“BEING COMFORTABLE WITH THE UNCOMFORTABLE”: ADOLESCENT GIRL’S EXPERIENCES OF AN EXTENDED OUTDOOR ADVENTURE PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

"BEING COMFORTABLE WITH THE UNCOMFORTABLE": ADOLESCENT GIRL'S EXPERIENCES OF AN EXTENDED OUTDOOR ADVENTURE PROGRAM

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The developmental stage of adolescence is a difficult time for young people, particularly girls. Research shows that girls often struggle during this period with low self-esteem, a lack of confidence, depression, and poor body image. Outdoor adventure programming has several positive outcomes, including providing adolescent girls with authentic experiences that allow them to challenge themselves, build connections with others, and develop life tools to overpower the negative societal influences of genders stereotypes and unrealistic pressures. Numerous studies confirm these outcomes. However, most of these studies looked at programs that lasted a few days to several weeks. Due to the importance of improving adolescent development for girls, this study examined the impacts of long-term exposure to outdoor adventure programming for adolescent girls. The injury employs a qualitative analysis to share the stories of 8th-grade students at the French Broad River Academy for girls. This private middle school utilizes outdoor education regularly. Students reflected on what outdoor adventure programming meant to them during their 2.5 years at the school. They did this over a semester by taking pictures of their outdoor experiences on disposable cameras. At the conclusion of the semester, students used photo-elicitation to share their experiences by using their photos to share their stories in

focus group interviews. Emergent themes from the focus groups included: Relationship & Community, Perseverance & Resiliency, Enjoyment & Finding Beauty in Nature, Leadership & Confidence, and Individual Growth.

Keywords: adolescent girls, outdoor adventure programming, adventure education, experiential education, photo-elicitation

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Research Interest

The idea for this study originated through personal reflections on my years as an adolescent girl and my time as a program director for an all-girls adventure summer camp. The story of my adolescent years is fraught with struggle, with me "having a hard time." I felt misunderstood. I did not trust authority figures, was extremely self-conscious, and was often depressed. I consistently felt the grasps of childhood bliss and teenage milestones simultaneously tugging in opposition during those younger years. The pressure from peers to mature quickly and conform to the feminine societal expectations stifled the adventurous little girl begging to roam freely in the woods. Wanting to feel accepted and valued among my friends, I allowed teenage social norms to win the tug of war in my heart. I left behind the young, independent, opinionated, barefooted girl for the insecure, approval-seeking, conforming teenager. I rediscovered the girl from my childhood through my college outdoor leadership program and a summer camp counseling job. I unfurled from my smothered position and vibrantly came back to life in a new yet familiar way. I look back on my adolescent years and cannot help but think what it would have been like to have someone take my hand and tell me that the girl from my youth was always meant to be a part of me. Rediscovering her helped me find my voice, passions, and a healthier view of myself. My reflections of adolescence led me to observe and ponder what adolescent girls experience today, and what is recorded in the existing literature.

My research into adolescent development and my professional time spent with girls revealed that my experience is not singular; many girls have similar stories regarding their adolescent years. I have had the opportunity to work within strong girls-specific summer camp

programming over the past few years. I built close relationships with many campers, staff, and alumna. During this time, it was common to hear their stories of extraordinary growth and broadening perceptions discovered through camp experience, only to return to a world that does not understand or embrace this new development within them. These stories and experiences led me to wonder if a world could exist where growth through outdoor adventure programming is cohesively understood as a part of everyday life for young girls. Thus, I believe the stories of adolescent girls who get to experience this type of setting regularly is something to listen to and further explore, in hopes to share for the benefit of other adolescent girls.

Background

The adolescent years are a crucial yet challenging developmental time for young people, particularly girls. Research shows that many adolescent girls struggle with: various mental health issues (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016); poor self-body image (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016); low confidence in themselves generally (Steinberg & Morris, 2001); and with physical activity specifically (Girl Scout Research Institute, 2020). All these challenges are exacerbated by the increased use of social media (Wicks, 2020). There is hope, however. Evidence shows young girls who take part in outdoor adventure programming are often better at confronting some of these obstacles.

Various studies have measured the positive outcomes from programs utilizing the outdoors as an avenue for growth. A few of the results from girl-specific programming are positive body image (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016), resiliency (Whittington et al., 2016), courage (Whittington & Mack, 2010), and confidence (Evans et al., 2020; Whittington & Aspelmeier, 2018). Investigating the impact of outdoor adventure programming (OAP) on

adolescent girls is still relatively new to experiential and outdoor education, and more research is needed. Past research seems to support a particular need to study programs that aim to help adolescent girls over an extended period (months or years) instead of the week to several weeklong programs previously reviewed. Yet, most studies examine shorter outdoor experiences for adolescent girls. This gap in the literature led me to ponder the potential for more lasting outcomes for long-term exposure to outdoor adventure education for girls. My postulation is that longer lasting, longitudinal programs that are integrated into the routine lives of girls', will have results that are more impactful and last longer than attending a shorter (such as a week or two) outdoor adventure program. For example, instead of a girl leaving her summer camp experience to a world that does not understand, she is immersed in community and outdoor activities that are inherently a part of her life and development as an adolescent.

This Study

The French Broad River Academy (FBRA) for girls creates an ideal scenario for young girls to learn more about extended outdoor adventure exposure. FBRA for girls is a private middle school (6-8 grade) located in Asheville, NC, that comprehensively intertwines experiential, outdoor, and adventure education programs throughout their school curricula. As a part of their holistic academic curriculum, they implement weekly outdoor activities (rock-climbing, tandem canoeing, skiing, service-learning, science fieldwork), several overnight trips throughout each semester, and a cultural immersion trip to Costa Rica (FBRA, 2021). This research study examines the stories of 8th-grade students reflecting on their outdoor adventure programming (OAP) experiences from their Fall 2021 semester, as well as the past 2.5 years at the FBRA for girls.

This study relies upon qualitative methods to examine the students' experiences at the FBRA. I did not attempt to quantify specific outcomes (Larkin, 2010), but rather to document the girls' reflections and personal interpretations of their outdoor adventure experiences at the FBRA during their final year at the school. This study examines their experiences for one semester, but the students were also asked to reflect upon the past two and half years. This form of research allows for examining the students' outdoor experiences holistically and for their stories to be heard via their individual and collective voices.

In the chapters that follow, I will next provide a literature review that lays foundational information on adolescent girls' physical and social development and focuses on past findings from outdoor adventure programming for girls. Following a literature review, the methods and methodology provide the framework for this research study. Lastly, I have chosen to relay my analysis, findings, and discussion by manuscript submission. This option requires chapters 1-2-3 plus a full-length manuscript aimed at a specific journal and formatted as such. The chosen is: *The Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership (JOREL)*. The requirements of a JOREL manuscript submission are 20-30 double-spaced pages (6000-9000 words), including reference list and abstract, written in APA format (JOREL, 2022). The conclusion of the manuscript consists of Results & Discussion, and Reflection & Recommendations, which encapsulates the answer to the research question I hoped to answer: What are the individual and collective experiences of the 8th-grade students at the French Broad River Academy for girls who have participated in outdoor adventure programming, long-term (2.5 years).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The adolescent years are a vital yet frequently challenging time (Witt & Caldwell, 2018), especially for girls. Girls experience specific challenges that haunt them more often than boys, including: mental health issues, poor self-body image (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016); low confidence (Steinberg & Morris, 2001); and limited interest in physical activity (Girl Scout Research Institute, 2020). Outdoor adventure programming (OAP) provides pivotal growth experiences and tools to help young girls navigate these difficulties. Numerous studies have measured the positive outcomes from programs utilizing the outdoors as a platform for growth and support for girls (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016; Hubert et al., 2020;). However, examining the impact of OAP on adolescent girls is still relatively new to outdoor education research, and more investigation is needed. Notably, most research in this area has focused on programs of short duration (1-2 weeks). Thus, a study examining the effects of extended programming (months or years) is warranted. This literature review examines adolescent development, adolescent development for girls, adventure programming for girls, and identifies what is missing.

Key Terms

This study will frequent the term outdoor adventure programming (OAP). The best way to explain OAP is to show its definition in the web of experiential and outdoor education (EOE) terms. Below are definitions that narrow in and allow for a clearer understanding of the overall EOE field and where this study falls in these foundational definitions.

- Experiential Education (EE) – a philosophy that lays the foundation for teaching methodologies. Educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience,

focusing on reflection to increase knowledge, develop skills, refine values, and develop people's capability to contribute to their community (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014).

- Outdoor Education (OE) - is the combination of learning in and through the natural world (Gilbertson et al., 2006). Gilbertson et al. (2006) describes outdoor education as containing of three main components: physical skills, interpersonal growth or educational skills, and ecological relationships.
- Outdoor Adventure Education (OAE) – "a variety of teaching and learning activities and experiences usually involving a close interaction with an outdoor natural setting and containing elements of real or perceived danger or risk in which the outcome, although uncertain, can be influenced by the actions of the participants and circumstances" (Ewert, 2014, p. 5).
- Outdoor Adventure Programming (OAP) - is the deliberate use of adventurous activities to produce learning in individuals or groups, frequently to improve society or communities. It also typically focuses on one or a combination of the following categories: recreation, education, development (individual or group), or therapy (Priest, 1999). "Positive outcomes that may occur from participating in an outdoor adventure program include, but are not limited to, personal growth, educational and physical outcomes, group development skills and resiliency" (Whittington & Budbill, 2013, p. 40).

OAP is chosen because it is like OAE, but also encompasses programs that do not seek to reach a specific goal or outcome. Some programs and activities are purely recreational (Cason &

Gillis, 1994). The allows for the inclusion of all types of outdoor programming at the French Broad River Academy (FBRA): education, development, and recreation.

Adolescent Development

Early adolescence (ages 10 to 14) and mid-adolescence (ages 15 to 17) are stages in an individual's life that are broadly known as precarious developmental stages (Witt & Caldwell, 2018). Various changes and transitions occur physically, mentally, and emotionally during this time (Gilmore & Meersand, 2014; Hubert et al., 2020; Perry & Pauletti, 2011; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Adolescents are experiencing enhanced cognition, more desire for independence, and changes within their social and academic school culture. Additionally, the numerous bodily transformations during puberty make the physical body itself a difficult developmental challenge. Rapid physical growth, the desire for more sleep, the beginning of secondary sexual characteristics, and the feeling of loss of control are overwhelming for young teens trying to assimilate to their new body and its functions into everyday life (Gilmore & Meersand, 2014).

Due to these changes within the body and mind, adolescents are especially susceptible to environmental and other contextual influences surrounding them, such as peer pressure and reckless desires/curiosities (Hubert et al., 2020). Bodily changes and their surrounding influences can considerably affect how well adolescents adjust to changes and navigate their relationships with peers, parental figures, and themselves. Despite what we know about adolescent development, some topics remain on which professionals have yet to achieve consensus (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). With that said, they do agree that when problematic behaviors arise, it is not always a direct result of adolescent changes, but frequently a result of prior problems that were introduced at home. By way of example, research has shown that long-term battles like alcoholism and abusive tendencies result from struggles within the home (Steinberg & Morris,

2001). Therefore, we must distinguish between problem behaviors that have an early onset from childhood exposure and ones that form because of adolescence.

In the United States, academic success and social advancement for early adolescents have been identified as declining drastically (Gilmore & Meersand, 2014; Juvonen et al., 2004). Studies reveal that the U.S. registers the most severe emotional problems and most negative views of peer culture amongst middle school-aged children (Juoven et al., 2004). In summary, there is a set of unique developmental (e.g., body, mental, and emotional) challenges, that affect all aspects of a young person's life, creating issues that require support (Gilmore & Meersand, 2014; Hubert et al., 2020; Perry & Pauletti, 2011; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Adolescent Girls

According to Perry & Pauletti (2011), gender and sex play a significant role in managing these challenges. Generally, pre-adolescent children have similar developmental progressions. Yet, research shows a few significant differences between girls and boys that stand out in studies examining challenges in young people as they crest upon their adolescent years (Hubert et al., 2020; Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Those differences are abilities and interests, self-image, social relationships, aggression, and depression. According to Perry and Pauletti (2011), girls are more people-oriented, and boys are more object-oriented. Girls have poorer body image. Boys have greater self-confidence and a stronger gender identity. Girls' same-sex friendships are described by greater intimacy, self-disclosure, support, caring, and relationship repair, but also by jealousy and co-rumination. Relationships amongst adolescent boys usually comprise more friendly competition, risky activities, excitement, direct control efforts, and reticence to express feelings and intimacy (Perry & Pauletti, 2011).

A significant difference between adolescent boys and girls is the rate of depression. Rates of depression in children are generally equal between sexes until they reach the ages between 10 and 15. At this point, the rate of depression for girl's doubles and continues to trend upward through middle adulthood (Hubert et al., 2020). Girls exceed boys not only in depression but also in correlated problems, such as eating disorders and self-injury behaviors like cutting (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Recent research shows that,

> in the United States, major depression among teen girls increased significantly from 2011 (12%) to 2017 (20%). In 2015 alone, compared to 2010, three times as many 10- to 14-year-old girls were admitted to emergency rooms after deliberately harming themselves (Girl Scouts Research Institute, 2020, p. 1).

Furthermore, girls are also more susceptible to the types of thoughts that can lead to depression, including self-blaming, poor body image, negative social comparison, hypervigilance leading to potential stress, and obsessing over the future consequences of hypothetical decisions (Gilmore & Meersand, 2014; Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Girls tend to possess excessive attention or acceptance-seeking behaviors and are therefore more likely to engage in activities that are potentially harmful or unhealthy (Hubert et al., 2020; Perry & Pauletti). Additionally, girls are more likely to try to gain approval from their peers.

