

# **Embracing the Mystery Box: How Outdoor Leaders Discover and Sustain Their Way of Life**

**Patrick Lewis**  
Ithaca College

**Jay Kimiecik**  
Miami University

## **Abstract**

Recent reports suggest that quality outdoor leaders are needed to meet the needs of increasing outdoor recreation participation. However, little is known about the experiences of individuals who discover outdoor leadership as a career or how outdoor leaders sustain this way of life over many years. Through a narrative inquiry framework, this study conducted in-depth interviews with outdoor leaders to better understand how they discovered the life theme of outdoor leader, as well as how they created and maintained this lifestyle over the years. This study used relevant life theme concepts such as flow and resonance as conceptual grounding, to understand and interpret the outdoor leaders' stories. Findings describe experiences within two main categories: Becoming and Maintaining. The participants discussed experiences that served as catalysts for becoming an outdoor leader, and they described how they established community networks, connected with nature, and created goals and challenge to maintain their discovered life theme over many years. This article discusses implications for the growth and development of outdoor leaders as well as future research.

**KEYWORDS:** narrative inquiry; outdoor leadership; career development; discovered life theme

*“What are stories, but mystery boxes?”*

–J.J. Abrams, writer/director

Participation in outdoor recreation is increasing according to recent reports and trend analysis in America. Close to half of the American population participated in an outdoor activity at least once in 2015 (Outdoor Foundation, 2016), with young adults aged 18 to 24 demonstrating a 5% increase in participation. In addition, older adults have increased their outdoor activity in recent years (Bobilya, Holman, Lindley, & McAvoy, 2010). This rise in outdoor recreation has also had an economic impact estimated at nearly \$900 billion annual consumer spending, generating 7.6 million jobs (Outdoor Industry Association, 2017). One outcome of these economic and participation growth trends is that more outdoor leaders across a variety of settings (e.g., recreation, schools, and private ventures) are needed to accommodate, serve, train, and educate this growing cohort of outdoor enthusiasts (Priest & Gass, 2018). However, being an effective outdoor leader is challenging, requiring a complex combination of technical and human skills developed and sustained over many years (Priest & Gass, 2018). It has been known for a number of years that long hours, time away from home and family, responsibility for the safety of others, and the pressure of myriad social and economic factors can lead to outdoor leader burnout (Thomas, 2001).

Not much is known relating to *how* individuals choose outdoor leadership as their career or *how* they maintain motivation and performance in that career over many years. Wagstaff (2011) observed that many enter the profession by chance. Furthermore, Bobilya et al. (2010) suggested that the certification process has created “good technicians but poor artists” (p. 313). These authors proposed that future outdoor programs need to train not only competent leaders who can safely lead, but also those who can connect with and inspire their participants. These ends could be achieved through a more in-depth understanding of why individuals choose an outdoor leader career, how they develop technical expertise, and how they sustain their motivation over many years.

Wagstaff (2011) proposed the Outdoor Leader Career Development Model (OLCDM), and more recently revised the model by adding the Outdoor Leader Career Development Inventory (OLCDI), as a heuristic tool to help clarify career stages (Wagstaff, 2016). Using the OLCDI, Wagstaff (2016) surveyed 594 outdoor leaders regarding their most current position, to better understand outdoor leadership career development. Based on the findings, Wagstaff (2016) proposed five stages of outdoor leadership career development: Exploration, Contemplation, Engagement, Professional Involvement, and Career Professional.

According to Wagstaff (2016), outdoor leaders in the Exploration stage are characterized as having little experience and limited exposure to the concept of professional outdoor leadership. However, these early-stage leaders are enthusiastic and stimulated by the work. The second stage, Contemplation, represents outdoor leaders who begin to consider a career in the outdoor industry as a “realistic option” (Wagstaff, 2016, p. 89). This stage is characterized with a disproportionate emphasis on technical over human skills, which may be part of affirming the outdoor leader’s passion for the work and can be crucial to his or her career development. Next, outdoor leaders enter the third stage of Engagement. This stage typically represents outdoor leader professionals of 6 to 11 years, whereby they begin to assume leadership positions within organizations and accept more responsibility. Outdoor leaders at this stage may be affected by significant life issues including relationships, family issues, or financial concerns that influence career decisions. Following Stage 3, outdoor leaders enter the Professional Involvement stage, which includes “active engagement in a professional community” (Wagstaff, 2016, p. 90). Outdoor leaders in this stage typically establish their professional identity and may seek to make changes to professional systems. Finally, outdoor leaders enter the fifth and final Career Professional stage in which they are characterized by a clearly established professional identity and well-developed leadership

skills. In this stage, outdoor leaders may become capable mentors and embrace this coaching role in the twilight of their career (Wagstaff, 2016).

