knowing what the outcome will be</li> <li>▪ Not sticking to expectations but rather going with the flow</li> </ul>	<p>All I had to do was let the unexpected happen; to be open to it. When you are traveling it becomes easier to say, “OK, I am ready for whatever comes my way, or I would like to learn about, blah...” I just needed to be open minded enough.</p> <p>– <i>Interview 1</i></p>

**Entering a zone unknown.** Another key finding from the interview data suggests that being in a new, unknown, and foreign place is invariably important in the transformational learning process. For these adventurers, leaving their comfort zones and entering a “zone unknown” (Campbell, 2008, p. 48) had a powerful impact.

Of paramount importance to this theme is the psychological and physical separation from the everyday world in which people live. This separation provided these travelers with new and exciting challenges and opportunities that pushed participants to re-consider perspectives, values, and priorities in life. For many of the interviewees, being in a new place signified an opportunity to be released from the pressures of every day life; to be able to play, experiment, and live free from

expectations and obligations; to be free to re-create themselves as a new person in a new location. They no longer needed to act a certain way, put on a particular face, play a specific role, or do what others expected of them. They could quite simply be who they were as an individual.

Interview5, for example, discussed how this sense of freedom to simply *be* played a large part in her submission to her passion for creating art: “When you travel you are not in your head. You are not worrying. You are not stressed. It is not the normal internal dialogs that are going on. You are freed from that.”

For Interview6, this sense of physical and psychological separation meant being willing to test some of his deeply held beliefs and assumptions about himself and his world. For him, experiences that were outside his normal frame of reference had a huge impact:

You become more open to the possibility of changing some of [your] behaviors or principles.... You become open to absorbing some new things, things that have not been part of your paradigms. When you take people out of their comfort zone and out of their confidence zone, you actually create openness and a greater openness to learning things and to accepting new things or different things.

Several travelers experienced immediate shifts in perspective as a result of being in a new location. For Interview9, Alaska was a magnificent place that led him to immediately reconsider his perspectives of himself and his world. The immensity of the land and the space there made him feel so small, and forced him to re-think his



priorities in life and his perspectives on what was important to him. He describes his thoughts during his first time in Alaska this way:

You are in Alaska. So it is zero feet above sea level and the glacier floor is 3,000 feet. But above you is 5,000 feet of pure granite relief and you are in a valley that is 10 times the size of Yosemite Valley. I mean, it is ridiculous the expanse. And, you know, there you are. It is just no question life altering. Being from the Lower 48, I don't think you can fathom, I certainly couldn't, the bald wilderness you were going to encounter from the minute you got on these small planes.

Table 6 summarizes the theme of entering a zone unknown.

Table 6

*Summary of Entering a Zone Unknown*

THEME	DESCRIPTION	SAMPLE QUOTE
Entering a Zone Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Travel to a foreign/new place</li> <li>▪ This place creates a physical and psychological separation from 'the normal world' form which the traveler came</li> <li>▪ Allows freedom from expectations and pressures</li> <li>▪ Provides space for reflection and transformational learning</li> </ul>	<p>You become more open to the possibility of changing some of [your] behaviors or principles.... You become open to absorbing some new things, things that have not been part of your paradigms. When you take people out of their comfort zone, you actually create openness and a greater openness to learning things and to accepting new things or different things.</p> <p>– <i>Interview6</i></p>

For all of these travelers, travelling to new and unknown places was a central element in their transformations. These locations offered critical opportunities for them to gain a sense of perspective, to experiment with new ways of being, to live without expectation, to see things anew, and to connect with themselves at new and deeper levels. The places inspired adventure, lent themselves to reflection and introspection, and created the necessary psychological space for transformation.

**Extra-ordinary & challenging experiences.** Not surprisingly, perhaps the most commonly described element of the travel experience that contributed to the process of transformational learning was having extraordinary experiences that pushed the adventurers' comfort zones and challenged the individual to think, act, or problem-solve in new ways. These experiences took a variety of forms. For some people, the physical challenges associated with their travels were most powerful. For Interview7, who describes himself as being much more at home "in a board meeting or having dinner at some fancy restaurant" than in the outdoors, being in nature was uncomfortable yet powerful, and helped him connect with himself on a deeper level:

We are who we are and it is partly because we are planted and rooted and form fit to the reality we live in. And we become comfortable and secure and our identity stays fixed in that mode. Now you take me out of that and put me in a life jacket and 48 degree water temperature which is deadly and put me in a sleeping environment where there is rattle snakes and have me be there worrying about protecting my son, but also loving the experience just for myself, and no cell phones and

no normal thoughts and you find yourself being transformed.

Encountering another reality causes other parts of you to come alive.

In addition to the physical challenges associated with traveling, cultural and social experiences take on a whole new meaning, as well. For some, their experiences represented a significant departure from their culture and social norms, and challenged them to be open to new customs, ideas, and social structures. Interview11, who is a teacher and linguist by training, found out that the real thing was very much different than knowing about languages and cultures from reading guidebooks:

I arrived in a country where I couldn't read the street signs. Some the most basic things in your life, how do you go to the bathroom, how you eat, how you shake hands, were totally different. Where people said, "How could you possibly blow your nose and put it in your pocket?" Good question. "How do you sit on the toilet that somebody else has sat on?" Good question. I had never been in a place like Asia where... where so many of these basic things are different.

As a recent college graduate who had never been outside the United States, Interview2's immersion in a place and culture that he knew nothing about, and which had very few amenities, was both challenging and therapeutic for him, and allowed him to connect more closely with nature and with himself:

The rain forest is a whole different thing. It was life changing; it just turned my world upside down in terms of what people in other parts of the world have to go through in their daily lives. Everything was so different than how I was used to living. It really took me out of my

comfort zone, the sense of being unplugged, of not hearing cars every day, or telephones. I felt myself get into a much more natural rhythm.

For others, the emotional impact of their experience was profound. Being charged by an elephant certainly pushed Interview6's emotional comfort zones. As a result of this "unpredictable" experience, he realized that he had been taking life for granted and began reprioritizing his life. He describes the experience as such: "Knowing that you had been confronted by something which was natural and completely unpredictable and completely unexpected was absolutely terrifying...."

For Interview8, riding down a mountainside on the back of an old packhorse was both thrilling and emotionally exhausting, and ultimately caused her to become a much more trusting person.

Interview9 used the "extreme environments" that he was in to connect with himself in deeper and more meaningful ways than he ever could have at home:

The things that come out of me as a result of the extreme environment that you are in has revealed to me myself in a way that I wouldn't even benefit from therapy because you are protecting yourself even in therapy. I am just an average guy. But we are all people and we all have worries and concerns and we are all searching. And accidentally in the wilderness, the wilderness has revealed sides of me that I couldn't run from. I couldn't lie about, I couldn't manipulate. I couldn't be anything at that moment in time but me.

The interviewees each faced extra-ordinary physical, cultural/social, and/or emotional challenges that were foundational experiences for the transformational learning that they experienced. These experiences were central to the critical reflection, introspection, and meaning-making that they engaged in.

Table 7 summarizes the theme of extra-ordinary & challenging experiences.

Table 7

*Summary of Extra-Ordinary & Challenging Experiences*

THEME	DESCRIPTION	SAMPLE QUOTE
Extra-Ordinary & Challenging Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Experiences that push physical, psychological, cultural, etc. comfort zones</li> <li>▪ Challenge the traveler to think, act, and/or problem-solve in new ways</li> <li>▪ Oftentimes, these experiences are the critical event upon which the individual reflects and makes meaning</li> </ul>	<p>I arrived in a country where I couldn't read the street signs. Some the most basic things in your life, how do you go to the bathroom, how you eat, how you shake hands, were totally different. Where people said, "How could you possibly blow your nose and put it in your pocket?" Good question. "How do you sit on the toilet that somebody else has sat on?" Good question. I had never been in a place like Asia where so many of these basic things are different.</p> <p>– Interview 11</p>

**Meaningful interactions.** Some of the most powerful and transformative experiences these travelers had were meaningful interactions with other people. Interestingly enough, these interactions happened at various points throughout the entire learning process: some interactions were the impetus of the call to adventure,

while others were the central extra-ordinary event that eventually led to period of reflection and meaning-making. The individuals and peoples that the interviewees met played several significant roles. Some were there to help the traveler through their challenges; others *were* the source of the challenges; and others still were inspirations or guideposts for the adventurers.