These areas of concern stem from gender role stereotypes, societal influences, beliefs, and values from friends and family, leading to adolescent girls preoccupation with beauty, fitting into those gender role stereotypes, and peer pressure (Galeotti, 2015; Whittington, 2006). Compounding these challenges, current trends in social media use create significant societal influences, which power over girls (Wicks, 2020). Adolescent females growing up in the digital age are increasingly self-conscious and more aware of how they are perceived on and off social

media. Further, the shift from childhood to adolescence is faster and occurs at an earlier age for girls growing up with social media. While this digitally engulfing world supports girls' ability to feel connected to peers, it also offers more opportunities to feel excluded (Wicks, 2020).

Numerous programs have been specifically designed to assist in adolescent female development. For example, in the U.S., one can readily find an afterschool, summer, or community program that delivers supportive physical and social experiences to adolescent girls in order to create outcomes that are working against these negative developmental trends (Gilmore & Meersand, 2014; Girls Scout Research Institute, 2020; Hubert et al., 2020; Perry & Pauletti, 2011; Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Wicks, 2020). Conversely, these programs also continue to be topics of debate among healthcare and education professionals due to varying evidence in the outcomes of the programs (Hubert et al., 2020). As far as the success of these programs, the results vary. However, it is widely accepted amongst the outdoor and adventure education community that adolescence is the perfect time to incorporate experiential learning opportunities (Hubert et al., 2020). During this pivotal developmental phase, young adolescents are increasingly interested in real-life, authentic experiences to help make sense of the world around them. (Hubert et al., 2020).

Outcomes of Outdoor Adventure Programming for Adolescent Girls

Research on outcomes for girls participating within OAP consists of vital social and life skills such as resiliency (Whittington, & Aspelmeier, 2018; Whittington & Budbill, 2013; Whittington et al., 2016), confidence, courage, positive body image, and empowerment (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016; Hubert et al., 2020; Whittington, 2006). OAPs can help girls by supporting and facilitating development in the areas they are at risk for, such as depression, poor body image, and eating disorders (Gilmore & Meersand, 2014; Girl Scouts Research Institute,

2020; Hubert et al., 2020; Juoven et al., 2004; Perry & Pauletti, 2011; Steinberg & Morris, 2001), and provide space for girls to explore social expectations, body changes, and identity (Whittington, 2011). Evidence supports the probability that these physically active programs help develop beneficial relationships, encourage resilience, and learn problem-solving skills, all of which promote mental and physical well-being amongst the girls (Hubert et al., 2020). The OAPs mentioned in this literature review provide adolescent girls with opportunities to experience new things, overcome physical and social challenges, and provide overall confidence and mental well-being resources. There are hundreds of adventure-based programs across the United States for adolescent girls and a long list of varying positive outcomes that come from these programs. Discussed next, a review of the existing literature on OAP for adolescent girls shows overall outcomes of resiliency, courage, positive body image, breaking down gender stereotypes, relationship significance, and long-term impacts.

Resiliency

Resiliency is a combination of internal and external factors that allow an individual to effectively handle challenges, stress, or hardship (Whittington et al., 2016). Developing resilience skills is a component of healthy youth development yielding protective coping abilities that allow youth to face oncoming hardships head-on. One way to help girls persevere through challenges is to create opportunities to gain resilience. Research on OAP has shown beneficial results supporting youth resilience (Whittington & Aspelmeier, 2018). Whittington & Budbill (2013) studied the outcomes of a specific adventure education program for girls, Dirt Divas, a mountain biking program for adolescent girls ages 11-16. One of the desired outcomes for Dirt Divas is to support girls' resiliency. In this qualitative study (Whittington & Budbill, 2013), improved resiliency was found, especially in correlation with the relational-cultural theory

(RCT). This theory suggests that psychological growth occurs in relationships. To explain, young girls who have healthy connections with their peers will support each other, learn how to have mutual contributions to the well-being of others, be more courageous, and thereby improve their confidence. Replicating this theory is a way to help girls maintain their voice and valuable connections with others (Whittington & Budbill, 2013). The evidence from this study showed that resilience grew amongst the girls when combined with a deeply relational program setting. While this is just one case study example on resiliency, due to generalization (Schofield, 1993), the same outcomes hold true to programs that operate similarly to Dirt Divas.

Whittington et al. (2016) returned to study resiliency within the Dirt Divas program using pre-and post-surveys and having the participants fill out the Resiliency Scale for Adolescents and Children. Results showed "substantive and enduring increases in their perceived resilience—especially concerning mastery—which persisted after the program was over" (Whittington et al., 2016, p. 11). Due to the diverse nature of this program, they were able to see if socio-economic status (SES) played a role. Typically, those who live within a higher SES see better resilience skills. However, in this study, at Dirt Divas, growth in resiliency presented itself equivalently amongst the socially diverse participants (Whittington et al., 2016). Whittington & Aspelmeir (2018) took their research a step further by looking at resiliency outcomes within various summer camps for girls. Four camps participated in the study, and they each classified themselves as adventure education, experiential education, traditional camp programming, or a mixed methods camp. The research methods utilized the Adolescent Girls' Resilience Scale (AGRS). "The AGRS measures factors related to girls' resilience that are most amenable to change after participation in short-term intervention programs" (Whittington et al., 2018, p. 128). There were consistent increases in resilience in all programs, with the most significant increase

in the adventure education-based camp. A credible reason behind these findings is that OAP environments are distinctively positioned to encourage the development of peer relationships among girls because they consist of small group sizes and physically and mentally challenging tasks that require trust and cooperation (Whittington et al., 2018).

Courage

Courage is a widely desired outcome for many adolescent development and OAP programs, but its definition is not without debate. Some people argue that it is always the act of overcoming fear, while others believe that fear does not have to be present. One helpful definition claims courage involves deliberate choice in the face of uncomfortable or fearful conditions (Whittington & Mack, 2010). In some studies, two types of courage emerged as beneficial for young women: physical and moral courage. Physical courage involves overcoming the overwhelming feeling of fear of injury, or even or death. Moral courage is overcoming the fear of losing social approval. There are also more personalized acts of courage specific to an individual, such as a person pushing beyond the perceived boundaries of their disability. Researchers classify this as personal or everyday courage (Whittington & Mack, 2010). Courage is radiant in girls ages 9 to 11, and they generally do not question their self-worth. They are confident in their thoughts and feelings, and they are outspoken about it. However, this confidence often erodes throughout adolescent period (Whittington & Mack, 2010). In the face of cultural pressures, social inconsistencies, and gender stereotyping, many girls find themselves losing their voice, which is ultimately their courage (Whittington & Mack, 2010).

Passages Northwest, an adventure education-based program, set out to help adolescent girls re-establish their self-esteem and to help them practice physical courage, expressive

courage, and inquisitive courage. Physical courage is found through being scared and acting anyway, such as going rock climbing in the face of fear. “Expressive courage is cultivated through creating art, expressing oneself fully, or dealing with conflict constructively. Inquisitive courage is developed by asking questions and being curious about the human and natural world” (Whittington & Mack, 2010, p. 170). Utilizing physical activities such as rock climbing and sea kayaking, along with expressive activities such as journaling, Passages Northwest helps participants cultivate the seeds of these various forms of courage (Whittington & Mack, 2010).

Whittington and Mack (2010) sought to record the courage outcomes among the girls who participated in the Passages Northwest programs. They used quantitative methods to collect data via pre-and post-program questionnaires. Overall, there was growth in courage amongst the girls, specifically expressive, physical, and moral courage (which consisted of standing up for their friends). Not only did this study show that the girls were able to experience courage during the adventure program, but they also were able to describe specific ways they planned to be courageous at home or school. Having moral courage was an unforeseen theme; in the qualitative analysis, many girls spoke of speaking up for their friends (Whittington & Mack, 2010). This furthers the evidence for the support between relational importance and the development of self-empowerment for girls.

Positive Body Image and Breaking Down Gender Stereotypes

Femininity refers to the simple idea that a person’s physical attributes and how they act are typically associated with being female. In contemporary Western society, and through social media influences in particular, femininity emphasizes beauty and outward appearances as a top priority for girls today (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016; Whittington, 2006; Wicks, 2020). Girls are valued for being compliant, sweet, friendly, cooperative, upbeat, and sincere. Further value is

extoled if they can meet the unrealistic beauty standards culture sets for them. Notably, these perceptions reflect the dominant construct of femininity as shaped by white, middle-class, heterosexual males' ideals of gender (Whittington, 2006). Researchers in girls' development argue that obedience to traditional femininity silences girls. As girls crest adolescence, they lose their natural tendencies such as vitality, resilience, immunity to depression, and their sense of themselves and their character due to the pressures of society (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Whittington, 2006).

OAPs that focus on girls' development can offer avenues for girls to resist and challenge these social stereotypes. Outdoor adventure programs for girls offer positive gender identity development and body image (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016; Galeotti, 2015; Whittington, 2006;). Studies that focus specifically on positive body image and challenging gender constructs show outcomes of perseverance, strength, and determination. Additionally, they offer evolvement on challenging assumptions of girls' abilities, feelings of accomplishment and pride, questioning ideal images of beauty, leadership skills, and building significant relationships with other girls (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016; Whittington, 2006).

Barr-Wilson & Roberts (2016) found that body image can impact girls in outdoor adventure settings. They interviewed girls who participated in a California-based adventure program, Girl Ventures, before and after the course (immediately after and three months after). All participants indicated their body image perceptions were improved during and immediately after their course. Most claimed that their body image was still positively affected by their course at the time of the study, three months after the course was completed (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016). Three main influences affected the participants' view on positive body image: the instructors, nature, and relationships with other girls on the trip.

Relationship Significance and Long-Term Impacts

Numerous studies have found other positive outcomes for adolescent girls who participated in OAP, such as reducing stress (Frank, 2009), improving social skills and leadership (Wang et al., 2006), and developing relationships (Sammet, 2010). Whittington (2011) studied the long-term impact of participating in a wilderness adventure. She interviewed girls at three different stages after their trip: 6-months, 18-months, and five years following the course. The entire course consisted of a year-long mentoring program, a weekend paddle-making event before the main trip, and a 3-week canoeing expedition. Even five years out, this study showed that girls' participation in an adventure program results in long-term positive impacts on their abilities in technical-skill development, communication, teamwork, leadership, and perseverance (Whittington, 2011).

A reoccurring theme for nearly every study identified was the significance of relationships for adolescent girls and their development (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016; Hubert et al., 2020; Sammet, 2010; Whittington, 2010; Whittington & Aspelmeier, 2018; Whittington & Budbill, 2013, Whittington et al., 2016; Whittington & Mack, 2010). For instance, in a mixed-method, two-part study, adolescent participants were surveyed and interviewed about their social interactions on an extended outdoor adventure trip with Adventure Treks (Mirkin & Middleton, 2014). While this was not a single-gender program, findings reveal that, on average, females are more oriented toward social development compared to males. Other studies also support this finding. In OAPs designed to foster relationship and community, more significant growth in areas such as increasing self-esteem, resiliency, courage, and going against gender stereotypes are present (Whittington & Budbill, 2013; Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016). When OAPs that operate away from the traditional school format and, when facilitated well, offer participants a

chance for social growth that may be preserved over time (Mirkin & Middleton, 2014). The nature of OAP is inherently communal, and these studies show how monumental outdoor experiences are when it comes to aiding in the positive development of adolescent girls.

In summary, adolescent development is challenging for young people, and research shows it is especially difficult for girls. Studies confirm that OAP supports adolescent girls in developing social skills, building confidence, resilience, courage, self-worth, and positive body image. While there is a growing body of literature, to support these benefits and outcomes for adolescent girls who participate in adventure programming, numerous research remain. For instance, more studies comparing a couple or multiple girl-specific OAPs and studies that highlight more long-term programs are needed. Long-term can be defined by a program that lasts several months to a year. The long-term could also mean longitudinal programs. For example, having girls participate in adventure activities, intermittently, over several years. This could include participation in adventure-based summer camps for multiple years, or girls involved in community or school-based programs participants come back to year after year. Research addressing long-term impact is needed for several reasons, including curricular reform within programs and findings that justify the added expense of prolonged OAP offerings (Galeotti, 2015). Ultimately, the primary purpose for determining the long-term effects of outdoor adventure programming for girls is to help promote strong, empowered, confident women, who have healthy self-images, and can be positive role models for other girls (Galeotti, 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the outcomes experienced by adolescent girls who participate in OAP regularly over the course of a semester while reflecting on their overall experience of multiple years at the French Broad River Academy.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Through a narrative style of inquiry, this study uses qualitative methods to tell the stories of the 8th-grade students at the French Broad River Academy (FBRA) for girls. I chose a qualitative research design because its methods excel in exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups have adopted through experience. Qualitative researchers typically focus on the significance of an individual's experience, perspective, and the places they emphasize essential when referring to the complexities and intricacies of their situation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on experimentally determining quantity, amount, or frequency, qualitative research interprets natural setting, human phenomena, and the meanings people bring to them (Larkin, 2010). As will become evident, for this study, I specifically chose to use a data collection method of photo-elicitation focus groups and inductive thematic analysis. This process resulted in a rich collection of emerged themes that help tell the story of these students. Specifically, this data helps express the meaning of outdoor adventure programming for adolescent girls over an extended period.