The OLCDM provides a useful template for better understanding the career stages for outdoor leaders “entering and eventually establishing long-term careers within the outdoor profession” (Wagstaff, 2016, p. 88). However, the experiences of outdoor leader professionals within any of the five stages have received limited attention (Field, Lauzon, & Meldrum, 2016; Filho, 2010). Osipow (1990) observed that more needs to be known about what happens to individuals after they choose a career. Wagstaff (2016) suggested that in-depth interviewing could “further explain the complexities of outdoor leader career tracks” (p. 88). As Allin and Humberstone (2006) stated, “. . . Professional development in outdoor education cannot be understood as divorced from the individual outdoor educators themselves” (p. 135). Thus, this study explores via in-depth interviews the stories of how outdoor leaders become and live as professionals. Via narrative inquiry, this qualitative study sought understanding of outdoor leaders’ lived experiences (Merriam, 2002) to gain insight into how they entered and maintained outdoor leader careers. Narrative inquiry can be considered an extension of hermeneutics, which uses qualitative methods to better understand what people do (Patton, 2002). Researchers “construct reality through interpreting data provided by participants” (Patton, 2002, p. 115). The personal narratives, “stories,” or simply data provide “especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 116). Following is a review of the basics of outdoor leadership and concepts that may underlie the developmental complexity of becoming an outdoor leader and maintaining that career over many years.

## Outdoor Leadership

Outdoor leadership is a dynamic and varied career path. An outdoor leader may work in a wide range of environments (e.g., rock, water, mountains, snow) and have varied responsibilities (e.g., assistant instructor, lead instructor, coordinator, camp counselor) with multiple clients (e.g., youth, adults, corporate groups, therapeutic groups). Medina (2001) surveyed attendees of an industry national conference and identified 13 categories of outdoor leadership positions: college/university faculty, instructor, leader, facilitator, counselor, director, coordinator, manager, teacher, therapist, health promoter, graduate student, and owner. Directors, coordinators, instructors, and teachers represented the most common type of position, and facilitating was the most frequent response for job responsibility of conference attendees (Medina, 2001). Medina also found that half of the surveyed outdoor leaders indicated at least eight job responsibilities.

To be an outdoor leader requires a diverse skill set. Shooter, Sibthorp, and Paisley (2009) reviewed and synthesized literature on outdoor leadership skills. Their review featured multiple models including Priest and Gass’s (2018) brick wall model of outdoor leadership; Martin, Breunig, Wagstaff, and Goldenberg’s (2017) outdoor leader competencies; the National Outdoor Leadership School’s essential competencies (Gookin, 2006); and the Wilderness Education Association’s 18-point curriculum (Teeters & Lupton, 1999). Additional models not reviewed in Shooter et al. (2009) include Nicolazzo’s (2012) outdoor leader essential skills (i.e., human, educational, and leadership) and the Wilderness Education Association’s updated curriculum (<https://www.weainfo.org/>) featuring the core competencies of outdoor living skills, planning and logistics, leadership, risk management, environmental integration, and education built upon a base of judgment and decision making. Identifying common elements, considering previous model limitations, and incorporating program perspectives, Shooter et al. (2009) proposed a new model that features three essential skills of outdoor leadership: technical skills, interpersonal skills, and judgment and decision making.

Given the wide range of essential skills and even broader range of potential environments, responsibilities, and user groups, Wagstaff (2016) defined an outdoor leader as “an individual who leads groups into natural settings via a variety of activities and modes of transportation,

such as walking, camping, biking, canoeing, caving, ropes courses, kayaking, and mountaineering, for a variety of purposes and outcomes” (p. 76). Ultimately, an outdoor leader needs to have the ability to do the work, the ability to effectively communicate and work with others, and the ability to make good decisions. But even within these guidelines, not much is known about the individuals who are willing to invest the time and energy to learn and implement these skills. How do individuals become interested in leading outdoor experiences? How do they maintain the motivation and energy to continue to develop and maintain their outdoor leader lifestyle over many years? Research on discovering life themes via the concepts of flow, resonance, and serious leisure serves as a conceptual guide for exploring answers to these questions in this study.