For example, Interview1 had an intimate encounter with some Mexican Indians who have intentionally removed themselves from mainstream society so as to preserve their culture, heritage, and familial bonds. The interaction with these peoples was “an exchange that enabled them to actually preserve the culture rather than destroy it.” It was “cultural interaction in a meaningful way.”

For Interview3, the opportunity to interact with children and villagers throughout Cambodia, and to see the impact she was making by raising money and educational resources, was a key factor in her decision to start her own company. And it wasn't only the locals that inspired her—the impact that these experiences had on other travelers who took part in helping these children was equally powerful for her.

Interview5 was inspired by the artists that had made her trip to Iran and Iraq so meaningful, even though many of them have been dead for hundreds of years: “I feel like the artists give me value and give meaning to life. I wanted to gather energy and blessings from all of these artistic cultures and civilizations to grant me the strength to pursue that path, too.”

Interview6 and his companions engaged in lengthy conversation and reflection after their encounter with the charging elephant, a talk that ultimately spurred the start of his new company:

I mean we spent a lot of time talking about it around the campfire. And that was where you started to realize that what we had shared was this extraordinary, threatening, and terrifying incident that had affected each of us somewhat differently.

For Interview7, spending time with his son out in nature was a moving and meaningful experience that helped bond the two of them together: “Lying out with your little boy in the middle of the canyon at night when the stars are just screaming at you, and laughing as you are tumbling down the river... everything about it was just so other-worldly.”

Finally, Interview11’s time in Nepal not only inspired her to create her own organization, but also gave her an opportunity to develop life-long friendships:

You make friends with people on a different level across the world that you never thought you could make friends... that you really knew nothing about. You become very close to the people that you are with all of them. And they know you at... at the most primal levels.

As demonstrated, meaningful interactions with people played a core role in the interviewees’ process of transformational learning. Without these interactions—which were often spontaneous but occasionally were orchestrated—the potential and possibility of transformation for the individual travelers would have been significantly lessened.

Table 8 on the following page summarizes the theme of having meaningful interactions.

Table 8

*Summary of Meaningful Interactions*

THEME	DESCRIPTION	SAMPLE QUOTE
Meaningful Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interpersonal interactions that have significant impacts on the traveler’s transformational learning</li> <li>▪ Occur at various points throughout the adventure travel experience [from the ‘Call’ to ‘Action’]</li> <li>▪ Different roles for the people with whom the travelers interacted: Inspiration; Helper, mentor, guide; Antagonist</li> </ul>	<p>Lying out with your little boy in the middle of the canyon at night when the stars are just screaming at you, and laughing as you are tumbling down the river... everything about it was just so otherworldly.</p> <p>– Interview7</p>

**Re-connection to self.** Although many of the transcripts neglect to thoroughly articulate the integral processes that the individuals went through as they attempted to make sense of their experiences, it is clear that these events invariably led to a period of reflection and meaning-making for the travelers. Whereas the literature suggests that having a group to support you in this reflection process is instrumental, these individuals largely described solo processes that occurred without the presence of others. It is also important to note that this period of reflection typically, but not always, occurred during the travel experience itself. For several travelers, some of the most profound periods of reflection and introspection came after they returned home, only then to realize what they had been through, and only then beginning the real process of creating meaning from those experiences.



However and whenever this period of reflection and meaning-making occurred, each of the travelers engaged in reflective exercises that helped bring life and meaning to their experiences and were essential in the transformational learning process. For the interviewees and adventurers whose stories of transformation were told through their interview transcripts, the heart of the transformational learning process, and the most critical outcome of it, was experiencing a reconnection with the self. All of the extraordinary experiences, all of the meaningful interactions with other people, and all of the reflection and meaning-making invariably led to one outcome: An increase in self-awareness. This self-awareness took many forms for the different individuals, but centered on the core ideas of (a) identifying one's purpose or mission in life, (b) developing new perspectives and understanding of self and others, and (c) rearranging one's priorities in life.

For many of the travelers, the most meaningful learning was a newfound awareness of self, often revealing new sides of oneself that had been hidden or unknown for years. Interview5's experiences showed a new side of herself:

There are facets of you that you keep oppressed or repressed that you are not even aware of, and when you are traveling, because you are so open, these sides of you come out and you are just, "Oh, my, is that me, too?" You get to honor a side of you and let that part live and be more of a part of your life when you come back from the trip, too.

Interview8 found that her adventures opened herself up to the person that she is deep down inside: "When you are doing something adventurous, you are really out

there in terms of who you are. There is no suit and tie. There are no pretenses. You are who you are as a natural person.”

Interview9 suggested that you cannot hide from yourself when you are out in the wilderness, and described an emotional response to his self-discovery process:

The whole thing was just so outside your frame of reference that it started, in time, to tap you into something about yourself that you had to confront. And some of it was not... was not good things. There were things that you discovered about yourself that you could suppress in your daily life because you didn't have to be so exposed. You didn't have to be so vulnerable. For that time in Alaska people get to see the real INT9 and what is really cool is that INT9 gets to see the real INT9. That is really so important for me. There [are] times where you are into the rhythm of your breath and all of the sudden, you are the best INT9 that I can be. You are feeling alive. You are feeling your body. You are feeling your power and there are often times where that feeling for me is so overwhelming that ...the tears are just streaming down my face because I am blown away that I am feeling this way.

Interview11's time in Nepal gave her a renewed sense of self: “When you are out there, you get to know yourself. These experiences gave me a sense of competence, a sense of self, a sense of what I really want, a sense of personal power.”

While many interviews describe this new awareness of self, others articulate a reconfiguration of an individual's priorities in life. This was certainly the case for Interview7, whose rafting trips helped him reconsider his whole life “totem”:

The further down [the river] we went, and the further away from civilization we journeyed, the more separated from the normal world and identity I became, and the more a new identity and a new set of parameters and priorities emerged and became our reality. Was I permanently transformed into an outdoorsman? No. But did some part of me expand and shift and did my totem of what matters in life reconstruct itself? Well on these trips, yeah. Yeah. No question.

Re-connecting to the self and to life’s priorities was found in each and every interview transcription. Table 9 summarizes the theme of re-connecting to self.

Table 9

*Summary of Re-Connection to Self*

<b>THEME</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>SAMPLE QUOTE</b>
Re-Connection to Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reflection and introspection on the extraordinary experience and meaningful interactions often lead to new insights and self-awareness</li> <li>▪ This includes: Re-discovering passion and purpose in life; re-connecting to values and priorities; being present to – and changing – perspectives of self, others, and the world</li> <li>▪ This re-connection to Self IS the transformational learning that occurs</li> </ul>	<p>The whole thing was just so outside your frame of reference that it started, in time, to tap you into something about yourself that you had to confront. And some of it was not good. There were things that you discovered about yourself that you could suppress in your daily life because you didn’t have to be so exposed. You didn’t have to be so vulnerable. For that time in Alaska, people get to see the real INT9, and what is really cool is that INT9 gets to see the real INT9. That is really so important for me.</p> <p>– Interview9</p>

**Taking action.** For these individuals, however, learning about, or rediscovering, oneself was not sufficient. Rather, the significance of the transformational learning that each individual experienced invariably led to a myriad of actions and impacts. For six of the interviewees, the transformational learning that they experienced from their adventures led directly to them launching new careers or new companies and organizations. For instance, Interview 11's profound experiences and the lessons that she learned from her trips to Nepal inspired her to build her own company, which helps build educational systems for children in Nepal:

You know all of this started with the first trip and discovering, "Wait a minute, there is a world you know nothing about," and "How do you keep this?" And then, "It is time to change your life," and the establishment of [name of her company].

Three individuals had their career aspirations and goals reaffirmed through their travel experiences, and consequently rededicated themselves to their careers. Interview 1 was struggling with her role as a travel guide, and was concerned about the impact that travel had on local cultures and economies. She describes her renewed commitment to her job and to the role that travel plays in intercultural understanding: "That was a really special experience, and I think that, for me, was transformative because I came home really fully confident and excited about travel in general, and the opportunities you have to build relationships and for connecting."