Site and Participant Selection

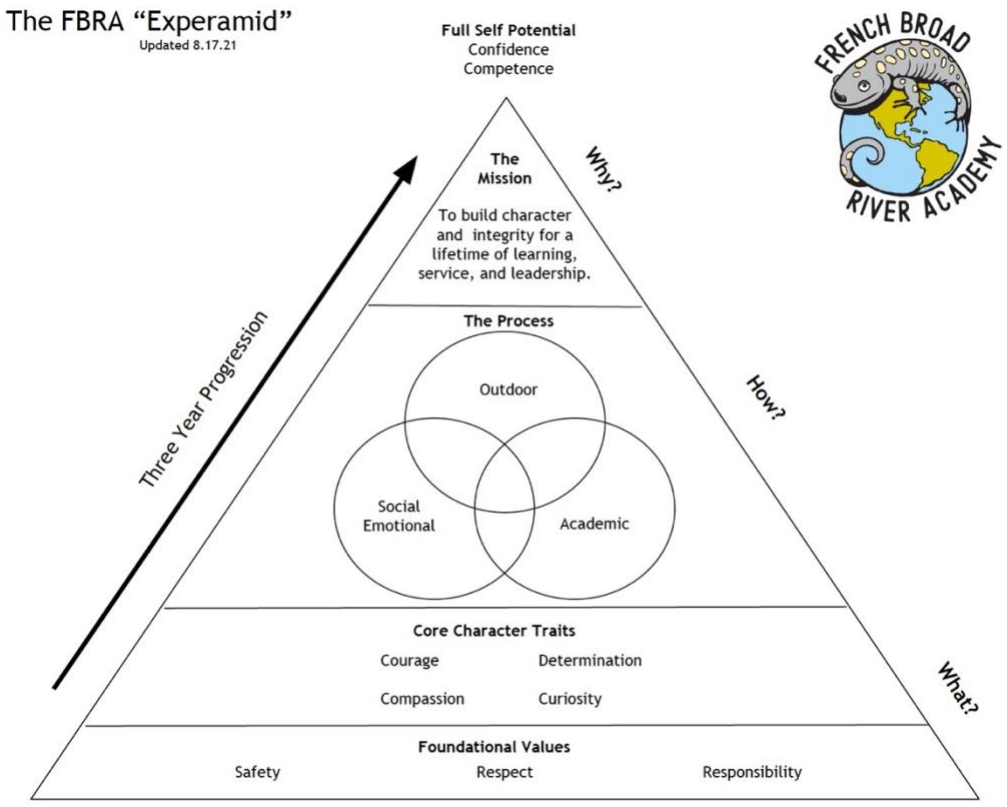
The site for this study is the French Broad River Academy for Girls (FBRA), located in Asheville, NC. FBRA is a day school that provides a traditional middle school curriculum via conventional and experiential methods. There are two schools within the FBRA system. The boys' school was established in 2009, and the girl's school started in 2015; both schools are very similar in their programming and curriculum but operate separately. Since its birth, the FBRA for girls has strived to provide a holistic education for girls in grades 6-8, teaching around 75 students each school year. Focusing on character-based education, the school aims to teach the whole student. Curriculum goes beyond rigorous academics to include social-emotional learning,

presentation and performance skills, foreign language, physical education, healthy choices, and media literacy. Their mission statement is “FBRA builds character and integrity for a lifetime of learning, service, and leadership” (FBRA, 2021).

The FBRA “curriculum is based on the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics, and the North Carolina Essential Standards for all other subject domains” (FBRA, 2021). While they base their curriculum on these standards, they consider their classrooms to go above and beyond these benchmarks. Advisors are advocates for the students, and they care about all aspects of the students’ lives, facilitating communication between learners, teachers, and parents that creates a true learning partnership (FBRA, 2021). Physical education classes are also a regular part of the FBRA curriculum. An annual rotation may include swimming, gymnastics, soccer, basketball, flag football, ultimate frisbee, rock climbing, yoga, running, dance, kung fu, badminton, or tennis. Likewise, the arts are a fundamental component at FBRA, including music, visual arts, and video production (FBRA, 2021).

This outdoor education program provides a structured environment for students to take risks, face and overcome challenges, and build confidence along with leadership skills that will serve them for years to come (FBRA, 2021). Along with a varied, weekly academic schedule, lessons are accompanied by learning in the field via a comprehensive outdoor curriculum of whitewater paddling, climbing, hiking, skiing, service learning, and international travel. The FBRA “Experamid” is a visual representation depicting the school’s all-encompassing values, curriculum, and goals.

Figure 1. The FBRA "Experamid"



This school was selected due to the area, personal interests, and structure. The school's campus is located beside the French Broad River in Asheville, NC, an ideal location for unlimited outdoor activities. Additionally, this location is conveniently close to where I live and work in Western North Carolina. I also have been drawn to their vision through observation via local rivers, rock climbing sites, and their frequent updates on social media. The in-depth and consistent opportunities for outdoor adventure activities for the students and their holistic education are unlike any other program I've encountered, making it an ideal research site to help fill a gap in the literature.

The sample for this study was the entire 8th-grade class, 24 students, and they each met the following criteria before the study:

a) Be an actively enrolled 8th-grade student at the French Broad River Academy for girls.
b) Completed the Fall 2021 semester
c) Participated in at least one outdoor adventure program per month
d) Secured consent from their parents or guardians
e) Provided assent for participation

The 8th graders at the school were chosen because they have more outdoor adventure programming (OAP) experiences from the past three years to reflect on compared to the other grades. The demographics of the students are girls ages 12-14 years old, coming from middle to upper-class families that live in Asheville, NC. Tuition currently totals $18,975 per year. The FBRA allows families to apply for financial aid, but they rely heavily on tuition and donors since it is a private school. Few people of color and minority groups are currently represented amongst the students and staff of the school. However, the FBRA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) coordinator and committee are boldly working on increasing diversity at the school.

Once a week, the students leave the classroom to explore the beautiful mountains and rivers outside their backdoor. Spring and Fall outdoor adventure lessons consist of tandem-canoeing expeditions, while winter lessons are spent practicing downhill skiing skills. Groups go rock climbing and bouldering outside throughout the year and engage in service-learning and field science work (FBRA, 2021). As a participant researcher, I joined the students and instructors intermittently throughout the semester on outdoor programming days to better understand the program and build rapport with the students prior to data collection.

The students understood that I was a researcher when I spent time with them. I also sometimes served as a substitute teacher for the school. They were informed of how they were

going to tell their stories, how the study would be conducted, and how the generated data would be analyzed. This process benefited the FBRA students by allowing reflection on their unique middle school experience both as a group and as an individual. It helped them see the bigger picture of what they are a part of within the realm of outdoor and experiential education and learn about qualitative research. This study could also become a resource for the school's donors, board of directors, or website.

This study was approved by WCU IRB (Institutional Review Board). The parent of each student agreed to consent via an online Qualtrics Survey (see APPENDIX B: CONSENT/ASSENT LANGUAGE). Students also provided assent via the online survey. The research design contains negligible risk for the participants, and thus no ethical concerns were present in the data collection, analysis, and write-up.

Methodology – Narrative Inquiry

This study is informed by narrative inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Narrative inquiry is a method of exploration that uses storytelling to uncover nuance and make meaning. It provides the opportunity for dialogue and reflection and allows the participants of the study to tell their own stories (Wang & Geale, 2015). Narrative inquiry is the study of how humans experience the world. It has a long history within sociology and anthropology and, more recently, has grown in popularity to explore educational experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Beyond telling a story, narrative inquiry allows researchers to understand the participants' experiences. It allows researchers to get information that the storyteller may not consciously know, allowing for hidden assumptions to rise to the surface. This form of data collection allowed the girls at the FBRA to share their outdoor adventure program experiences in the form of stories during focus groups. While the students' experiences I examined at FBRA focused on a

single semester (Fall 2021), their experiences from the 6th and 7th grade, inevitably impacted what they chose to discuss during this study. It, therefore, provided a holistic perspective on their experiences within adventure programming at the school.

Researcher Reflexivity

As a qualitative researcher, I cannot regard myself as neutral, as is often the case with other scientific studies. Therefore, it is important to divulge the implications of my knowledge, experiences, and worldview, and their role within my research. I am aware that my entrance into this study contoured the questions I asked the students and my interpretations of their stories. Reflexivity about how I am inserted into this study is crucial to the research (Larkin, 2010). While I had never worked for FBRA or been directly related to the school through a family member, I had worked in similar settings such as other private schools with outdoor programs, all-girls summer camps, and many outdoor education programs. Meaning, I was familiar and comfortable with the type of setting that I would be immersed in as a researcher. I began substitute teaching at FBRA the semester that I collected the data. Therefore, my first interactions within the school culture were primarily through the lenses of a researcher. I was familiar with many experiential education techniques that FBRA uses regularly. I also was familiar with some of the programming that FBRA has offered for the past few years via the local outdoor education community and social media.

Most of the positionalities (mentioned above) is beneficial to my research; however, I must recognize how these things situated me in the study. Like many of the teachers at FBRA, I am a white, cis-gender female and partake in outdoor and adventure activities. I felt like a "familiar" face to the students at FBRA. By contrast, the SES of my upbringing differs from many of the FBRA students. I grew up lower-middle class in a small rural town, unlike Asheville

in many ways. However, I have been working amongst the youth of upper-class society for years. Thus, this was a familiar demographic for me, and I felt I knew how to interact with them easily. I was aware of position throughout my data collection process. I primarily used it to my advantage to step into the community at FBRA.

Methods

I originally planned to collect and analyze two different forms of data: photo-elicitation focus groups and participant observation field notes. However, during my formulating this study and spending time at the school, I found that taking field notes was too lofty of an additional task. Thankfully, I still met two of my original goals through participant observation without taking the field notes to analyze later: One, I was able to insert myself into the school's culture, to understand it better and observe how the students interacted with one another and how they functioned in the FBRA environment. Secondly, I was built rapport with the students before our focus groups. I wanted them to know me, so they felt comfortable sharing during our time together. Therefore, participant observation was one method to this study, but the only form of data collection was through photo-elicitation focus groups.

Photo-elicitation Focus Groups

The data collection process consisted of photo elicitation focus groups. In brief, this consisted of participants taking pictures over the course of a semester, and then using the pictures to share their story during focus groups, at the end of the semester. There were three different focus groups and each one had 8 students in it. The progression of this process went as follows:

As part of the FBRA outdoor adventure programs, the students each received a disposable camera with 24 exposures, at the beginning of the fall semester (September). They used this camera to capture and interpret their experiences while participating in their outdoor

field lesson days. All students participated in this process of capturing their experiences through photographs. Some were more in tune with the process than others. For example, the students were given their cameras at the beginning of each overnight trip or field lesson day. Some were very excited and remembered to take pictures regularly, while others forgot to use their camera and ended up taking most of their photos at the end. This was one limitation to this process. The FRBA outdoor adventure program implemented the use of the cameras as a reflection tool before introducing this study. Following IRB approval, the study was then introduced in correlation with their cameras/picture taking, which was in October. The students received this prompt with their cameras at the beginning of the semester:

> Take pictures of what you want to remember most about your time during outdoor activities at the FBRA. Take photos of what means the most to you during these experiences. Please try and take pictures spread out throughout the semester. A suggestion would be about seven photos a month. These do not have to be staged photos – feel free to take candid shots of places, people, your friends, selfies, literally whatever you want. This will be different from pictures you take on your phone because they are permanent and will ultimately tell a story through film.

The cameras were collected near the end of the semester, and the film was developed digitally. The students then received an email (see Appendix D) with their pictures to choose from, along with ideas and directions on how to share their story during the upcoming focus groups. The pictures were shared via a private Google Photos album, allowing each student to share their 5 pictures back to me that they felt best represented their semester and the story of their OAP experiences. These chosen photos were printed and then brought to the three focus groups, on December 9th, 2021. During every focus group, each student shared their story using

their 5 chosen images. Their pictures were not analyzed as data. They were simply a form of expression that the students could use to help tell their stories.

Asking participants to share their experiences using pictures is called photo elicitation. Photo-elicitation was chosen for this study because it allows for a more personal level the participants' understanding. The emotional content extracted and projected from the photographs shows a deeper understanding of the students' experiences (Loeffler, 2004). These transactions are then recorded for later analysis by the researcher. The participants can interpret their experiences through photographs, making them the leading role of the interview process (Loeffler, 2004).

The shared stories and experiences were recorded through focus groups. Focus groups are a way to gather research by interviewing small groups of people at one time. The interviewer creates a supportive environment where the participants answer focused questions to encourage discussion and express differing opinions and points of view (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For this study, there were three different focus groups, consisting of 8 students each, lasting 75 minutes. During each focus group, the Focus Group Interview Script, found in Appendix A, was read verbatim during the focus groups. I read the first half of the script to each group, each student shared their stories and showed us their pictures (they were each given 5 minutes to share) and then I read each question on the script as follow-up questions to the stories that lead to group discussions.

The stories and conversations were recorded via audio and video. The audio recording was converted into text verbatim using Descript, a transcription software. The video served as a backup and allowed for observing body language, facial expressions, and social dynamics, creating a richer transcription experience.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is an overall approach and a way to gather data allowing the researcher firsthand involvement in the social environment of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). While I decided not to use participant observation as formal method of data collection, participant observation was still inherently part of this study, due to time spent with the students throughout the semester. As part of FBRA's weekly programming, the students spend a day doing some outdoor adventure (rock climbing, skiing, kayaking, canoeing, and hiking). The school kindly offered for me to join them on as many of their weekly outdoor adventure trips as possible. This also resulted in me being a substitute teacher periodically throughout the semester, on the field lesson days. Being immersed in OAP days with the students allowed me to listen, observe, and gain better insight into their reality at the school (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I joined them on six outdoor adventure programming days before the focus group interviews on December 9, 2021.

During my time at the school and on field lesson days, I observed and soaked in the culture, habits, conversations, and interactions amongst the students and their teachers. For OAP days, the 8th-grade class separates into two different groups. I was able to spend time with both groups during various activities. The culture of the FBRA for girls is one full of awareness, both learned and learning. For example, the teachers do an excellent job of teaching the students to be self-aware as well as anticipating the group's personal needs. It was evident that most of the students had gained some level of this leadership skill, while being aware that they were still improving. Other observations were seeing the goals of the school (kindness, supportive, and inclusive) play out amongst students. It was clear that they understood these cultural goals and worked hard to makes them norms. Another observation that I found interesting with this age

group/demographic was the contrast in behavior. They could spend the morning having a, "community meeting," discussing inclusivity, being vulnerable, and sharing their well-composed thoughts, desires, and intentions, and then spend the afternoon having a blast, being silly at a park playground. It was a true joy to experience a little bit of life with this group of students.

Focus Groups

The day of the focus groups I arrived at the school around 8:00 am and met with the three teachers that were going to be helping me coordinate the focus group sessions and facilitate the other parts of the day for the 8th-grade class. Since I had three different focus groups, we needed something for the other students to do while waiting their turn. We came up with a plan for the day. The schedule progressed in the following way:

Figure 2. December 9th 8th Grade Schedule

	Group A	Group B	Group C
8:00	Teacher Meeting		
8:20 - 8:40	Check In		
8:40 - 9:00	Assembly		
9:00 - 9:15	Whole Group Meeting		
9:15 - 9:30	Prep time/Setup in Salamander Room		
9:30 - 10:45	Interview	"Battle of the Bands"	Disc Golf & Lunch at the Park
10:45 - 11:15	Lunch	Lunch	
11:15 - 12:30	"Battle of the Bands"	Focus Group Interview	
1:00 - 2:15	Disc Golf & Lunch at the Park	Disc Golf & Lunch at the Park	Focus Group Interview
2:15 - 3:15			"Battle of the Bands"

This schedule allowed the students to have a little bit of outside time, eat lunch, and have another fun activity ("Battle of the Bands") while not participating in the interview.

The three FBRA teachers decided on which students were in each focus group, since they know the students well. They made this decision by putting some friends together, mixing up

students who are often together, and ensuring that there were not too many "big" personalities in one group and not too many quieter students in another.

Following morning assembly, all the 8th graders stayed in the Salamander room (large meeting room for the school) where we had a meeting and were informed on the day's events and given time to ask questions. We gave them the full schedule and told them what groups they would be in and who was going where first. They then went back to their homeroom classrooms for 15 minutes to have some time to think and make notes on a small notecard about what they were going to say when it was their time to share their story during the interviews. They were reminded of the storytelling prompts they received at the beginning of the semester and their prompt from the email a week prior (see Appendix C & D).

The assistance of the FBRA teachers was greatly appreciated. The day could not have been successful without them. Prior to the first focus group, they helped me lay the pictures out on the floor, organize the name tags, and set up the audio and video recording devices. Also, they checked on the camera, zoom recording, and audio recorder periodically to ensure it was all functioning properly throughout the focus group sessions.

As each group entered the room, I got their attention and instructed them to fill out a tag with their name and pronouns. After that, they found and collected their photos from the floor. They enjoyed getting to see all the pictures and which one's other people chose. If a student's picture was accidentally not printed, they were able to share it digitally on a computer screen. After they had their name tags and photos, they formed a circle on the floor. During each focus group session, students took turns sharing their 3–5-minute story. Following the story-telling time, we flowed right into the Focus Group Interview Script (see Appendix A) questions. This took up the remainder of the 75-minute session and was a relaxed conversational time where

students answered “pop-corn” style. Not every student answered each question, but every student shared their thoughts at least once throughout the whole discussion. There were thirty-minute breaks between each group. This allowed for me and my teacher assistant to get everything prepped and ready for the next group. Each teacher that assisted throughout the day (they switched around) sat outside of the group circle during the focus groups. They sat relatively far away from the circle but in the same room.

The experiences with each group went as follows:

Group 1

The first group came into the room in a bustle from their preparation time. They seemed excited and a little nervous. Some of the girls were even rehearsing what they wanted to say to a friend off to the side. I told them there was nothing to be nervous about, and it was going to be a fun, casual conversation.

While sharing their stories, some of the students laid each photo out on the floor, and some of them chose to pass their pictures around the circle. Each student had a specific story for each picture. This group was eager to share and quickly felt comfortable in sharing. Multiple students were naturally sentimental, and it was clear that they enjoyed sharing their stories. After each of them shared their stories, they continued to laugh, talk, and reminisce on the semester or previous years together. It was challenging to get a word in as the facilitator. I enjoyed hearing them speak and did not want to interrupt but to keep things moving along, I eventually interrupted and asked them their first official question (Do you feel that these outdoor adventure trips and experiences have been valuable to your life? Why or why not?). Every student was able and eager to answer each question following the first one. They also loved responding to each

other's responses. It was indeed a conversation that I did not participate in. I put each question out there, and they answered and engaged with one another.

Group 2

The second group came in a little more apprehensive than the first group but still energized and curious. We sat down, read my prompt from the script, and got started. Everyone chose to pass their pictures around the circle, so we could look at them as they were talking. After sharing their stories, this group was eager to answer the questions, but it felt more organized and streamlined than the first group. They did a great job of conversing amongst themselves while still giving me the facilitator space to ask questions. I ended up asking the questions in the order I had planned them, and I did not feel like I had to interrupt their conversation to keep things moving. Like the first group, though, they still reminisced on shared experiences. I was able to hear from each person several times.

Group 3

The last group came into the room full of chatter and laughter. They spent the time before the session officially began being silly in front of the video camera. However, once our time began, they were much quieter and a little more subdued than the other groups. One reason this may have been the case is that they had gotten to spend the entire morning playing frisbee golf in the woods. There was no one eager to share first. After some silence and giggling, someone finally said they would go first, and we all cheered her on. After that, things progressed smoothly. Each girl shared their story by passing around their photos. The stories in this group were much shorter than the previous two groups. I asked all the questions on my planned script and facilitated some other questions and conversations to fill up the time in the end. Following their lead, it was a fruitful conversation about autonomy and things they would change about the

program. I also inquired more about their individual stories and ideas to create more dialogue. This took up more time and helped them to think deeper. While this group was quieter, they still had substantive things to share and enjoyed the interview process.

Overall, the day went well, and the students seemed to have enjoyed it. Many of them told me they liked this experience and enjoyed the intentionality required for the picture-taking process. Several of them said they even wanted to use disposable cameras for other semesters. The students also did an excellent job respecting each other during the story-sharing and conversation process. Following the focus group interviews, I helped one of the teachers facilitate a "Battle of the Bands" activity for the last group.

Data Analysis

Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcriptions from the focus group interviews. Inductive thematic analysis requires that the researcher collect detailed information from participants and then through a coding process form the data into categories or themes. The categories or themes are then compared with preexisting, related literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The analyzed data for this study consisted of the transcriptions of the student's storytelling and facilitated conversations during the focus groups. The themes were chosen as a result of patterns in the transcriptions as opposed to determining theme prior to the focus groups (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Since situation and place are fundamental when analyzing a story, I looked for specific locations in the storyteller's landscape that give meaning to the narrative, such as the physical location and how the activities in that place affected their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This type of process requires a heightened awareness and focused attention on the data and an openness to the indirect, unstated nuances of the social phenomena that the students are experiencing (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

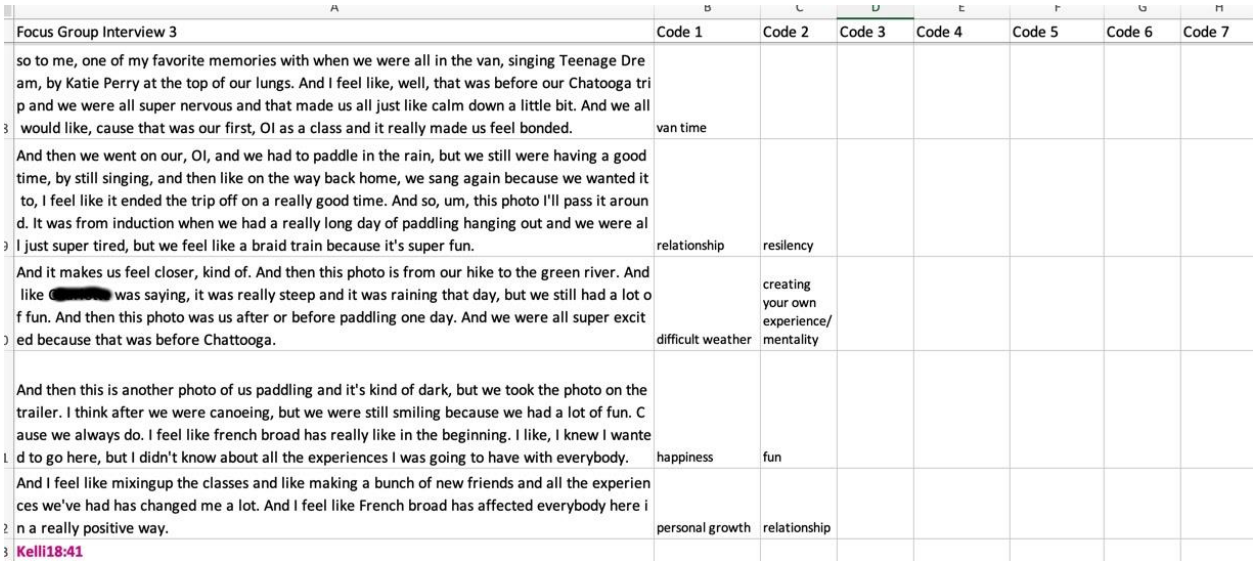
The step-by-step process of data analysis went as follows:

Step 1: I transcribed each focus group session using Descript (an online transcription program) and then edited each transcript by typing the correct words or phrases that the program transcribed incorrectly. Editing them was time-consuming as it consisted of meticulously listening to each of the 75-minute focus group interviews, pausing and relistening to segments, making sure that all the transcript words were correct. The video recordings were referenced when I was unsure of who was talking. I went back and watched segments of those as needed, but I did not re-watch the entire video recordings. After re-listening to each focus group session and editing the transcriptions, I began working with each transcript individually.

Step 2: I reread the entire Focus Group 1 transcription and made hand notes of reoccurring concepts that came up. I then typed all of these up into a word document. There were 48 total, so I decided to "combine" some of them to create a shorter list (34 total). This was a practice coding session and created an extra step. However, I feel that it allowed me to ease into the process, of thematic analysis and coding, and helped me to interact with my data before fully diving.

Step 3: After that, I re-read the Focus Group 1 transcript and coded it in Excel. Coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks of writings and choosing a word or phrase to represent it. This code is then put in the margins or above the transcribed material (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The transcription was divided into chunks on an Excel document and placed in a column on the far left of the spreadsheet, along with seven coding columns beside the text. See Figure 3 as an example:

Figure 3. Excel Coding Example



	Focus Group Interview 3	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5	Code 6	Code 7
3	so to me, one of my favorite memories with when we were all in the van, singing Teenage Dream, by Katie Perry at the top of our lungs. And I feel like, well, that was before our Chatooga trip and we were all super nervous and that made us all just like calm down a little bit. And we all would like, cause that was our first, OI as a class and it really made us feel bonded.	van time						
4	And then we went on our, OI, and we had to paddle in the rain, but we still were having a good time, by still singing, and then like on the way back home, we sang again because we wanted it to, I feel like it ended the trip off on a really good time. And so, um, this photo I'll pass it around. It was from induction when we had a really long day of paddling hanging out and we were all just super tired, but we feel like a braid train because it's super fun.	relationship	resiliency					
5	And it makes us feel closer, kind of. And then this photo is from our hike to the green river. And like [redacted] was saying, it was really steep and it was raining that day, but we still had a lot of fun. And then this photo was us after or before paddling one day. And we were all super excited because that was before Chattooga.	difficult weather	creating your own experience/ mentality					
6	And then this is another photo of us paddling and it's kind of dark, but we took the photo on the trailer. I think after we were canoeing, but we were still smiling because we had a lot of fun. Cause we always do. I feel like french broad has really like in the beginning. I like, I knew I wanted to go here, but I didn't know about all the experiences I was going to have with everybody.	happiness	fun					
7	And I feel like mixingup the classes and like making a bunch of new friends and all the experiences we've had has changed me a lot. And I feel like French broad has affected everybody here in a really positive way.	personal growth	relationship					
8	Kelli18:41							

After coding in Excel, I made a code map in Word by listing all the codes I used. There were 41 of them.

Step 4: After coding the first focus group, I felt that I had a solid grasp of the process and coded the other two focus groups in one sweep, following the same procedure outlined above. When applicable, I decided to code using the same or similar words to the list of codes that had already been used for consistency. I then made two more code maps in Word with a list of codes used for Focus Groups 2 & 3 (see all code maps in Appendix E).

Step 5: Since the codes were consistent throughout all three focus groups, I collapsed the codes into themes (categories of similar ideas), creating a third code map for the themes (see Appendix F).

Step 8: Finally, I went back and chose representative quotations for the descriptions and themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In summary, using the framework of narrative inquiry, the student's stories and discussions were analyzed for both their personal experiences and interactions with one another

(Wang & Geale, 2015). The stories were analyzed by putting them into themes that summarize meaning for the students (Loeffler, 2004). The themes were chosen when concepts emerged in repetition from the stories and responses to the scripted questions. The themes were examined to help answer the original research question: What are the individual and collective experiences of the 8th-grade students participating in outdoor adventure programming (OAP) at the French Broad River Academy for girls?

Trustworthiness

In ensuring trustworthiness, the following strategies were employed:

1) Clarification of researcher bias – At the outset of this study, researcher bias was articulated in writing under "Researcher Reflexivity."
2) Negative or discrepant information – Evidence that was contradictory to this study's general perspective is reported in the final thesis.
3) Repeated observations at the research site – There was consistent, iterative contact with participants in the field during their outdoor adventure programming experiences.
4) Rich, thick description – Detailed descriptions of the settings where I observed the participants provide a solid framework for future researchers of similar studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).
5) Transcripts were thoroughly examined to ensure they did not contain apparent mistakes during transcription.
6) Multiple forms of digital recording – I have the video (video camera and zoom) and an audio recording of the focus group interviews.
7) I made sure there was no drift in the definition of the codes. This was accomplished by continually comparing quotes with the codes and themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Reporting the Findings

The findings of this study are reported in a narrative style of writing where the reader has a thick, detailed description of the experiences of the 8th-grade girls at the French Broad River Academy, as opposed to a scientific report. The final report provides a holistic picture of what it is like to be a young girl at the school experiencing outdoor adventure programming weekly and the meanings they attach to it. It provides a lens through which the readers can view the subject's world (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Manuscript Option

As part of the EOE thesis handbook, I have chosen the manuscript thesis format option. That option requires chapters 1-2-3 plus a full-length manuscript aimed at a specific journal and formatted as such. In this option, the next chapter will be my complete manuscript. I have chosen to submit to the *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership (JOREL)*, which requires authors to submit a manuscript that is 20-30 double-spaced pages (6000-9000 words), including references, tables, and figures written in APA format (JOREL, 2022). What follows is my manuscript for submission to JOREL.