Interview 2 went to Costa Rica to get experience in his field of study and learned so much more from his time there:

I came back and got that desk job and was in it for about six months, looking at my picture of Costa Rica every day, and I decided to go back. I ended up living there for about two years, kind of been involved in working with different turtle projects, which eventually led me to here. Once I saw the effects that field conservation can have, and then consequently the effect that appropriately done tourism can have on the conservation work, I was hooked. That eventually led to this project that I am doing now where I am actually promoting people to go and visit the same sites where I used to work.

Five of the travelers made significant changes to their priorities and perspectives in life as a result of their learnings. Interview5 had a new outlook on life and her future upon returning from her time in Iran and Iraq:

On the surface, it doesn't look like anything changed, but on the inside *everything* changed! This trip [gave me] a profound experiential insight that there is a million ways to see life [and] there is no reason to hold back! It gave me so many different insights I would have never had. I can be more present for my dreams that I postponed all these years. I feel much more optimistic and open to life and its possibilities.

Interview9 shifted his perspectives of what is important in his life and in his work as a restaurant owner. He learned how to decipher the critical from the mundane, and it has made him a happier, more well-balanced person:

[These adventures] helped me be a better person, more patient, less agitated with the stupidity of everyday life and everyday selfishness

because I just don't care. It is not important. I now have a place in my mind that I can go that is really calming for me. It is a series of experiences that without question opened my eyes to how short life is.

Finally, four people had significant transformations regarding relationships. Interview11's experience in Nepal transformed her in such a way that she could not go back to being the person she was before she left:

I turned to my husband and I said, "I am going to do this. If you want me to stay with you and be your wife, that is OK. That is fine. But if you can't, then I think it is time you and I sat down and talked." And so he and I split after 26 years of marriage.

Interview7 went with his son on a series of rafting trips together, the result of which was an extraordinarily deep bond between the two of them: "We came together as father and son more intimately, more intensely, more completely than we do the other 350 days a year. He will never have a point in his life where he wonders if his dad loved him."

There are many more examples of how the travelers took significant and unprecedented action in their lives as a result of these adventure experiences. What was equally interesting to find was that these transformations not only impacted the travelers themselves, but either directly or indirectly influenced those around them, as well. The actions that these people took had another outcome that was largely unexpected: Their actions inspired others to do something different or adventurous with their lives, as well. Once transformed as a result of their travel experiences, these individuals were inspired and motivated to engage others in similar experiences.

For some of the interviewees, the idea of inspiring others was specifically stated as being a crucial element of their experience. Interview2 not only dedicated his life to environmental conservation as a result of his time spent in Costa Rica working with sea turtles, but he now says that: “My life mission now is to motivate and inspire people to go and do what I did... to see it themselves, and to see the effect that it can have both on the traveler and on the destination.”

For others, being an inspiration for others was a byproduct of the energy, passion, and transformation that they brought home from their experiences. Interview8 found that when she went back to the United States after having her adventures in Chile and told her story to people, it inspired them to consider travel as a way to do something different in *their* lives: “When I came home, people were just fascinated. People are really inspired by these stories and they think, ‘Wow, you know, I wonder if that could change my life.’”

Similarly, Interview11 found that when she returned from her first trip to Nepal, people were engrossed with her stories and wanted to go with her on her next adventure: “I went back to [work] and people said, ‘Where are you going next?’ and then they said, ‘Can I go with you?’”

Interestingly, inspiring others acted to help complete the cycle of learning for the individual traveler and, in many cases, was the call to adventure for those inspired by the adventurer. Clearly, another key component of the adventure experience is sharing that experience with others and, when appropriate, encouraging people to consider travel as a means for personal transformation.

Table 10 summarizes the theme of taking action.

Table 10

*Summary of Taking Action*

THEME	DESCRIPTION	SAMPLE QUOTE
Taking Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Physical manifestations of the internal transformations that took place within the traveler [Re-Connection to Self]</li> <li>▪ Took many forms, including: starting new careers or companies; making significant changes to priorities in life; making critical decisions regarding relationships</li> <li>▪ Often, these travelers inspired others to go on their own adventure; were the ‘Call to Adventure’ for other people</li> <li>▪ Many of the interviewees were inspired to travel more</li> </ul>	<p>I came back and got that desk job and was in it for about six months, looking at my picture of Costa Rica every day, and I decided to go back. Once I saw the effects that field conservation can have, and then consequently the effect that appropriately done tourism can have on the conservation work, I was hooked.</p> <p>– <i>Interview2</i></p> <p>On the surface, it doesn’t look like anything changed, but on the inside <i>everything</i> changed! This trip [gave me] a profound experiential insight that there is a million ways to see life [and] there is no reason to hold back! It gave me so many different insights I would have never had. I can be more present for my dreams that I postponed all these years. I feel much more optimistic and open to life and its possibilities.</p> <p>– <i>Interview5</i></p>



## **Additional Findings**

In addition to the seven aforementioned themes, two other important elements of the adventure travel experience contributed heavily to the transformational learning of the participant. These factors were represented in several of the transcripts, but were not present across enough of the interviews so as to be labeled as key themes. Both of these elements were discussed at some length in the literature review.

**Authenticity of experience.** One finding that was specifically mentioned by only a handful of the interviewees—but that the literature suggested would play a dominant role in the transformational learning of the individuals—was the importance of authenticity of the experience. While not overtly mentioned as a key factor in the experience, one can nevertheless extrapolate that the authentic nature of each excursion was, in fact, central to the entirety of the adventure experience. Each of the adventurers sought unique and inspiring experiences that ultimately challenged them in ways that they would not have imagined prior to departure. In combination with these challenges, much of the learning that transpired can be attributed to the authentic nature of the experiences. For example, Interview 1 discussed the role of the “authentic nature” of her experience with the Mexican peoples she encountered as being a critical element in her re-connection to her work. For her, this authentic interaction drove home the idea that both travelers and local peoples can benefit from travel. Other interviewees also reference the importance of having experiences that were representative of the land, the peoples, and the culture of the place they traveled to. This authenticity allowed them to fully immerse themselves in the experience

mentally and emotionally, and helped create the space and the opportunity for transformation.

**Trip length.** Another finding that emerged from the data was that the length of the trip had an impact on one's ability to learn from their experiences. Looking once again at the trip details for each of the travelers, 10 out of the 12 people went on adventures that were longer than 1 week, and 6 of the 12 had experiences that lasted more than 2 weeks. Clearly, having the time to fully engage oneself in a travel experience was an important factor in the transformation of these individuals.

The idea that trip length played a critical role in personal transformations was implied but not overtly mentioned in any of the interviews but one: Ironically, Interview7, who was one of only 2 people whose trip was *less* than 1 week long, was the lone interviewee to discuss the importance of trip length. He says:

I think there is a reality in which we live. And you can step slightly outside of that reality for a moment or an hour or three hours. And then you step back in and the experience could be wonderful but it is a wish in a way. It is a taste. It is not a full meal, a taste. And so when you go out for a couple of days, the degree to which you sort of shift into an alternate reality and to this state of consciousness is real, but it is small. The truth of it is that two or three nights out on a river was safe for me. I felt like I could handle that. The longer one felt more dangerous. It felt more stepping outside, literally closing the door on my [comfort zone]. When you are out for two nights, you are saying,

“This is terrible, but I know by tomorrow night I will be home again.”

But when you are out for a week, that is a long time.

While the value of trip length was rarely articulated in the interviews, it nevertheless was found to be a critical factor in the transformational learning process of the interviewees included in this data set.

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

This qualitative study analyzed 12 interview transcripts of individuals who described themselves as having experienced transformational learning as a result of adventure travel. The purpose of the study was to identify critical factors of adventure travel that are associated with transformational learning. Analysis of the data revealed seven key themes that represent the common experiences of the individuals who engaged in adventure travel experiences that contributed to transformational learning in these adults: (a) heeding a call to adventure; (b) being open to experience & transformation; (c) entering a zone unknown; (d) immersion in extra-ordinary & challenging experiences; (e) engaging in meaningful interactions; (f) re-connecting to self; and (g) taking action. Furthermore, two additional elements were also found to play a role in the overall adventure and transformational learning of the individuals: The authentic nature of the experience and trip length.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to identify the elements of adventure travel that contribute to the transformational learning process of adults. To attempt to answer this question, a textual analysis of 12 pre-existing interview transcripts from individuals who had described themselves as having life-changing, transformational experiences as a result of adventure travel was performed.