CHAPTERS FOUR & FIVE

JOREL Manuscript

"Being Comfortable with the Uncomfortable": Adolescent Girl's Experiences of an Extended Outdoor Adventure Program

ABSTRACT

This study examined the impacts of long-term exposure of outdoor adventure programming for adolescent girls. This qualitative analysis shares the stories of the 8th-grade students at the French Broad River Academy for girls, which is a private middle school that consistently intertwines outdoor adventure programming (OAP) into their curriculum. Students reflected on what OAP has meant to them during their 2.5 years at the school. They did this over the course of a semester by taking pictures of their outdoor experiences on disposable cameras. At the conclusion of the semester, students used photo-elicitation to share their experiences by using their pictures to share their stories in focus group interviews. Emergent themes from the focus group interviews included: Relationship & Community, Perseverance & Resiliency, Enjoyment & Finding Beauty in Nature, Leadership & Confidence, and Individual Growth.

Keywords: adolescent girls, outdoor adventure programming, photo-elicitation, focus group interviews

"Being Comfortable with the Uncomfortable": Adolescent Girl's Experiences of an Extended Outdoor Adventure Program

Research Interest

The idea for this study originated through personal reflections on my years as an adolescent girl and my time as a program director for an all-girls adventure summer camp. During my adolescent years, I felt misunderstood. I did not trust authority figures, was extremely self-conscious, and often depressed. I habitually felt the grips of childhood bliss and teenage milestones simultaneously ripping me apart during those younger years. The pressure from peers to mature quickly and conform to the feminine societal expectations stifled the adventurous little girl begging to roam freely in the woods. Wanting to feel accepted among my friends, I left behind the young, independent, opinionated, barefooted girl for the insecure, approval-seeking, conforming teenager. Through my college outdoor leadership program and a summer camp counseling job, I rediscovered the girl from my childhood. I look back on my adolescent years and cannot help but think what it would have been like to have someone show me that the girl from my youth was always meant to be a part of me. Rediscovering her helped me find my voice, passions, and a healthier view of myself.

My research into adolescent development and my professional time spent with girls reveals that my experience is not singular; many girls have similar stories regarding their adolescent years. I have had the opportunity to work within strong girls-specific summer camp programming over the past few years. I built close relationships with many campers, staff, and alumna. During this time, it was common to hear their stories of extraordinary growth and broadening perceptions discovered through camp experience, only to return to a world that does not understand or embrace this new development within them. Thus, I believe the stories of

adolescent girls within outdoor adventure programming are something to listen to and further explore.

The primary researcher, also the author of this manuscript, conducted all components of data collection and field observation. The use of "I" in this story and throughout this paper is from their perspective.

Literature Review

The adolescent years are a vital yet frequently challenging time (Witt & Caldwell, 2018), especially for girls. Girls experience specific challenges that haunt them more often than boys including: mental health issues, poor self-body image (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016); low confidence (Steinberg & Morris, 2001); and limited interest in physical activity (Girl Scout Research Institute, 2020). Outdoor adventure programming (OAP) provides pivotal growth experiences and tools to help young girls navigate these difficulties. Numerous studies have measured the positive outcomes from programs utilizing the outdoors as a platform for growth and support for girls (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016; Hubert et al., 2020;). However, examining the impact of OAP on adolescent girls is still relatively new, and notably, most research in this area has focused on programs of short duration (1-2 weeks). Thus, a study examining the effects of extended programming (months or years) is warranted.

Adolescent Development

Early adolescence (ages 10 to 14) and mid-adolescence (ages 15 to 17) are stages in an individual's life that are broadly known as precarious developmental stages (Witt & Caldwell, 2018). Various changes and transitions occur physically, mentally, and emotionally during this time (Gilmore & Meersand, 2014; Hubert et al., 2020; Perry & Pauletti, 2011; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Due to these changes within the body and mind, adolescents are especially

susceptible to environmental and other contextual influences surrounding them, such as peer pressure and reckless desires/curiosities (Hubert et al., 2020). Bodily changes and their surrounding influences can considerably affect how well adolescents adjust to changes and navigate their relationships with peers, parental figures, and themselves. While there is still more research than can be done in the scientific and social understanding of adolescence, the literature does agree that there is a set of unique developmental challenges that affect all aspects of a young person's life (Gilmore & Meersand, 2014; Hubert et al., 2020; Perry & Pauletti, 2011; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Adolescent Girls

According to Perry & Pauletti (2011), gender and sex play a significant role in managing these challenges. Generally, pre-adolescent children have similar developmental progressions. Yet, research shows a few significant differences between girls and boys that stand out in studies examining challenges in young people as they crest upon their adolescent years (Hubert et al., 2020; Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Those differences are abilities and interests, self-image, social relationships, aggression, and depression.

A significant difference between adolescent boys and girls is the rate of depression. Rates of depression in children are generally equal between sexes until they reach the ages between 10 and 15. At this point, the rate of depression for girl's doubles and continues to trend upward through middle adulthood (Hubert et al., 2020). Furthermore, girls are also more susceptible to the types of thoughts that can lead to depression, including self-blaming, poor body image, negative social comparison, hypervigilance leading to potential stress, and obsessing over the future consequences of hypothetical decisions (Gilmore & Meersand, 2014; Perry & Pauletti, 2011).

These areas of concern stem from gender role stereotypes, societal influences, beliefs, and values from friends and family, leading to adolescent girls' preoccupation with beauty, fitting into those gender role stereotypes, and peer pressure (Galeotti, 2015; Whittington, 2006). Compounding these challenges, current trends in social media use create significant societal influences, which hold power over girls (Wicks, 2020).

Outcomes of Outdoor Adventure Programming for Adolescent Girls

Research outcomes for girls participating within OAP consists of vital social and life skills such as resiliency (Whittington, & Aspelmeier, 2018; Whittington & Budbill, 2013; Whittington et al., 2016), confidence, courage, positive body image, and empowerment (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016; Hubert et al., 2020; Whittington, 2006). OAPs can help girls by supporting and facilitating development in the areas they are at risk for, such as depression, poor body image, and eating disorders (Gilmore & Meersand, 2014; Girl Scouts Research Institute, 2020; Hubert et al., 2020; Juoven et al., 2004; Perry & Pauletti, 2011; Steinberg & Morris, 2001), and provide space for girls to explore social expectations, body changes, and identity (Whittington, 2011). Evidence supports the probability that these physically active programs help develop beneficial relationships, encourage resilience, and learn problem-solving skills, all of which promote mental and physical well-being amongst the girls (Hubert et al., 2020). There are hundreds of adventure-based programs across the United States for adolescent girls and a long list of varying positive outcomes that come from these programs. Discussed next, a review of the existing literature on OAP for adolescent girls shows overall outcomes of resiliency, courage, positive body image, breaking down gender stereotypes, relationship significance, and long-term impacts.

Resiliency

One way to help girls persevere through challenges is to create opportunities to gain resilience. Research on OAP has shown beneficial results supporting youth resilience (Whittington & Aspelmeier, 2018). Whittington & Budbill (2013) studied the outcomes of a specific adventure education program for girls, Dirt Divas, a mountain biking program for adolescent girls ages 11-16. One of the desired outcomes for Dirt Divas is to support girls' resiliency. In this qualitative study (Whittington & Budbill, 2013), improved resiliency was found, especially in correlation with the relational-cultural theory (RCT). This theory suggests that psychological growth occurs in relationships. To explain, young girls who have healthy connections with their peers will support each other, learn how to have mutual contributions to the well-being of others, be more courageous, and thereby improve their confidence. While this is just one case study example on resiliency, due to generalization (Schofield, 1993), the same outcomes are accurate for other programs that operate similarly to Dirt Divas.

Courage

Girls ages 9 to 11 generally do not question their self-worth. They are confident in their thoughts and feelings, and they are outspoken about it. However, this confidence erodes throughout the adolescent period (Whittington & Mack, 2010). In the face of cultural pressures, social inconsistencies, and gender stereotyping, many girls find themselves losing their voice, which is ultimately their courage (Whittington & Mack, 2010).

Whittington and Mack (2010) sought to record the courage outcomes among the girls who participated in the Passages Northwest programs. They used quantitative methods to collect data via pre-and post-program questionnaires. Overall, there was growth in courage amongst the girls, specifically expressive, physical, and moral courage. This study's four main themes:

acceptance/confidence, perseverance, interpersonal relationships, and voice. Not only did this study show that the girls were able to experience courage during the adventure program, but they also were able to describe ways how they planned to be courageous at home or school. Having moral courage was an unforeseen theme; in the qualitative analysis, many girls spoke of speaking up for their friends (Whittington & Mack, 2010). This furthers the evidence for the support between relational importance and the development of self-empowerment for girls.

Positive Body Image and Breaking Down Gender Stereotypes

Femininity refers to the simple idea that a person's physical attributes and how they act are typically associated with being female. In contemporary Western society, and through social media influences in particular, femininity emphasizes beauty and outward appearances as a top priority for girls (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016; Whittington, 2006; Wicks, 2020).

OAPs that focus on girls' development can offer avenues for girls to resist and challenge these social stereotypes. Outdoor adventure programs for girls offer positive gender identity development and body image (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016; Galeotti, 2015; Whittington, 2006;). Studies that focus specifically on positive body image and challenging gender constructs show outcomes of perseverance, strength, and determination. Additionally, they offer evolvement on challenging assumptions of girls' abilities, feelings of accomplishment and pride, questioning ideal images of beauty, leadership skills, and building significant relationships with other girls (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016; Whittington, 2006).

Barr-Wilson & Roberts (2016) found that body image can impact girls in outdoor adventure settings. They interviewed girls who participated in a California-based adventure program, Girl Ventures, before and after the course (immediately after and three months after). All participants indicated their body image perceptions were improved during and immediately

after their course. Most claimed that their body image was still positively affected by their course at the time of the study, three months after the course was completed (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016). Three main influences affected the participants' view on positive body image: the instructors, nature, and relationships with other girls on the trip.

Relationship Significance and Long-Term Impacts

Numerous studies have found other positive outcomes for adolescent girls who participated in OAP, such as reducing stress (Frank, 2009), improving social skills and leadership (Wang et al., 2006), and developing relationships (Sammet, 2010). Whittington (2011) studied the long-term impact of participating in a wilderness adventure. She interviewed girls at three different stages after their trip: 6-months, 18-months, and five years following the course. The entire course consisted of a year-long mentoring program, a weekend paddle-making event before the main trip, and a 3-week canoeing expedition. Even five years out, this study showed that girls' participation in an adventure program results in long-term positive impacts on their abilities in technical-skill development, communication, teamwork, leadership, and perseverance (Whittington, 2011).

A reoccurring theme for nearly every study identified was the significance of relationships for adolescent girls and their development (Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016; Hubert et al., 2020; Sammet, 2010; Whittington, 2010; Whittington & Aspelmeier, 2018; Whittington & Budbill, 2013, Whittington et al., 2016; Whittington & Mack, 2010). Findings reveal that, on average, girls are more oriented toward social development compared to boys (Mirkin & Middleton, 2014). In OAPs designed to foster relationship and community, more significant growth in areas such as increasing self-esteem, resiliency, courage, and going against gender stereotypes are present (Whittington & Budbill, 2013; Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016) are present.

The nature of OAP is inherently communal, and these studies show how monumental outdoor experiences are when it comes to aiding in the positive development of adolescent girls. When OAPs that operate away from the traditional school format and, when facilitated well, offer participants a chance for social growth that may be preserved over time (Mirkin & Middleton, 2014). The nature of OAP is inherently communal, and these studies show how monumental outdoor experiences are when it comes to aiding in the positive development of adolescent girls.

In summary, adolescent development is challenging for young people, and research shows it is especially difficult for girls. Studies confirm that OAP supports adolescent girls in developing social skills, building confidence, resilience, courage, self-worth, and positive body image. While there is a growing body of literature, to support these benefits and outcomes for adolescent girls who participate in adventure programming, numerous research remains. For instance, more studies comparing a couple or multiple girl-specific OAPs and studies that highlight more long-term programs are needed. Long-term can be defined by a program that lasts several months to a year. The long-term could also mean longitudinal programs. For example, having girls participate in adventure activities, intermittently, over several years. This could include participation in adventure-based summer camps for multiple years, or girls involved in community or school-based programs participants come back to year after year. Research addressing long-term impact is needed for several reasons, including curricular reform within programs and findings that justify the added expense of prolonged OAP offerings (Galeotti, 2015). Ultimately, the primary purpose for determining the long-term effects of outdoor adventure programming for girls is to help promote strong, empowered, confident women, who have healthy self-images, and can be positive role models for other girls (Galeotti, 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the outcomes experienced by adolescent girls

who participate in OAP regularly over the course of a semester while reflecting on their overall experience of multiple years at the French Broad River Academy.

Methods

Through a narrative style of inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), this study uses qualitative methods to tell the stories of the 8th-grade students at the French Broad River Academy (FBRA) for girls. The data collection method of photo-elicitation focus group interviews and the inductive thematic analysis process resulted in a rich collection of emerged themes that help tell the story of these students. Specifically, this data expresses the meaning of outdoor adventure programming for adolescent girls over an extended period.

Site and Participant Selection

The site for this study is the French Broad River Academy for Girls (FBRA), located in Asheville, NC. Since its birth, the FBRA for girls has strived to provide a holistic education for girls in grades 6-8, teaching around 75 students each school year. FBRA is a day school that provides a traditional middle school curriculum via conventional and experiential methods. Focusing on character-based education, the school aims to teach the whole student.

Along with a varied, weekly academic schedule, lessons are accompanied by learning in the field via a comprehensive outdoor curriculum of whitewater paddling, climbing, hiking, skiing, service learning, and international travel. This outdoor education programming provides a structured environment for students to take risks, face and overcome challenges, and build confidence along with leadership skills that will serve them for years to come (FBRA, 2021).

The sample size for this study was the entire 8th-grade class, 24 students. The 8th graders at the school were chosen because they have more outdoor adventure programming (OAP) experiences from the past three years to reflect on compared to the other grades. Once a week,

the students leave the classroom to explore the beautiful mountains and rivers outside their backdoor. Spring and Fall outdoor adventure lessons consist of tandem-canoeing expeditions, while winter lessons are spent practicing downhill skiing skills. Groups go rock climbing and bouldering outside throughout the year and engage in service-learning and field science work (FBRA, 2021). As a participant researcher, I joined the students and instructors six times throughout the semester on outdoor programming days to better understand the program and build rapport with the students prior to data collection.

Methodology

This study was informed by narrative inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Narrative inquiry is a method of exploration that uses storytelling to uncover nuance and make meaning. It provides the opportunity for dialogue and reflection and allows the participants of the study to tell their own stories (Wang & Geale, 2015). Narrative inquiry is the study of how humans experience the world. It has a long history within sociology and anthropology and, more recently, has grown in popularity to explore educational experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Beyond telling a story, narrative inquiry allows researchers to understand the participants' experiences. It allows researchers to get information that the storyteller may not consciously know, allowing for hidden assumptions to rise to the surface. This form of methodology the girls at the FBRA to share their outdoor adventure program experiences in the form of stories during focus groups.

Data Collection

Photo-Elicitation Focus Groups

The data collection process consisted of photo elicitation focus groups. In brief, this consisted of participants taking pictures over the course of a semester, and then using the pictures

to share their story during focus groups, at the end of the semester. There were three different focus groups and each one had 8 students in it. The progression of this process went as follows:

As part of the FBRA outdoor adventure programs, the students each received a disposable camera with 24 exposures, at the beginning of the fall semester (September). They used this camera to capture and interpret their experiences while participating in their outdoor field lesson days. The FRBA outdoor adventure program implemented the use of the cameras as a reflection tool before introducing this study. Following IRB approval, the study was then introduced in correlation with their cameras/picture taking, which was in October. The students received this prompt with their cameras at the beginning of the semester:

> Take pictures of what you want to remember most about your time during outdoor activities at the FBRA. Take photos of what means the most to you during these experiences. Please try and take pictures spread out throughout the semester. A suggestion would be about seven photos a month. These do not have to be staged photos – feel free to take candid shots of places, people, your friends, selfies, literally whatever you want. This will be different from pictures you take on your phone because they are permanent and will ultimately tell a story through film.

The cameras were collected near the end of the semester, and the film was developed digitally. The students then received an email (see Appendix D) with their pictures to choose from, along with ideas and directions on how to share their story during the upcoming focus groups. The pictures were shared via a private Google Photos album, allowing each student to share their 5 pictures back to me that they felt best represented their semester and the story of their OAP experiences. These chosen photos were printed and then brought to the three focus groups, on December 9th, 2021. During every focus group, each student shared their story using

their 5 chosen images. Their pictures were not analyzed as data. They were simply a form of expression that the students could use to help tell their stories.

Asking participants to share their experiences using pictures is called photo elicitation. Photo-elicitation was chosen for this study because it allows for a more personal level about the value of the participants' understanding. The emotional content extracted and projected from the photographs allows for a deeper understanding of the students' experiences (Loeffler, 2004).

The shared stories and experiences were recorded through focus groups. Focus groups are a way to gather research by interviewing small groups of people at one time. The interviewer creates a supportive environment where the participants answer focused questions to encourage discussion and express differing opinions and points of view (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For this study, there were three different focus groups, consisting of 8 students each, lasting 75 minutes.

During each focus group, the Focus Group Interview Script, found in Appendix A, was read verbatim. I read the first half of the script to each group, each student shared their stories and showed us their pictures (they were each given 5 minutes to share) and then I read each question on the script as follow-up questions to the stories that lead to group discussions.

The stories and conversations were recorded via audio and video. The audio recording was converted into text verbatim using Descript, a transcription software. The video served as a backup and allowed for observing body language, facial expressions, and social dynamics, creating a richer transcription experience.

The transcripts from that day consisted of the students sharing their stories and their responses to the Focus Group Interview Script questions. The original prompt for the storytelling

section was: What does outdoor adventure programming at French Broad River Academy (FBRA) mean to you?

Before arriving at the Focus Group Interview:

- Students were asked to take pictures through their fall semester in response to the original prompt.
- I received an email one week prior 1) inviting them to share their story about what outdoor adventure programming means to them and 2) to pick their five favorite photos they would like printed to have for their storytelling.
- Students were given 15 minutes of reflection time to think about how they wanted to share their story and an index card for notes on the morning of the interviews.

The focus group interviews explore the students' perceptions of meaning and impact from their participation in the outdoor adventure programming during their time at the FBRA. While these students are in their final year at the school and were interviewed only during the middle of their last year, they reflected on the past two years.

Data Analysis

Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcriptions from the focus group interviews. Inductive thematic analysis requires that the researcher collect detailed information from participants and then through a coding process form the data into categories or themes. The categories or themes are then compared with preexisting, related literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The analyzed data for this study consisted of the transcriptions of the student's storytelling and facilitated conversations during the focus groups. The themes were chosen as a result of patterns in the transcriptions as opposed to determining theme prior to the focus groups (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

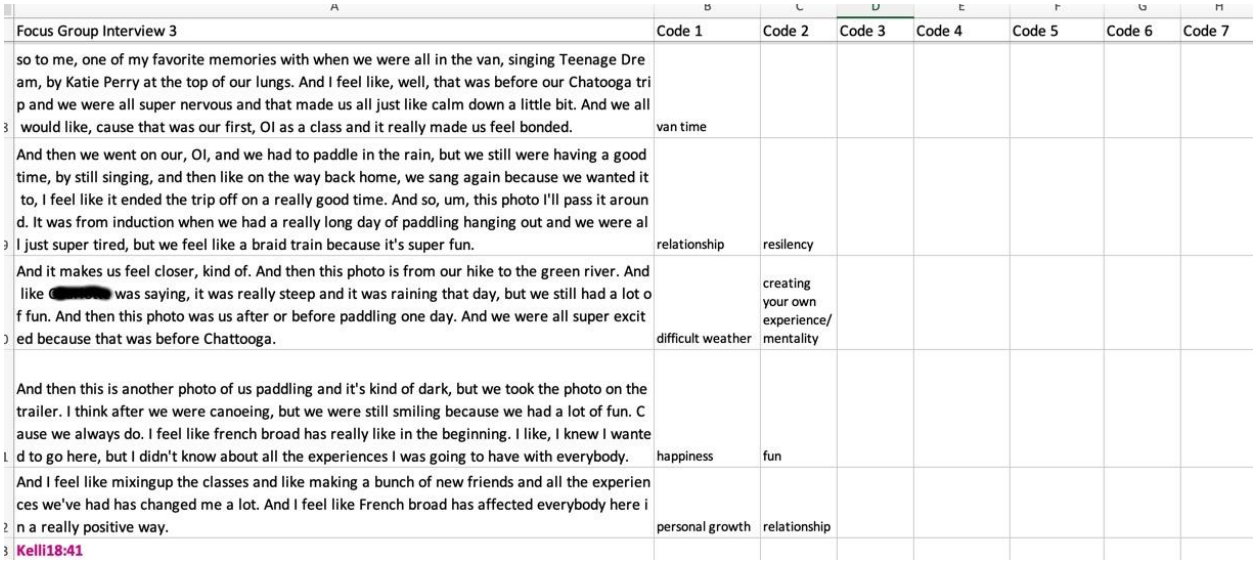
The step-by-step process of data analysis went as follows:

Step 1: I transcribed each focus group session using Descript (an online transcription program) and then edited each transcript by typing the correct words or phrases that the program transcribed incorrectly. I went back and watched segments of those as needed, but I did not re-watch the entire video recordings. After re-listening to each focus group session and editing the transcriptions, I began working with each transcript individually.

Step 2: I reread the entire Focus Group 1 transcription and made hand-written notes of reoccurring concepts that came up. I then typed all of these up into a word document. There were 48 total, so I decided to "combine" some of them to create a shorter list (34 total). This was a practice coding session and created an extra step. However, I feel that it allowed me to ease into the process, of thematic analysis and coding, and helped me to interact with my data before fully diving.

Step 3: After that, I re-read the Focus Group 1 transcript and coded it in Excel. Coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks of writings and choosing a word or phrase to represent it. This code is then put in the margins or above the transcribed material (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The transcription was divided into chunks on an Excel document and placed in a column on the far left of the spreadsheet, along with seven coding columns beside the text. See Figure 3 as an example:

Figure 4. Excel Coding Example



	Focus Group Interview 3	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5	Code 6	Code 7
3	so to me, one of my favorite memories with when we were all in the van, singing Teenage Dream, by Katie Perry at the top of our lungs. And I feel like, well, that was before our Chatooga trip and we were all super nervous and that made us all just like calm down a little bit. And we all would like, cause that was our first, OI as a class and it really made us feel bonded.	van time						
4	And then we went on our, OI, and we had to paddle in the rain, but we still were having a good time, by still singing, and then like on the way back home, we sang again because we wanted it to, I feel like it ended the trip off on a really good time. And so, um, this photo I'll pass it around. It was from induction when we had a really long day of paddling hanging out and we were all just super tired, but we feel like a braid train because it's super fun.	relationship	resiliency					
5	And it makes us feel closer, kind of. And then this photo is from our hike to the green river. And like [redacted] was saying, it was really steep and it was raining that day, but we still had a lot of fun. And then this photo was us after or before paddling one day. And we were all super excited because that was before Chattooga.	difficult weather	creating your own experience/ mentality					
6	And then this is another photo of us paddling and it's kind of dark, but we took the photo on the trailer. I think after we were canoeing, but we were still smiling because we had a lot of fun. Cause we always do. I feel like french broad has really like in the beginning. I like, I knew I wanted to go here, but I didn't know about all the experiences I was going to have with everybody.	happiness	fun					
7	And I feel like mixingup the classes and like making a bunch of new friends and all the experiences we've had has changed me a lot. And I feel like French broad has affected everybody here in a really positive way.	personal growth	relationship					
8	Kelli18:41							

After coding in Excel, I made a code map (see Appendix E) in Word by listing all the codes I used. There were 41 of them.

Step 4: After coding the first focus group, I felt that I had a solid grasp of the process and coded the other two focus groups in one sweep, following the same procedure outlined above. When applicable, I decided to code using the same or similar words to the list of codes that had already been used for consistency. I then made two more code maps in Word with a list of codes used for Focus Groups 2 & 3 (see all code maps in Appendix E).

Step 5: Since the codes were consistent throughout all three focus groups, I collapsed the codes into themes (categories of similar ideas), creating a third code map for the themes (see Appendix F).

Step 8: Finally, I went back and chose representative quotations for the descriptions and themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In summary, using the framework of narrative inquiry, the student's stories were analyzed by putting them into themes that summarize meaning for the students (Loeffler, 2004).

The themes were chosen when concepts emerged in repetition from the stories and responses to the scripted questions. The themes were examined to help answer the original research question: What are the individual and collective experiences of the 8th-grade students participating in outdoor adventure programming (OAP) at the French Broad River Academy for girls?

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness throughout this study: Researcher bias was articulated; evidence that was contradictory to this study's general perspective was reported; there were repeated observations at the research site; rich, thick description was used to describe the settings where I observed the participants; transcripts were thoroughly examined to ensure they did not contain apparent mistakes during transcription; there were multiple forms of digital recording; and I made sure there was no drift in the definition of the codes. This was accomplished by continually comparing quotes with the codes and themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Results & Discussion

The results of this study tell a story. It is a story of a young girl who came to school in 6th grade not knowing much about who they1 wanted to be. She knew what she liked, her interests, passions, and even her personality. She was funny and liked to tell jokes with family members, and maybe even a couple of friends, but only to the people they had known for a while. When she came to a new school in 6th grade, those things were hidden. They needed to be hidden because she wanted to be liked. She wanted to be seen as the cool girl, and to be honest, she didn't even know exactly what that meant yet, but hiding parts of herself seemed to feel safer.

1 The use of they/them pronouns as singular references is intentional in this writing to appropriately represent all students at the FBRA, who use both she/her and them/they pronouns.

The experiences they would come to have in the wild were unknown at the time. The long days in the rain with peers, who would soon become some of the best friends, were not a part of them yet. The comforts of home and the familiar routines of everyday life would quickly be traded in for cold nights under the stars, rainy days on the river, and muddy shoes. She did not know it yet but what she knew about her life was changing.

She and her friends would soon grow into the 8th-grade version of themselves. If they could see the future, they would see a group of girls with increased confidence and comfort in expressing themselves freely without restriction. They would see themselves having fun and learning to love time outside. They would see recently developed perseverance and resiliency within their characters, and that they had become capable, strong leaders. They would see their community of friends and teachers challenging them to be the best they can be.

And most importantly, they would grow as individuals in many ways, from compassion to learning how to be flexible in shifting circumstances, how to speak up, how to live in the moment. That 6th grader didn't know this girl.... yet. The different, older version of herself, this girl will be aware of needs within her greater community and knows when to act. She will understand the value of stillness in nature, feels strong, and understands how her mentality and attitude affect circumstances. She will laugh, will be comfortable being silly, and they will shine from the support of her community. They will be courageous and compassionate.

This hypothetical story summarizes meaning from the collection of stories shared by the 8th-grade class during Focus Group Interviews on December 9, 2021.