From this analysis, 7 key themes emerged from the data as being foundational for the transformational learning process in adults as a result of adventure travel experiences: (a) heeding a call to adventure; (b) being open to experience & transformation; (c) entering a zone unknown; (d) immersion in extra-ordinary & challenging experiences; (e) engaging in meaningful interactions; (f) re-connecting to self; and (g) taking action.

This Chapter will present a discussion of the important findings and draw conclusions from the data presented in Chapter 4. A discussion of the implications of that data will ensue. Finally, limitations of this research and recommendations for future research will be introduced.

### **The Process of Transformational Learning via Adventure Travel**

The themes that were identified in Chapter 4 suggest a pattern or process for how people make personal transformations and experience transformational learning from adventure travel experiences. This process was implicit throughout the interview transcriptions, and follows the following five sequential steps: (a) heeding a call to adventure; (b) entering a zone unknown; (c) immersion in extraordinary &

challenging experiences; (d) re-connecting to self; and (e) taking action on the learnings. Specific examples of each of these themes can be found in Chapter 4. A graphical representation of this transformational learning process via adventure travel can be found on page 130.

**A call to adventure.** In the first step, the travelers accepted a call to adventure. This call either occurred as a result of one distinct event or experience—for example, graduating from college or a literal call from a friend with an invitation to travel—or as the culmination of a series of events or life situations that gradually led to the felt need for change. For some, this call was a feeling of discontent in their life; for others, it was an invitation to go on an adventure experience with a friend; for still others, it was an intentional act to achieve a specific goal. In each case, the individual was setting off on an adventure for a purpose, even if they did not know what that reason was or what they were looking for, and they went with a sense of excitement, intrigue, and openness.

**The zone unknown.** After accepting this call to adventure, the travelers then inevitably found themselves transported to another physical location that was very different than the one from which they were coming. Campbell (2008) called this the zone unknown. The physical dimensions and attributes of the place, the cultural and social differences and nuances, and—perhaps most critically—the psychological separation and distance from the normal world from which the travelers came were all contributors to the process of transformational learning.

**Extra-ordinary & challenging experiences.** In this zone unknown, the individuals encountered a variety of extraordinary experiences. In many cases, these

experiences manifested themselves in various types of challenges. For some, the physical challenges that they encountered were the central event of their travel experience; for others, working through cultural and social idiosyncrasies was the most exhilarating—and at times frustrating—component of their travels. For others still, encountering emotional, psychological, or spiritual challenges was the catalyst for the change that was to come. For all of these individuals, however, these extraordinary experiences enabled them to reconsider their perspectives of self, of others, of the world, and of their role and place in the world.

**Re-connecting to self.** The subsequent process of reflection, introspection, and meaning-making from these challenging experiences ultimately led each person to re-connect with themselves in a meaningful, powerful, and transformational way. These experiences acted as a mirror for them to see themselves in a new light, or—perhaps more accurately—to see their true self for the first time in a long time. By peeling away the layers of so-called knowledge that had accumulated over the years, the persona that had been built, and the masks that they had worn in their everyday life, all of the adventurers were able to reconnect to themselves in some important and transformative way. They found their true being through their travels, and experienced a kind of excitement and potential that had, for many, been dormant since childhood.

The entire notion of personal transformation is predicated on the individual's ability to re-connect to themselves. The transcripts and the individual interviews used in this analysis suggest that before one can create lasting change in themselves, they need to be aware of what exists for them in the present and/or what has existed for

them in the past. This self-awareness manifests itself in the identification of core values, strengths and weaknesses, existing perspectives and paradigms, and one's purpose or mission or goals in life. The data from these transcripts strongly suggests that it is only *after* the individual is able to connect to these elements of themselves in a powerful and meaningful way that they are able to make lasting personal transformations.

**Taking action.** This new sense of self was the foundation for the transformations that occurred. All of these adventurers committed to change in their lives as a result of their experiences; this was a mental and emotional transformation that signaled the metaphorical death of the “old” person—the person that they had been—and the metaphorical birth of the “new,” transformed person. Ultimately, this connection to self and the emergence of a new person led to action. This willingness to take action on what was learned is what made the transformations come alive. Many rekindled or found a passion that ultimately led them to change career paths. Others' experiences revealed hidden personal values and/or strengths, and empowered them to make changes to their way of being in the world, how they treated other people, and how they prioritized their lives. All of the interviewees took action towards realizing the passions, perspectives, and prioritizes that emerged from their reflection upon their experiences and the subsequent reconnection to self.

It is important to reiterate that while the manifestation of the transformation may have been an action that the individual took, the real transformation that occurred happened within the mind of the participant: They changed how they saw themselves, others, or the world; they found their passion; they re-connected to

themselves; they re-prioritized their life; etc. From this new perspective or place, they *had* to do something that reflected this transformation; it was who they had become. Said differently, these individuals pressed the reset button on themselves and got clear on what was real and what was important for them, and then took action on it.

In addition to these five sequential steps, two equally vital elements occurred at various points throughout the entirety of the transformational learning process and should thus be considered as significant parts of this formula.

**Being open to experience & transformation.** Being open to experience & transformation was found to be a necessary and critical mindset and approach that these travelers embodied from the time they heard their call to adventure through the action that they took that helped manifest their transformations. This ever-present way of being encouraged them to immerse themselves in their experiences, to go with the flow of whatever was happening, and to trust themselves and others to overcome the challenges they were presented with. Being open to experience & transformation permeates the entire transformational learning process—that is, it is the life blood of any transformational experience: without being open to experience & transformation throughout the process/journey, one is significantly less likely to be transformed. Being open to experience & transformation also means allowing oneself to be transformed, not being hindered by expectations or preconceptions or what you *thought* you knew.

**Meaningful interactions.** Having meaningful interactions with other people differed from the sequential steps mentioned above in that it was found at various points throughout the adventure experience and, in some cases, at multiple points





Figure 1. Transformational learning via adventure travel

within the same individual's experience. For example, some interviewees had meaningful interactions with others that inspired them to go on an adventure and could be described as being the call to adventure, whereas others had meaningful interactions with people that were the key to their taking action on the learnings. For many of the interviewees, these interpersonal interactions were often the catalytic event in the entire adventure experience; it was the reflection on—and meaning-making from—these interactions that ultimately led to the transformational learning for these adults.

Figure 1 on the previous page depicts the cycle of transformational learning that these individuals went through.

### **Findings Related to the Literature Review**

The themes described above consist of an amalgam of ideas, thoughts, theories, and experiences that are largely consistent with the literature review found in Chapter 2. Throughout these 7 themes are components of adult learning theory (intrinsic motivation, experiential learning, application of learning), experiential learning theory and the experiential learning cycle (concrete experiences, reflection, meaning-making, and application and action), transformational learning theory (intrinsic motivation, challenging comfort zones, reflection, and meaningful interactions with others), and adventure travel theories (the impact of location and place). These findings were generally expected, considering the *a priori* approach that was taken to the coding and analysis process, which was based heavily on findings from the review of the literature.

**Being open to experience v. intrinsic motivation.** There was, however, one theme found in the data that was not identified in the literature regarding these fields that should be discussed in further detail: being open to experience. As suggested in the discussion and subsequent examples of this theme above, being open to experience is similar to, yet divergent from, being intrinsically motivated. Whereas intrinsic motivation suggests that people are performing an activity or participating in an adventure experience for some type of internal reward, whether it is personal growth or personal satisfaction, being open to experience infers that the individual is willing to immerse oneself in whatever experiences come their way, and will do so with an open mind and an open heart so as to fully engage in the activity and maximize the potential for learning and development. Although related, it is imperative to distinguish between the two: while intrinsic motivation and a call to adventure are pre-adventure stimuli for going on an adventure travel experience, being open to experience is an approach or mentality that transcends the entirety of the adventure and exists from the call to adventure through the action that the individual takes.

It is interesting to note that this idea of being open to experience is one that is oft-discussed in psychological circles as being critical to any transformation and change that occurs within people (D. Mankin, personal communication, September 28, 2012). Since there is often significant overlap between the fields of psychology, experiential education, and even travel, it would not be an exaggeration to state that being open to experience may in fact be the single most critical factor in the transformational learning that these adults experienced.

**The hero's journey.** The hero's journey was discussed in Chapter 2 as a relevant metaphor for the transformational learning process that occurs via adventure travel. It was fascinating to note that the process of transformational learning that the adults in this study described is highly aligned with Campbell's (2008) model of the hero's journey. The research findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 further illustrate the congruence between the literature and its applications in the lived adventure experiences of the interviewees. It is clear from the interview transcripts that these twelve adventurers ventured off on their own individual hero's journeys. The process of the adventure experiences of these people depicted in the previous pages brings to life the theoretical model that Campbell developed.

The first step in Campbell's hero's journey took place when the individual heeded a call to adventure. This was described as the first step in the transformational learning process for the interviewees. Upon departing for this adventure, they crossed the threshold of adventure into the zone unknown (the second step), wherein they predictably encountered a series of obstacles, challenges, and tests (the third step). Oftentimes, the travelers were aided or assisted by meaningful interactions with other people; in some cases, however, these interactions acted as another form of antagonism for the hero-to-be. The only way that they were able to overcome these challenges was by re-connecting to the self (the fourth step), whereby they then developed new perspectives, new goals, new ways of solving problems, and so forth. They then returned home from the adventure to the known world with these new mindsets and took decisive action to re-create their life so as to be in alignment with this new mindset (the final step). In doing so, they made a positive impact on the

people in their communities and the world around them. Thus, the analysis, findings, and interpretations of the data in this research suggest that the hero's journey is a valid and powerful metaphor for the process of transformational learning that these twelve adults underwent as a result of their adventure travel experiences.

The literature review also discussed several topics that have been the focal point of on-going debate in their respective circles. Data from the interview transcripts shed some light on how these topics impacted the ability of these travelers to make personal transformations from their travel experiences.

**Emergent v. prescribed outcomes.** Much of the literature on experiential learning proposes that having programmatic goals is an essential component of the learning process. Similarly, outdoor education programs often have clearly written or defined goals for each program, many of which include personal transformations. Others, however, promote the individuality of the adult learner and suggest that prescribed outcomes are inconsistent with the underpinnings of the experiential and transformational learning processes. For the interviewees used in this research, invariably the individualistic, emergent, and organic nature of transformational learning outcomes was found to be far more effective than going into the experience with specific desired outcomes. Although some of the interviewees did, in fact, have specific outcomes in mind before departing on their adventure, they let the adventure happen and learned from what they were experiencing rather than sticking to a set of rigid desired outcomes that they were hell-bent on achieving. They did not let expectations get in the way of learning from their experiences. This flexible approach was critical to the overall impact of these adventures on the individuals.

**The role of physical risk.** The element of physical risk is one that is commonly used in experiential and/or outdoor programming to create opportunities for reflection, introspection, and meaning-making. Still, much debate has taken place among theorists and academics about the role of risk in the learning process. While some feel that risk—real or perceived—is a critical element in the learning process, others suggest that risk inevitably retards the participant’s ability to learn because they are forced to focus their energies on things other than observation and awareness of the experience. In the end, the use of risk has as many advocates as it does detractors in the associated fields, and—for better or worse—is a commonly used tool in outdoor and experiential learning programming.

The data from this research overwhelmingly suggested that the element of physical risk was not particularly influential in the transformational learning of participants. While in some cases physical activities or events certainly contributed to this overall experience of the adventure (e.g., Interview7’s experiences on the Colorado River and Interview9’s time in Alaska), they were not found to be nearly as instrumental to the process of transformational learning as were the mental and/or emotional challenges that the travelers faced (albeit sometimes as a result of the physical activities in which the individual engaged). From there, one can conclude that the role of physical risk in the transformational learning process of these individuals was merely a stepping stone on the way towards reflective practices that ultimately re-connected the person with the Self. It was an important element of the experience for some, but it is certainly not a prerequisite for transformation.

**The reflection process.** On the one hand, much of the literature on adult and experiential learning discusses the individualistic nature of the learning process and suggests that no two people will have the same experience. This might lead one to infer that the art of reflecting and making meaning from one's experiences should be a highly personal process. On the other hand, however, literature on experiential learning theory and transformational learning theory espouses the power of others, particularly groups, in the reflection and meaning-making process.

While there is little doubt that other people can and do play an important role in the reflection and meaning-making processes for some individuals, that was not found to be the case for most of the interviews in this data set. In fact, only one person—Interview6—described a reflection process where other people were present; in every other instance, this reflection and meaning-making step was a solitary act of the individual traveler. While it should be said that many of the interviews do not go into much depth or detail about the specifics of the reflection process, suffice it to say that had other people made significant contributions to that process, it is likely that it would have been mentioned in the transcripts. Therefore, the findings of this research describe scenarios where the travelers did not engage others in critical reflection but rather internalized this reflection in a highly personal and individualized process.

### **The Travel Bug**

An interesting note about these 12 travelers: Despite the fact that many of them had been casual travelers prior to the transformational experience that they describe in their interview, almost all of them purposefully engaged in additional and more frequent adventure travel experiences *after* this experience. This may suggest

that these individuals felt so empowered, so connected, so transformed as a result of this experience that they then began seeking more adventures that might bring them similar transformations. Perhaps this is what the term “travel bug” actually refers to: Individuals having such powerful and life-changing travel experiences that they have a very real felt need to continue this process of personal discovery, transformation, and enlightenment. Perhaps once they have tasted and seen the transformational power of travel, they have an intense desire to travel more frequently in order to stay on the experiential learning ride that they found themselves on. While purely speculative, this idea is certainly founded in the data and resonates with both the literature and from personal experiences.

### **Social Implications of Travel**

Many of the interviewees found themselves calling others to adventure by encouraging people that they knew or came into contact with to venture out and have their own transformational travel experiences. In addition to the interpersonal impact that these interactions may have had, there exists the possibility of social implications, as well. For several of the interviewees, meaningful interactions with others led them to reconsider how they treated and thought about peoples from different places and cultures. These interactions increased understanding, opened up lines of communication, and spawned new relationships. If travel truly can be transformational, as was demonstrated by these interviews, and if much of the transformation that occurs is psychological in nature and deals with ways that we see, think about, and act not only towards ourselves but others, then it could be concluded that travel could be a tool for social progress and understanding.



## **Importance of the Findings**

As discussed in Chapter 1, there has been a dearth of research on how individual adults experience transformational learning. Much of the research that has been conducted has been focused on adolescents and has been conducted via the case study model. The little empirical research that has been done on transformational learning in adults has focused on short-term experiences also of the case study variety. Furthermore, there are innumerable anecdotal books, articles, and stories of people experiencing life-changing transformations from their personal travel experiences, many of which are extremely popular.

This study is important and relevant because it is one of the first of its kind to examine transformational learning in individual adults as a result of adventure travel experiences. Consequently, it is also one of the first empirical research studies to identify a formulaic process for this transformational learning process from adventure travel. While this study verifies much of the literature regarding experiential learning in adults, it also offers significant new insights to the fields of adult learning, experiential learning, outdoor education, and adventure travel.

## **Implications of the Findings**

These findings have important implications for organizations, individuals, and for experiential educators and the adventure travel industry. If applied appropriately, these findings have the potential to create successful transformations not only in the individuals in whom these transformations take place, but within groups, organizations, and communities.

**Individuals.** The findings from this research have significant implications for individuals. Paramount is balancing pre-trip expectations and goals with being open to experience. While it is fine to have specific intentions for a program or an adventure, this research suggests that almost inevitably, those plans morph into something completely different during the experience. As such, it is critical to remain open-minded and openhearted throughout the journey, and to fully immerse oneself in the experience as much as possible so as to maximize opportunities for reflection, reconnection, and, ultimately, transformation. A core component of this immersion is the willingness to challenge oneself to be, think, act, or experience in new and different ways. In doing so, it is possible to develop new skills that will stretch comfort zones, expand what is possible for the individual and others, and enhance self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-efficacy.

**Experiential educators & travel companies.** Finally, for experiential educators and adventure travel companies, these findings represent a critical opportunity to develop, enhance, and integrate intentionally designed transformational learning opportunities into travel programming. In addition to the aforementioned elements of the adventure experience that contribute to transformational learning, two specific factors can have powerful influence over the results of the experience for participants. First, the authentic nature of the experience cannot be stressed enough. This research suggests that being able to engage in authentic experiences was infinitely more potent in contributing to transformational learning than more contrived or constructed scenarios would have been. Thus,

designing risk into a program, or staging superficial interactions with people, can actually have a negative impact on the transformational potential of a program.