Analysis of the focus group transcriptions resulted in five themes that emerged across all three interviews: Relationship & Community, Perseverance & Resiliency, Enjoyment & Finding Beauty in Nature, Leadership & Confidence, and Individual Growth. Along with the stronger

themes, the last paragraph in this section highlights two other less mentioned themes (exclusion within small groups and autonomous moments) that are essential to give voice to each student, regardless of the frequency it was discussed. The results and discussion have been organized by theme, followed by in-depth descriptions and representative student quotes.2

Emergent Themes

Relationship & Community

Relationship and community was the most discussed theme within the interviews. It was so common that it was hard to distinguish other themes, since it was woven into every comment made. The students consistently talked about how vital bonding with their classmates was and felt they had made life-long friends at the FBRA. One student said,

> *I wanted to take photos that had people in them because I felt like people were what made the experience. Like I definitely would not want to be camping in a hurricane by myself. I really think the only reason that this experience was like so amazing and so enjoyable was because having everyone to laugh and to sing with and to cry with...we're practically family, really. I could trust anyone with anything.*

They frequently discussed how all the challenging things they experienced as a group brought them together. For example, one girl said,

> *Every time I look at [these pictures], it makes me so emotional seeing the growth of our friendships and bonding and connection and community and I think the reason that our relationships with each other and with the teachers are so strong is because of these trips*

2Any name mentioned in the representative quotes are pseudonyms.

that we go on because...we struggled in the rain and the cold and it's very unique and it like really strengthens everything about you and the people around you.

They were able to see each other at their high points (have a fun time on a trip, conquering fears, learning something quickly), as well at their lowest points (homesick, cold and wet in the elements, struggling to feel successful at a skill or specific role of the day). The students felt that the challenging experiences they had together and the intimate moments, like long hours riding in the van or talking while hiking, provided the foundations for growing friendships with peers, connecting with and feeling supported and heard by their teachers, and creating a sort of family/communal experience. This seemed important to them when it came to progressing in outdoor technical skills and growing in confidence and leadership individually.

The emphasis that these students placed on relationships, friendship, and community within their stories directly correlates with the numerous studies that show the relationship significance for adolescent girls and positive development such as increasing self-esteem, resiliency, courage, and going against gender stereotypes (Whittington & Budbill, 2013; Barr-Wilson & Roberts, 2016). This is particularly shown in the Whittington & Budbill, 2013 study, where improved resiliency was evident with distinct support for the relational-cultural theory (RCT). This theory suggests that psychological growth occurs in relationships. An RCT model shows that in mutual, supportive, relationships individuals are inspired to offer support for the people around them, be more courageous, and grow in confidence. This helps girls maintain their voice, and value connection and relationships with others (Whittington & Budbill, 2013). The findings from this study, when coupled with further support from the literature (Sammet, 2010; Whittington & Budbill, 2013)) make clear the importance of fostering healthy relationships and community within youth development programs, particularly for girls.

Perseverance & Resiliency

The second theme that emerged across all three interviews was perseverance in the face of challenges and resiliency. Students frequently shared stories of dealing with challenging weather while out on field lesson days or overnight trips. They spoke of these experiences fondly and said that it taught them to learn how to "be comfortable with the uncomfortable." That was a phrase that was used repeatedly. They shared stories of overcoming fear and accomplishing hard things together. For instance on girls said,

> *So, this picture was taken right after our [three-day trip] to the Chattooga [River]. Yeah, I know personally, I was pretty scared [for this trip] because there are supposed to be really hard rapids and stuff, and I didn't feel ready for it before. But then when I actually got on the river and started paddling, I just remember how everybody there had my back and that [it was] going to be a really fun day. This picture was taken after that and it kind of shows everybody's excited. Like we conquered it!*

They also frequently spoke of having ownership and power over their attitudes and experiences. Despite outside circumstances, they kept saying how they knew it was up to them to make a day fun or exciting. They took responsibility for their reactions to challenging circumstances, choosing to positively frame the difficulties they experienced. One student said,

> *It was kind of like a long uphill walk to go to [the bouldering area], and we had to carry these really big mats for bouldering. So, if people fell, they wouldn't get hurt. And the other person had to carry two backpacks. And me and [Lara] were the leaders of the day. And it was like really hard walking. Like we could've made it really negative because it was really hard uphill, but everyone made it so positive, and it was really fun to walk up the hill with the [crash pads].*

They also referred to feeling strong and being able to overcome physical challenges.

Perseverance and resiliency have both been shown to improve from exposure to OAP. Whittington (2011) confirms that these life skills are evident within OAP and can provide lasting positive effects for participants at least five years after the experience. Learning how to persevere through challenges at a young age can increase the quality of life for these middle schoolers in various ways. They will apply this growth to academics, athletics, relationships, and other life challenges while in high school and beyond. Building resiliency and perseverance through outdoor adventure programming will directly aid in the various mental health challenges that adolescent girls are prone to experiencing (Whittington et al., 2016).

Enjoyment and Finding Beauty in Nature

Enjoyment was a clear theme interlaced in each of the focus group interviews. Students spoke of having fun, singing songs, conversations with friends, the joy felt from being immersed in an outdoor experience, camping along the river, playing games, and feeling community connection. In one story, a student shared their experience on an overnight trip,

> *It was night, and we had just finished cleaning up dinner and everyone was playing red light, green light on the beach...There was a cooler by the canoes, kind of far away, and as I walked over and I filled up my water I just kind of stood there, and I watched everyone playing, and the moon was super high and it was reflecting on the river and I said to myself, this is the pinnacle of joy right here. I could see the laughter and I could hear the laughter from the other campsite across the river and it was just this moment where I was like, I never want to leave.*

Other Stories revolved around enjoying riding in the van together and appreciating the time they get to spend outside of the classroom during their school week.

Other emergent concepts of enjoyment were finding beauty in nature and feeling a sense of at peace and calm. For example, one student said,

> *I feel like because of the places and stuff we get to do with FBRA, I have found my happy places. I remember this one moment...the last night of the Congaree...I was walking to the van...and I just looked up at the sky and it was super clear, and it there were like a million stars...it was just gorgeous and....it made me so happy.*

It is essential for youth development to spend time in nature, engaged in places and activities that allow for active and direct contact with the natural, non-human world (Garst, 2018). Interacting in nature feeds the health and well-being of young people, such as improved concentration, reduced stress, better overall disposition, and enhanced creativity. Experiences outside can also help form youth's ethics, understanding of their world, and their opinions of themselves (Garst, 2018). Specifically, evidence reveals that fun and enjoyment, especially outdoors, promote mental and physical well-being amongst girls (Hubert et al., 2020).

Leadership & Confidence

The third theme that emerged from the interviews is leadership and confidence. The students reminisced on their experiences with formal types of leadership such as being leaders of the day (which consists of helping the teachers make decisions on logistics, making sure the group has their needs taken care of, and encouraging the group in times of challenge). Regarding casual leadership abilities, students learned how to speak up and use their voice amongst the group. One student spoke of their leadership experiences and said,

> *I feel like I really learned how to be a good leader and noticing what the group needs and how I'm feeling myself. And, just noticing how everybody's feeling as a whole and putting out [my] personal needs and just really noticing each individual person, but also*

everyone. I can notice if one person's not feeling good and having a positive mindset, because if you have a public mindset, you can really bring the whole group up and say [if] you have a negative mindset, then it's going to...make the whole group feel bad. So, I really learned...[how to be] with a group and be a good leader.

There were also conversations around willingness to take more risks, socially and physically.

A significant theme that emerged from the interviews was the development of confidence. The students occasionally spoke of confidence about feeling like they could overcome some physical challenge or certainty about a specific outcome. However, they predominantly spoke of confidence as assurance in themselves and how this program and their experiences helped them learn to feel comfortable in who they are and feel the freedom to express themselves in front of their friends and teachers. They discussed how this was going to help them make new friends and relationships when they go on to high school and other life situations. For example,

I feel like having those good connections with people has helped bring me to find myself more. Like I'm also more connected with who I am, and I'm more comfortable with who I am because of the people. Like I don't feel nervous, and I don't have to hide anything. And I think learning how to feel open and good about yourself is a skill that we all have now. And I think that is really important for in high school and on, because you have to present yourself with confidence and feel comfortable with who you are. And I definitely feel like all my friends and peers have brought me out of my shell, a lot.

Growth in leadership and confidence is a precious outcome of this OAP program. Girls tend to have a poor view of themselves and are easily susceptible to depression because of it (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Having an OAP program like the one at the FBRA can be crucial to

helping young girls grow in confidence, improve their views themselves and develop leadership skills (Whittington & Mack, 2010).

Individual Growth

Individual growth was also discussed during each focus group interview. These stories and conversations consisted of many things, from growing in their ability to feel compassion towards others to being flexible under stressful and shifting circumstances in the field. One student answered the question, "Is there something you have learned from these activities that you feel you will carry on after graduating from FBRA?" by saying, "I think it teaches you to have positivity with things. Like, Oh! This might not work, and that's okay."

Students also spoke of feeling more self-aware, positive, and proud of themselves. They shared stories of feeling more empathy towards other types of people and being resilient, and just overall feeling like they have grown as a person. Within one example, regarding the freedom to fail, a student said,

> *I feel like another thing that we can kind of apply...outside of school is learning [from] your mistakes and failures. We try a lot of things for the first time here, like some of us have never climbed before, or canoed before, skied all that kind of stuff. And so we're obviously not going to be good when we first start, so just knowing that if you're not great at it, or you fail at it in the beginning, then you can learn a lot from it instead of just saying, I can't do this.*

Skills just as flexibility, compassion, self-awareness, and learning from mistakes are all things that should persist and continue to grow throughout an individual's lifetime. Developing these individual growth attributes allows someone to create and sustain strong relationships in life, collaborate and communicate well with others in a workplace setting, and maintain a growth

mindset. Whittington (2011) shows how individual growth from OAP lives on years after the initial experience. Due to this correlation, there is even more reason to believe in the significance of the extended exposure to OAP that FBRA provides.

Additional Themes

Class Size. The previously mentioned five themes were consistent throughout all three interviews. However, a few themes emerged less frequently but are worth mentioning. One remark was on the size of the classes at the school and on trips. Due to small ratios, students can easily get to know one another and bond. However, it was also clear that some students felt left out or excluded because of the small numbers. For example,

> *Having such a small community of 24 people, [the] exclusion is so much more evident...Like we have an amazing bond and connection, but...there's still flaws in the system where we're not perfectly connected as we would think with no exclusion or anything. At a larger school or program if there are more people, it gives you more options for a person to find their people.*

This voice must be heard. It is a valid thought and feeling. However, I do not think the answer is to adjust the class size, but instead to be more inclusive towards all students. FBRA does a fantastic job of helping the students learn about inclusivity and implementing that within their day-to-day procedures. For example, while hiking, students hike with a different person every hour. In the van, they alternate where they sit based on birthdays, or the alphabetical order or your first name, or other random things like that. They often let the students pick out these fun ideas to feel like they have ownership over the inclusion process. While inclusivity and compassion are cornerstones at FBRA, students will still form closer relationships with some peers more than others, which is what this voice was trying to say.

OAP environments like FBRA foster the ideal environment for relationship development among girls because they consist of small group sizes and physically and mentally challenging tasks that require trust and cooperation (Whittington& Aspelmeier, 2018).

Student Autonomy. Another additional theme that emerged was the significance they felt towards autonomous moments. The times they cherished the most or thought they could bond the most with their friends were times when their teachers were not around. During one conversation about autonomy, a student said,

> *I'm not saying this is a bad thing, but like, everything is so structured and so planned and there's a plan for every day, but I think that the times that we actually make the most memories is when things go off plan. [The] moments where it is unscheduled and we just get to hang out with our class, or if there's a really bad thunderstorm, like on the Congaree, and we all go sit in our tarps for an hour silently, or just when [unplanned] things happen, it is always the most impactful.*

The desire and need for autonomy are crucial for youth development and a sign that the adolescent is supported by healthy adult relationships (i.e., parents and teachers) (Larson & Walker, 2018). Much of what young people are involved in today is structured. School, after-school programs, sporting events, music lessons, are all chosen, organized times, leaving students feeling like they have little free time. Therefore, taking seriously the students' desire for autonomy is important. Young people want and need more time where they feel like they get to choose what they do. More autonomous moments will allow for more social growth, independence, and confidence in adolescent girls.

Conclusion & Recommendations

This study suggests several positive outcomes from the OAP at FBRA and specifically speaks to the long-term exposure of this type of programming for adolescent girls. Using narrative inquiry, this study focused on the participants' own words to elevate their unique experience as adolescent girls in OAP. The outcomes that emerged from their voices are Relationship & Community, Perseverance & Resiliency, Enjoyment & Finding Beauty in Nature, Leadership & Confidence, and Individual Growth. Along with the emerging themes, the findings of this study suggest that FBRA is generally achieving its goals: courage, determination, compassion, and curiosity.

One limitation of this study was the function of photo elicitation. It was overall cumbersome process for researcher (logistically) and the teachers at the school (physically and logistically). For example, to keep the students from having to be responsible for their cameras all semester, the school kept them in labeled bags in a closet. Therefore, before each field lesson, it was the teacher's responsibility to make sure they made it on the trip and passed them out to each student. Sometimes students would forget to take pictures because the camera would be in their backpack, or they would all be in a dry bag while on the river, which means they forgot about them. It was also a lot of work to develop them, have students pick from the digital files on time, and then print them. Disposable cameras and developing them are also expensive; One camera can range from $13-$20.

However, despite these challenges, photo-elicitation was still a suitable method for this study for numerous reasons. One, the disposable cameras was a better option for capturing pictures in the field. FBRA students are not allowed to have their personal phones on trip days so they can be more immersed in the day and to avoid losing them in the field. Therefore, the

alternative option of having them use their phones to take pictures would not have worked. Secondly, a lot of the students mentioned how much they enjoyed the process of having to take the photos. For instance, they said that using the cameras required them to give more thoughtful intention about what they were experiencing in the moment. By way of example, one student said, "*I really enjoyed having my own camera and just being able to like take one picture [and] not being able to see what it looked like. So, it was just like, you couldn't change it back*."