Secondly, while this research has suggested that reflective activities should, in many cases, be individualized in nature, there seems to exist an opportunity to capitalize on the transformational learning market, so to speak. In other words, many people travel for the purposes of transforming their lives, and others have life-changing transformations from traveling without planning on it. However, by intentionally designing a program that allows participants opportunities to travel to foreign lands, challenge themselves in unique and authentic ways, and reflect on their experiences in a purposeful way, it is possible for experiential educators and adventure travel companies to enhance the likelihood of these transformations.

Furthermore, the presence of someone who has the skills and ability to guide or facilitate a group of individuals in reflective activities could greatly increase the probability of transformational learning. Although the individuals in this research all experienced personal transformations and learning, it is interesting to consider how many more people go on similar adventures and do not experience these types of transformations. As such, having a facilitator who would empower individual travelers to reflect, make meaning, and re-connect to themselves during their travel experience has the potential to be extremely beneficial for the participants.

**Organizations.** Most organizations actively look for ways to develop leaders so as to ensure future organizational success and sustainability. A combination of a review of the literature and personal experience suggests that many organizations use extrinsic motivation to coerce individuals to engage in leadership development

activities. Among these rewards are higher pay, nicer offices, and more perks. A typical leadership development program may look something like this: a group of uninterested employees attending a lecture series once per month, after which they *may be* expected to produce certain results that indicate that they have learned from the program. Not surprisingly, in many instances, these efforts are futile.

This research suggests that in order to maximize the results from leadership development programs, organizations should focus on people who are intrinsically motivated to develop and grow. Rather than mandate a specific group of people attend a leadership program, organizations should make the programs voluntary for anyone within the organization. This not only isolates the people who want to be there, but also simultaneously creates an atmosphere of positivity, creativity, and transformation for the individuals and the organization.

Secondly, the individualized nature of learning found in the literature and supported by this research suggests that reflective practices and activities should be focused on personal applications of the program and learnings rather than larger group issues. That is not to suggest that there should not be a discussion around the large-scale implications of the program for the organization, but rather that the focus should be on the individual at first, and potentially culminating in organizational applications of individuals' learnings.

Finally, many organization-backed leadership development programs offer periodic meetings for participants to attend, oftentimes interspersed over a period of several months. The findings from this research suggest that allowing participants a more focused, intense, and immersive experience has the potential to deepen learning

and foster significant change within and among participants. As detailed in the discussions about trip length and the Zone Unknown, creating a purposeful break from the norm of organizational life and providing ample time for participants to commit to the program and their development could have profound impacts on organizational success.

### **Limitations of This Study**

There were several limitations of this exploratory research study. First, there was a relatively small sample size [ $n=12$ ] of interview transcripts. Ideally, this sample size would be closer to 25 or 30 participants. Furthermore, this study only analyzed transcripts from people who *had* experienced transformational learning from adventure travel experiences. It would have been valuable to explore interview transcripts for people who had *not* had a transformational adventure travel experience, and then to compare and contrast the findings between the two groups.

The use of pre-existing data has inherent drawbacks. For instance, the data is what it is; in other words, the researcher does not have the opportunity to ask clarifying questions of the interviewees. Additionally, a lack of context made some of the analysis difficult. Several interviewees referred to data or background information that was already known to the interviewer but that was not re-stated overtly in the interview. Some of this data would have been beneficial in the analysis process.

Finally, qualitative data analysis in general, and thematic and/or textual analysis in particular, tends to be highly subjective by nature and can thus lead to unintended researcher bias.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

This exploratory research hints at several intriguing theories and hypotheses that could form the bases for future research projects. The small sample size limited the ability of the researcher to draw conclusions based on gender and/or age; however, a larger sample size might be better suited for exploring differences in these demographic areas. Trip length was found to be a contributing factor to the overall ability of the individual to experience transformational learning from an adventure experience; further research on this topic could prove invaluable not only to adventure travel and experiential education organizations, but to individual travelers and even organizations that have leadership development programs.

Taking a deeper look at several of the themes could provide important insights into the transformational learning process; specifically, exploring the psychological impact of the zone unknown would be a fascinating project. Similarly, researching the impact of being open to experience and transformation could further link education and psychology fields and could provide useful data for experiential education and adventure travel organizations. Diving into the many types of re-connection to self—identifying values, purpose, passion, and priorities—would be an intriguing study.

An exploration into the social impact of adventure travel, considering the above discussion on social transformation, could provide educators, psychologists, and businesses with valuable insights into the travel industry and how it can be utilized to promote and foster communication and understanding. Finally, it would be interesting to study the idea of the travel bug and to test the notion that this bug may, in fact, be an addiction to personal growth and transformations.

## **Conclusions**

This research has demonstrated that adventure travel experiences can lead to transformational learning in adults. The 12 individuals interview transcripts used for this research represent a small percentage of those people who engage in adventure travel every year and who experience life-changing transformations from those travel experiences; their stories and experiences are allegories for the broader adventure travel experience that many people undertake every year.

A distinct process—one that is highly aligned with the Hero's Journey model first presented by Joseph Campbell (2008) —emerged as the centerpiece of this transformational learning process. This process contains seven themes. First, individuals heed a call to adventure, where they have an intrinsic motivation to travel, grow, and transform. They travel to and enter an unknown land, where they are faced with many challenges. These challenges can be physical, cultural, social, emotional, mental, psychological, spiritual, etc. Through these challenges, the traveler has an opportunity to reflect on him/herself, create meaning from the experiences, and reconnect to their true self. From this reconnection to self, the individual then takes action on manifesting change in their lives. Oftentimes, this action takes the form of a career change, whereas other times the result is a shift in one's priorities and perspectives.

During these travel experiences, the individual inevitably encounters people with whom they have meaningful interactions. For some people, these interactions are the call to adventure; for others, the people they meet are helpers, or inspirations, or even the root cause of the challenges they faces; and for some, all of these scenarios

apply. Nevertheless, these authentic interactions often form the foundation upon which the transformations are made. And finally, throughout this process of challenge and transformation, the individual remains open to experience and open to transformation; they immerse themselves in the experiences, harbor no expectations, and willingly give themselves to the opportunities being offered. This openness creates the space for transformation to occur.

The re-connection with self was found to be the central element of the transformational learning that these adults experienced. All of the processes, events, experiences, and interactions that took place before the transformation all ultimately led to one critical event: the individual finding themselves again, re-connecting with who they are and always have been, and—from this renewed connection to Self—transforming the way they thought about themselves, other people, the world, or their place in the world. It was only *after* this re-connection to Self that meaningful actions were taken, and the physical manifestations of the inner transformations that these individuals experienced came alive.

Finally, interpretations of these research findings suggest that intentionally designing adventure travel and/or experiential learning programs around these findings and themes has the potential to increase the likelihood of a participant experiencing transformational learning through adventure travel.



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## Appendix A

### IRB Approval Letter

# PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

## Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

June 7, 2012

Michael Bennett  


**Protocol #: E0512D09**

**Project Title: *An Exploration of Transformational Learning in Adults as a Result of Adventure Travel Experiences***

Dear Mr. Bennett:

Thank you for submitting your application, *An Exploration of Transformational Learning in Adults as a Result of Adventure Travel Experiences*, for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your faculty advisor, Dr. Daphne DePorres, have done on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations (45 CFR 46 - <http://www.nihtraining.com/ohsrsite/guidelines/45cfr46.html>) that govern the protections of human subjects. Specifically, section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4) states:

(b) Unless otherwise required by Department or Agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:

**Category (4) of 45 CFR 46.101**, research, involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a **Request for Modification Form** to the GPS IRB. Because your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to "policy material" at <http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/>).

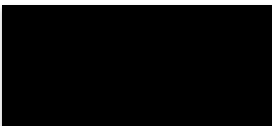
Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact me. On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

6100 Center Drive, Los Angeles, California 90045 ■ 310-568-5600

Sincerely,



Jean Kang, CIP  
Manager, GPS IRB & Dissertation Support  
Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education & Psychology



cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Associate Provost for Research & Assistant Dean of Research, Seaver College  
Ms. Alexandra Roosa, Director Research and Sponsored Programs  
Dr. Yuying Tsong, Interim Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB  
Ms. Jean Kang, Manager, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB  
Dr. Daphne DePorres  
Ms. Christie Dailo

## Appendix B

### Individual Interview Summaries

The following pages comprise a series of summaries of each of the individual interview transcripts that were used as the data set for this research. Each summary aims to provide a brief but pertinent description of: (a) the setting and/or the impetus for the adventure travel experience; (b) the specific events, challenges, and/or people who played critical roles in the transformational learning process; and (c) the outcomes of the experiences, ranging from actions taken to the many alterations in perspective and priorities that emerged.

#### **Interview1**

In October of 2007, Interview1, a 24-year old adventure travel guide, was hired to lead a group of travelers on a 10-day cultural expedition through Copper Canyon, Mexico. The highlight of the trip was a visit to see the Turahumara Indians, a small group of reclusive and indigenous people that live in the canyon, almost completely cut off from modern society except for limited contacts with adventure travelers. During this brief encounter, the two groups had an intimate exchange of cultures through singing, art, and non-verbal communication.

This experience had a profound impact on Interview1. As someone who had been working in the adventure travel industry for years, she had seen both the positive and negative aspects of travel. Prior to this trip, Interview1 had developed significant reservations about the potentially negative impact commercial tourism could have on local cultures, and questioned her future in the industry. This intimate interaction with

the Turahumara Indians revived her belief that the positive benefits and power of travel far outweighed the bad, and ultimately reconnected her with her passions for leading adventure trips, meeting new people, and sharing cultures.

As a result of this experience, Interview1 was able to build a renewed sense of dedication and energy toward her work, and once again embraced her role not only as a travel guide but also as an ambassador of culture, learning, and understanding. Interview1 now works as a consultant and adventure tour guide for various adventure travel companies and organizations throughout North America, where she is able to share her passion for creating opportunities for intercultural sharing and understanding.

## **Interview2**

In the fall of 1999, fresh out of college, Interview2 realized that in order to get a job in his chosen field of environmental conservation, he needed real world experience. Everything that he knew was theory; he had no hands-on, real-world experience. Consequently, Interview2 decided to go to Costa Rica for 6 months, where he worked both on an endangered turtle conservation project and on an organic farm, in order to get the necessary experience for him to be able to find gainful employment upon his return to the States.

Having never been to Costa Rica, he was immediately taken aback at the differences in culture between the United States and Costa Rica. In particular, he was astounded to find that people were generally happy despite the living conditions there. Interview2 also had the opportunity to observe what other people must go through on a daily basis simply to survive. During his time in Costa Rica, he learned



to adapt to the way of life, and grew to love the people, the culture, and the lifestyle, which were much more in touch with nature and with one another, and offered him many opportunities to re-connect with himself and to the world around him.

His experiences in Costa Rica allowed Interview2 to not only gain experience in his field of environmental conservation, but developed within him a sense of self-confidence and self-esteem. His passion for environmental conservation was affirmed, and he has since dedicated his life to not only doing the work himself, but also to inspiring other people to pick up the cause. Finally, his perspectives and understanding of other people and cultures grew immensely from this experience. Interview2 has spent the past decade working on a variety of conservation issues, particularly those that deal with endangered species such as sea turtles.

### **Interview3**

After graduating from Notre Dame University, Interview3 began working as a consultant for a large consulting firm. She quickly realized that she did not want to be doing that kind of work for the rest of her life, and eventually quit. Soon afterwards, she took a series of odd jobs, including being a ski instructor and guiding whitewater-rafting trips in Colorado, while she was looking for purpose in her life and her work. Eventually, she decided to go to Japan to teach English as a second language to children there, and ended up staying there for 3 years.

While in Japan, she and several other teachers embarked on a 5-week bike tour across Cambodia. Their original goal was to simply have fun, but when they heard about an organization to which they could donate funds that would help support school programs for the poor children in Cambodia, they decided to do the trip as a

fundraiser. They put together a website and asked friends and family for donations. By the time the trip launched, Interview3 and her friends had raised over \$100,000 USD for the program. Seeing the impact that they could have on the children and people of Cambodia, Interview3 and her friends decided to start their own organization dedicated to supporting education programs in Cambodia through adventure and volunteer trips.

Interview3 found something that she loved to do. The trips and the tours gave her a sense of purpose, and a mission in life. For her, the trips not only helped the people and children of Cambodia, but they inspired the volunteers and paid clients who went on the trips to do something more with their own lives. Interview3 now lives in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where she runs two organizations: a for-profit organization that offers adventure tours of Cambodia whose proceeds are funneled into the non-profit organization, which offers volunteer tours of Cambodia that support educational programs throughout the country.

#### **Interview4**

Interview4 and his wife traveled to Vietnam for a 12-day cultural tour of the country in the fall of 2003. Up until then, both he and his wife had been working on Wall Street for the majority of their careers. But recently, Interview4 had been beginning to feel that something was missing from his life and from his career. He knew that he was looking for something different out of life, but didn't have any idea as to what it was. Serendipitously, a friend phoned him to see if they had any interest in going to Vietnam. When this opportunity presented itself, he saw it as a perfect opportunity to "do something radically different." He had traveled extensively before

this trip, but almost exclusively within the United States and Canada. For Interview4, going to Vietnam was a way to do something “far away and adventuresome with very little actual risk.”

While on a walking tour through a small village with their local guide, Interview4 saw that the children were playing in the streets and asked why they weren't in school. The guide told him that the children did not go to school because their parents couldn't afford the \$30 USD it cost to send the children to school. Thinking about his interaction with the children, who were so nice and sweet and engaging and smart and friendly— “it was the appeal of these kids” that made such an impact on him—Interview4 had a “Paul on the road to Damascus moment”: He wanted to help these kids get an education.

Arriving back in the States, he began researching and exploring ways in which he could help the children of Vietnam get a high-quality education. After much research, he and his wife quit their jobs and founded their own non-profit organization dedicated to building high-quality educational programs in Vietnam. They also began working to secure funding for the children to be able to attend the programs. The trip to Vietnam changed not only Interview4's and his wife's lives, but also had a huge and lasting impact on the life of many Vietnamese children.

### **Interview5**

Interview5 set off on a 6-week trip to the Middle East with the specific intention of the adventure being a launching pad for her new career and life as a filmmaker. Something had long dreamed about doing. She chose to go to Iraq and Iran largely because of the influence of a former teacher who spoke to her of the

adoration and appreciation the people and cultures in Iran and Iraq had for their artists. Interview5's hope was that she, too, would find inspiration from the people and the cultures and from the artists themselves that would encourage and support her in pursuing her dream.

Before she embarked on her adventure, Interview5 was a young woman who was struggling to find her place in the world. She was frustrated with her life, her career, her health, her relationships, and the absence of passion in her life. Deep down, she had a yearning to become a filmmaker, and while that was her dream, she was taking no steps towards achieving that goal. Eventually, she decided that she must do whatever it took to pursue her dream—living a life without the creativity, excitement, and energy that filmmaking brought to her was slowly killing her.

The trip was wildly successful. Interview5 fully and completely immersed herself in the experiences, in the cultures, in the people, and in the art and artists in each location she visited. She re-connected with her passion for filmmaking, and most importantly, with her drive and desire to be a filmmaker. During the trip, she decided once and for all that she was dedicating the rest of her life to the art of film. Upon her arrival home, she enrolled in a graduate program for filmmaking and moved to San Francisco. Other changes ensued—she became much more energetic and alive; she started eating better and getting in shape; she became the person that she always knew she was and wanted to be.

### **Interview6**

Interview6, a 60-year-old male who was working for a large international bank at the time, was in Africa on a work-related trip. During some down time, he

offered to show some of his colleagues around for a few days, and they went on a walkabout in Zimbabwe with the goal of seeing some wild animals and relaxing in nature. Having grown up in South Africa and having spent significant periods of time in Zimbabwe, Interview6 was intimately familiar with the land, the people, the animals, and life in the bush, and, with the assistance of a friendly local guide, felt very comfortable showing his friends around for a few days.

One day, while they were out walking on a small island in the middle of a river known for being a watering hole for a wide variety of bush animals, they suddenly heard a thundering noise and looked up to find an enormous female elephant charging at them. The group did their best to escape, but the elephant was gaining on them. They only managed to escape the rampaging beast when their guide fired a warning shot from his shotgun to scare off the elephant. Frightened and in shock, the group spent the rest of the day recovering from their experience.