Also, having the photos on the day of the focus group interviews was valuable. They gave the students inspiration, something tangible to take as a memory, and something for the listeners to see while the storyteller spoke. Also, the youth of today interact with media regularly; the use of images and video are a primary form of communication and connection for them (boyd, 2014). Thus, making photo elicitation an opportunistic form of data collection when working with this population. Therefore, the negative aspects of photo-elicitation with disposable cameras are simply things to consider for a future researcher considering this method.

Considerations for Future Research and Programming

With over ten years of experience in experiential education, I (primary researcher) can confidently say that the programming at FBRA is exceptionally well done; every aspect is thoroughly thought through and planned with intention. While the type of programming they offer at the FBRA is not possible for every school or program, to see more OAP for adolescent girls over an extended period, would have great benefits. The growth that these students were able to experience feels unique to the amount of exposure they had over 2.5 years. The students spoke specifically to the change they experienced from 6th grade to now.

Schools and programs that do have the resources, should focus on immersive OAP for their students. However, it is important to mention that these activities are steeped in privilege.

For most organizations, there are endless roadblocks to making these programs happen, such as funding, access to outdoor areas, well-equipped and trained staff, and other resources such as transportation. Regardless, it is important to advocate that more adolescent girls have these types of opportunities. Therefore, the ultimate hope is that underserved populations would also have access to extended outdoor adventure programming.

In conclusion, outdoor adventure programming for adolescent girls offers the opportunity to build community, facilitate the growth of perseverance and resiliency, encourage a love of nature, create enjoyment, teach confidence, practice leadership, and foster personal growth. Instructors are imperative to these activities as they can model these growth areas and facilitate activities and discussions that aid in the growth process. Participation among adolescent girls can contribute to healthier communities with self-confident young people, providing positive directions for a brighter future.

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APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Focus Group Interview Script

Introduction

- Thank you all for being here today and thank you for allowing me to hang out with you a few times throughout the semester. It was great to get to know you and be a part of your great school.

- Thank you for your commitment to sharing your story based on your semester of outdoor adventure programming at the FBRA. I am interested in learning about and better understanding the experiences you had participating in these activities as a part of your education and development.

- We are going to visit for about 90 minutes, during which time you will be asked to each share your story using your previously selected photographs. I will then ask you all various follow up questions regarding your stories of the semester.

- Your responses will be recorded using an audio recorder and a video camera.

- It is important for you to know that **everything that you say will be confidential**. We plan to prepare a report based on our research, but pseudonyms will be used to identify participant responses.

- Your stories and responses based on your experience will provide invaluable reflection for you and your peers as well as create feedback and information for the school.

- Do you have any questions?

- Let's get started.

- Please take 5 minutes each to share your story of the semester. Use your chosen photos and explain what is happening in each picture, what made you choose these pictures, and why are these pictures important in describing your story of the semester.

Each student will share their story and show their photos.

Follow up Questions:

1) What have these outdoor adventure activities meant to you?
2) Do these activities influence other areas of your life?
3) Is there something you have learned from these activities that you feel you will carry on after graduating from FBRA?
4) How do these pictures help you view yourself?

Final thoughts

- Thanks again for your participation and valuable feedback.

- If you think of anything else you didn't have a chance to share or any questions, please feel free to contact me.

APPENDIX B: CONSENT/ASSENT LANGUAGE

Western Carolina University- Consent/Assent Form Language to Participate in a Research Study

Below is the informed consent/assent information which will be presented to the parent/guardian and the student on a WCU Qualtrics survey. By clicking a button labeled [Consent to Participate] at the end of the form, parents/guardians will indicate their consent. By clicking a button labeled [Assent to Participate] at the end of the form, students will indicate their assent.

Project Title: Outdoor Adventure Programming Experiences of Adolescent Girls at the French Broad River Academy

This study is being conducted by:
Kelli Anne Talley
Graduate Student
Experiential and Outdoor Education
Western Carolina University
Andrew J. Bobilya, Ph. D.
Professor and Program Director, Experiential and Outdoor
Education Professor
Western Carolina University

Description and Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the impact of the outdoor adventure programming experiences of 8th-graders at the French Broad River Academy (FBRA) for girls. The data for this study will be collected primarily through one focus group interview to be held in December on the school's campus. Your student is being invited to participate in a research study about the outcomes of outdoor adventure programming for adolescent girls. By doing this study we hope to learn more about the outdoor adventure programming of the French Broad River and the long-term opportunities it provides for its students over the course of the semester.

What your student will be asked to do:
8th Grade students are already capturing moments that mean the most to them throughout the course of the semester during their outdoor programs via a disposable camera. One of the researchers will be spending a few days in the field with the students, participating in some of the outdoor activities to better understanding the programming at FBRA and take participant observation notes.

At the end of the semester, they will be invited to participate in a focus group interview (6-8 students) lasting no more than 1.5 hours. They will each share their stories by picking 5 of their favorite photos. The photos will serve as a platform for their story of their experience within the semester. Data will be recorded by audio and video recording of the focus group stories and discussions. Follow the recording, the stories and conversations will be typed up in text on the computer. Following that, the transcribed text will be coded for themes within the stories.

Risks and Discomforts: There is the potential for social risk when participating in focus group interviews. The students will be taking a risk by sharing their experiences, thoughts, and feelings with the group. We will request that all students respect the confidentiality of the group and not share any other student's responses outside of the group. However, we cannot guarantee their privacy or confidentiality because there is always the possibility that another student in the group could share what was said.

Benefits: This study could benefit your student by providing them an opportunity for reflection of their unique middle school experience at the FBRA.

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security:

Collected Confidential Data

The data collected in this research study will be kept confidential. Participation in research may involve some loss of privacy. We will do our best to make sure that the information about your students is kept confidential, but we cannot guarantee total confidentiality. Your student's personal information may be viewed by individuals involved in the research and may be seen by people including those collaborating, funding, and regulating the study. We will share only the minimum necessary information to conduct the research. Your student's personal information may also be given out if required by law, such as pursuant to a court order. While the information and data resulting from this study may be presented at scientific meetings or published in a scientific journal, **your student's name or other identifying, personal information will not be revealed.**

We will collect your student's information through audio and visual recordings. This information will be stored in an encrypted cloud-based system. When the audio recorders are converted to text, only the primary researcher will see the individual corresponding names with the quotes.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is voluntary, and your student has the right to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If they choose not to participate or decide to withdraw, there will be no impact on your grades/academic standing.

Contact Information: For questions about this study, please contact Kelli Anne Talley at (864)884-9442 or katalley1@catamount.wcu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Andrew Bobilya the principal investigator and faculty advisor for this project, at ajbobilya@email.wcu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your student's treatment as a participant in this study, you may contact the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through the Office of Research Administration by calling 828-227-7212 or emailing irb@wcu.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential to the extent possible.

By clicking "Consent to Participate" I give consent for my child, _____ (full name printed), to participate in this study. I understand what is expected of my child and that their participation is voluntary.

By clicking "Assent to Participate" I give assent, _____ (student's full name printed), to participate in this study. I understand what is expected of me and that my participation is voluntary.

APPENDIX C: PHOTO-ELICITATION PROMPT

Photo Elicitation Prompt for the 8th grade class at French Broad River Academy for Girls
(Implemented by FRBA Fall 2021 Outdoor Adventure Program (OAP) Regardless of WCU Thesis)

This year through FBRA OAP, you will get to share your story. A story about what these programs have meant to you over the years as a FBRA student. And more particularly, the story of what these programs mean for you this semester (Fall 2021). Each week you go outside and get to experience a new form of adventure outside. The opportunity to get to experience outdoor adventure programming as a part of your curriculum is unique compared to what many other girls your age experience. Think about what these experiences have meant to you over the past few years (both good and bad, both challenging and pure fun) and how you might want to depict the story of those meanings through photographs of this semester's experience.

Through pictures you will be able to share your story. You will each get one disposable camera. There are 27 photos on each camera reel. To help share your all-inclusive story of the semester, a recommendation would be to take 6-7 photos each month. At the end of the semester, you will pick up to 5 of your favorite photos to share your story.

Take pictures of what you want to remember most about your time during outdoor activities at the FBRA. Take photos of what means the most to you during these experiences. These do not have to be staged photos – feel free to take candid shots of places, people, your friends, selfies, literally whatever you want. This will be different from pictures you take on your phone because they are permanent and will ultimately tell a story through film.

APPENDIX D: EMAIL COMMUNICATION TO STUDENTS

Email Sent to Students One Week Prior to Photo Elicitation Focus Group Interviews

Hey 8th-graders!

I hope you are doing well. I am excited to see you all next week! On Thursday, we will have our focus group interviews. We will break up into 3 separate groups and rotate into 75-minute sessions with me in a classroom. During your session, you will get to share YOUR story. **Before then, I need you to do 2 THINGS:**

1. First thing: **Find the link at the bottom of this email to your pictures and pick out which ones you like the best for your story. You can pick up to 5 of them.** If your name is not on the list, ask your friends if they can share their pictures with you (I am okay with all of you sharing. I do not mind there being the same photos. I would just ask that person first.), or if you have another picture that is appropriate from teachers or something that is fine, you just need to get that to me. Once you have chosen your pictures, email me back those photos. **I need these by 8 pm on Monday.**
2. The second thing I need is for you all to think of a 3-5 minute presentation for your group where you share what outdoor adventure programming days have meant to you over the past 2.5 years at the FBRA for girls. Your story can be ANYTHING. I have no expectations for what you share. I want you to share from the heart.

Possible options for how you share your story:

- You may choose to write or type out your story that you can read directly from.
- You could make some notes that go with each picture specifically.
- You could make a bulleted list of highlighted stories, events, or feelings that you want to talk about.

I will bring printed and digital versions of your photos for you on Thursday.

Please email me if you have ANY questions surrounding your story or the process of the day.

Thank you and see you soon!
- Mrs. Talley

APPENDIX E: CODE MAPS

Focus Group 1 Code Map

1. beauty in nature (4)
2. Bonding (3)
3. building community
4. Comfortable in the uncomfortable (5)
5. communication
6. Community (4)
7. Confidence (6)
8. connection (3)
9. Creating your own experience/mentality (8)
10. Difficult Weather (10)
11. Do it again (2)
12. energizing
13. exclusion among small groups
14. finding beauty in nature
15. flexibility (2)
16. Freedom and comfort to be yourself (5)
17. friendship
18. Fun (9)
19. group awareness
20. happiness (5)
21. joy (3)
22. leadership (2)
23. living in the moment
24. memorable
25. peace/calm (2)
26. perseverance (3)
27. personal growth
28. physical challenge
29. positivity (2)
30. proud
31. Relationship (15)
32. relationship w/ teachers (3)
33. seeing each other at highest and lowest points (2)
34. self-sufficiency
35. Struggle
36. Support each other (2)
37. transferable skills
38. Trust
39. Unity from trials (16)
40. Van time (4)

Focus Group 2 Code Map

1. beauty in nature
2. Bonding (3)
3. comfortable in the uncomfortable (6)
4. community (2)
5. compassion (4)
6. confidence
7. connection (2)
8. creating your own experience/mentality (11)
9. difficult weather (2)
10. environmental awareness
11. flexibility
12. freedom and comfort to be yourself (8)
13. friendship
14. fun (7)
15. group awareness
16. growth from trials
17. leadership (2)
18. living in the moment (6)
19. peace/calm
20. perseverance (4)
21. personal growth (3)
22. physical challenge
23. positivity (3)
24. relationship (6)
25. relationship w/ teachers
26. self-awareness
27. self-soothing?
28. self-sufficiency
29. support each other (3)
30. teamwork
31. transferable skills (3)
32. trust
33. type 2 fun
34. unity and growth from trials (5)
35. Van time
36. vulnerability
37. willing to take risks

Focus Group 3 Code Map

1. autonomy moments
2. awareness for other people
3. beauty in nature (4)
4. bonding
5. challenge
6. comfortable with the uncomfortable
7. community (3)
8. community service (2)
9. confidence (2)
10. creating your own experience/mentality (7)
11. desired autonomy
12. difficult weather (9)
13. environmental awareness
14. family (2)
15. freedom and comfort to be yourself (3)
16. friendships
17. fun (6)
18. grit
19. group awareness (2)
20. happiness (5)
21. integrity (2)
22. learn from mistakes
23. living in the moment (3)
24. perseverance (5)
25. personal growth (2)
26. physical challenge
27. positivity (7)
28. relationship (8)
29. relationship w/ teachers
30. resiliency (7)
31. sense of freedom
32. support each other (2)
33. unity and growth from trials (9)
34. van time (3)

APPENDIX F: THEMES MAP

Themes Consistent Throughout All Three Focus Groups with Collapsed Codes

Relationship & Community
Bonding (7
Community (10)
Connection (5)
Friendships (3)
Relationship (29)
Relationship w/ teachers (5)
Family (2)
Support each other (7)
Seeing each other at highest and lowest points (2)
Unity from trials (16)
Trust (2)
Teamwork

Perseverance and Resiliency
Comfortable in the uncomfortable (12)
Resiliency (7)
Difficult Weather (21)
Physical challenge 4
Struggle
Creating your own experience/mentality (16)
Perseverance (12)
Unity and growth from trials (15)
Type 2 fun
Grit

Leadership & Confidence
Confidence (9)
Freedom and comfort to be yourself (8)
Leadership (2)
Willing to take risks
Freedom and comfort to be yourself (8)
Leadership (2)
Awareness for other people
Group awareness (4)
Communication

Individual Growth
Personal growth (6)
Positivity (12)
Proud
self-sufficiency (2)
Transferable skills (4)
Flexibility (3)
Living in the moment
Compassion (4)
self-awareness
Living in the moment (9)
Learn from mistakes
Vulnerability
Integrity (2)

Enjoyment and Finding Beauty in Nature
Fun (22)
Do it again (2)
Happiness (10)
Joy (3)
Memorable
peace/calm (3)
Beauty in nature (9)
Environmental awareness
Sense of freedom
Van time (8)
Beauty in nature
Environmental awareness

Other
Exclusion among small groups
Desired autonomy (3)
Community service (2)