Slowly but surely, the group began bonding over the shared experience. Interview6 grew particularly close to one of his colleagues, and they began a life-long friendship as a result. In addition to the relationships, Interview6 had a revelation that he was no longer invincible, and that he needed to get his priorities in life in line. He had been spending too much time working and not enough time doing what he loved to do: travel and help people. Combining his work experience in helping develop leaders with his desire to travel, Interview6 and several of his colleagues decided to launch a company that used adventure experiences as the foundation for personal and organizational leadership development.

## **Interview7**

In the fall of 1990, Interview7 was dealt a series of unexpected blows: he developed serious health issues and was facing significant challenges at work. He felt overwhelmed and frustrated with everything that was happening in his life. Thinking about his life up until that point, and the relationships he had with his family, he realized that he had been so involved with his work that he barely had time to spend with his wife and children. On a whim, he decided that he wanted to take each of his children on an annual adventure trip in order to develop deeper bonds with them.

Over the following several years, Interview7 went with son on a series of rafting and camping trips. Specifically, rafting trips to Grand Canyon National Park and to the Colorado River stand out for him. Initially, the idea of an outdoor adventure experience terrified Interview7—he hated the dirt, the bugs, and everything else about being outdoors. He was a curmudgeonly corporate guy. However, for the sake of his son, they went, and over the years they had innumerable adventures—from harrowing whitewater-rafting outings to camping out underneath the stars. They also took time to engage in many deep, personal conversations that only fathers and sons can have. Interview7 was so moved by one conversation that he was brought to tears with pride, love, and admiration for the young man that his son was becoming.

Getting to share experiences, bond, and talk meaningfully with his son on these adventures was an incredible experience for Interview7. In addition, he developed a much stronger sense of self, and got back in touch with his own personal values and priorities in life. As a result, he worked hard to change his attitude toward work and toward family, and re-prioritized his life to reflect these new attitudes.

## **Interview8**

Interview8 graduated from college in 2004, and—not knowing what she wanted to do with her life—decided to take a friend up on an offer to go to Patagonia, Chile, for two weeks. The plan was to travel through the majestic land of mountains, rivers, and lakes, do some backpacking, have some fun, and enjoy the scenery. A week into the trip, however, she had fallen in love with the place and the people, and knew that she needed to stay. She was “completely absorbed by Chilean culture and the natural beauty” around her, and consequently postponed her trip home indefinitely so that she could “ride the wave of adventure.”

The decision to stay changed her life. She was about to embark on a voyage to South Georgia Island, as the photographer on a British Naval Vessel, when she was offered a job guiding horseback riding, sea kayaking, and hiking excursions in the Torres del Paine National Park in southern Chile. She took the job, not knowing how the decision would change my life forever. One day, while on a horseback excursion with clients, she met a local gaucho and horse whisperer. They immediately gravitated towards each other, and soon fell in love. In the following months, they had innumerable hair-raising adventures, including rounding up wild horses at the tip of the Southern Ice Field and living in rustic conditions during the Patagonian winter.

Eventually, the couple married, settled in Patagonia, and began a family of their own. For Interview8, her willingness to “ride the wave of adventure” ultimately led her to not only meet her future husband, but also impassioned her about adventure travel and Chilean culture, and started her own adventure travel company.

## **Interview9**

Interview9 is a chef and restaurateur from Louisville, Kentucky, who decided to go with some friends and colleagues on a series of backpacking trips to Alaska. The specific trip described in the interview was to Lake Clarke, a remote region in the far north of Alaska that was recommended to him by his guide. Out of shape before the trips, Interview9 worked hard to prepare for the rigors of the Alaskan wilderness, training three hours or more per day, and was very much looking forward to a physically challenging but exciting experience.

Upon arriving in Alaska, he was blown away by the expanse, the beauty, and the vastness of the land. This sense of place and space was very surreal for him, and immediately took him to a reflective and introspective place that he had not planned on going. Throughout the trip, a series of experiences – an encounter with a bear, a near-death encounter on the mountain, and a harrowing trek through dense brush – forced him to confront himself and what he was all about. He got to see who he really was outside of his every day life, and once again reconnected to his true Self, both good and bad, in a way that would have never happened had he not gone to Alaska.

From these trips, Interview9 learned much about life, about people, and about priorities, and had a transformational experience from which he was able to recreate how he looked at life, at others, and at himself. He describes himself as being much more easy going, much more compassionate, and much more willing to take chances, knowing that nothing could be more difficult than trying to save a friend who had fallen through a crevasse.



## **Interview10**

Interview10 is a 43 year-old lineman for the electric company who had two adventure experiences that transformed his worldview. In 2006, he traveled with friends to their homeland of Portugal, where they spent a week traveling around visiting his friend's family and relatives. Interview10 felt isolated and alone because he did not understand the language, an experience that lead him to reconsider his lack of tolerance towards some of the people that worked with and for him, including immigrants in the US who are struggling with English and trying to fit into American culture. As a result of this transformation, the trip opened his eyes to the power of travel, and he openly began looking for more travel opportunities.

The next year, he embarked on a two-week trip with his adventurous mother to Peru, where they explored Cuzco, Machu Picchu, and the Amazon Rainforest. A series of key interactions with local peoples gave him a new perspective on American affluence and "materialistic values," leading him to ask "do we really need all of these things to make us happy?" and affirmed his desire to travel, change, and grow.

Before these trips, Interview10 described himself as "materialistic," "impatient" with and "unsympathetic" toward immigrants in US, and not being that interested in the rest of the world. Both of these trips opened him up to "a whole world of possibilities" that he "didn't even know was out there." He now wants to see more of the world and appreciates its "diversity and beauty." Finally, he ended an 18-year relationship with his girlfriend who didn't share his new perspectives and interest in exploring the world.

## **Interview11**

Interview11 was a schoolteacher and administrator who literally experienced a Call to Adventure—one of her closest friends phoned her one day and asked if she wanted to go on a trip to Nepal. As someone whose teaching interests focused on intercultural communication and understanding, she jumped at the chance to experience a new people, culture, and place. With her friend (and another travel companion), they set off on a multi-week hiking and backpacking adventure.

Arriving in Nepal, Interview11 found herself in a country where the most basic things of her life were different—how she went to the bathroom, ate, shook hands, slept, and where, despite speaking 5 languages, she could not read the street signs. Moreover, like many people in such a world, she found herself doing the hardest physical thing she had done in her life—trekking for 2 weeks at high altitude. In addition to the physical nature of the trip, Interview11 was extremely impressed and inspired by the local peoples, many of whom she developed life-long friendships with. Their love for one another, respect for the world, and outlook on life inspired her to share her experiences with other people.

When she returned home, she felt exceptionally more competent, powerful, and healthy, and gave her a new sense of who she was. She decided that she couldn't go back [home] and be a “pretty little executive wife,” divorced her husband, and subsequently founded an adventure travel company that offers “trips designed around concepts” such as art and culture and natural medicine. She also founded a non-profit organization that has built more than 45 library/community centers, developed educational programs, and seeded businesses across rural Nepal.

## Interview12

Interview12 graduated from college without knowing what he wanted to do with his life and how he would be able to use his Spanish degree. He didn't have any plans for work or job opportunities, so he decided to "do what I know I love to do, which is travel." He went to South America for 6 months, traveling on the "Gringo Trail," a popular route through South & Central America including Patagonia, Machu Picchu, the Galapagos Islands, the Amazon, more.

On this trip, he fell in love with Latin America, especially the culture and the "edginess" and sense of danger/adventure that he experienced there. He was, however, taken aback at how the people lived in "rustic" conditions yet were still so happy with life, mindlessly enjoying time spent with family and friends. Interview12 couldn't fathom how they could be so happy, but soon realized that he was evaluating *their* living conditions from his *own* "cultural prism." These experiences really pushed him out of his comfort zone and "forced" him to change. It was the first time he realized that he had a "cultural prism" through which he judged places, cultures and experiences from the perspective of his own cultural background and biases.

This trip changed his awareness and perceptions of, and attitudes and behaviors toward, other people and cultures, and made him more of a "global thinker and citizen." He also found his passion in life: traveling and turning other people on to the beauty of Latin America, and the lessons that we can all learn from interactions with other peoples and cultures. To this end, Interview12 started his own adventure company that offers small group trips focusing on "cultural and environmental respect and enjoyment."