## Discovering Life Themes

Discovering life themes or emergent motivational systems through endogenous experience (i.e., motives and purpose that originate within the individual) have been shown to direct people into fulfilling, lifelong professional work (Clawson & Newburg, 2009; Csikszentmihalyi, 1985, 1990). These emergent motives are considered “open” because they “cannot be explained in terms of previously existing determining factors” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1985, p. 95). These emergent motives also are intrinsic because they arise from direct experience and provide inner rewards so compelling that they may guide an individual to explore and contemplate professional possibilities to foster these optimal experiences. As an example, a young woman paddles a raft for the first time with friends and finds the experience so absorbing that she goes back again and again and soon begins to wonder about career possibilities in outdoor adventure—a discovered life theme begins to emerge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1985, 1990).

Typically, professional work life themes are presented, rather than discovered, which would be expected because a society is only able to continue when most people accept and invest energy in predictable, established, and common life themes. This does not mean that an individual’s life will be the same as everyone else’s, but the experiences will be “fairly predictable” within presented life themes (Csikszentmihalyi, 1985). Discovered life themes can direct people, via order in consciousness and emergent goals, into such meaningful and fulfilling experiences that the contexts of leisure and work integrate into a more holistic way of being and living (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Newburg, Kimiecik, Durand-Bush, & Doell, 2002; Stebbins, 2013). In sum, discovered life themes emerging from open motivational systems are not the norm, but certainly do exist (Clawson & Newburg, 2009; Csikszentmihalyi, 1985; Newburg et al., 2002). How does this process occur whereby for some individuals discovered, rather than presented, life themes emerge, leading to fulfilling professional work choices and experiences?

*Flow*, a state of optimal experience involving complete absorption in a task, is one possibility for the discovery of intrinsic-oriented life themes (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). For example, in rock climbing, immersion and loss of self-consciousness may provide opportunities for individuals to express themselves on the rock and bring those experiences back with them (Arcand, Durand-Bush, & Miall, 2007). As Csikszentmihalyi (1975) originally noted, the autotelic experience is “a psychological state, based on concrete feedback, which acts as a reward in that it produces continuing behavior in the absence of other rewards” (p. 23). The autotelic experience is a holistic sensation, an “inner state so enjoyable that people are willing to forsake a comfortable life for its sake” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 37). For some people, flow or the autotelic experience can be so powerful that it overrides more common presented life themes, leading them to invest psychic energy to explore further the emerging or discovered life theme.

A second concept parallel to flow states that may help explain the process of emergent or discovered life themes is *resonance* (Newburg et al., 2002). Resonance is also grounded in positive subjective experience, whereby one’s life is a seamless fit between how he or she wants to *feel* (internal) and the environment (external). Resonance refers to a harmonious way of living and evolved from interviews with hundreds of outstanding performers in science, music, sports,

arts, business, and medicine (Clawson & Newburg, 2009). The Resonance Performance Model emerged out of these interviews as a means for understanding the process of positive subjective experience and optimal performance. The performers' narratives suggest that they lived their lives in a circular pattern by (1) identifying how they wanted to feel in their daily activities, (2) preparing to experience how they wanted to feel, (3) identifying obstacles that prevented them from feeling the way they wanted, and (4) revisiting how they wanted to feel when they lost touch with it (Newburg et al., 2002). Newburg (1993) does not consider the model components in a linear fashion, but instead as a cyclical, holistic integration of feel into people's daily lives. Some researchers (Arcand et al., 2007; Burke, Durand-Bush, & Doell, 2010) have explored the notion that feel may be a multidimensional or holistic subjective experience. For example, Burke et al. (2010) interviewed elite and recreational mountain climbers and found that the elite climbers paid closer attention to and were more aware of how they wanted to feel in multiple dimensions (e.g., physical, spiritual) when climbing, which led to a greater immersion in the task than for the recreational climbers.

Both flow and resonance may play a role in discovered life themes. The Resonance Performance Model refers to a broader positive subjective experience, whereas flow pertains more to positive subjective snapshots of specific experiences. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) suggested that flow alone cannot explain why some people commit to and excel in certain areas of life: "It takes energy to achieve optimal experiences, and all too often we are unable, or unwilling, to put out the initial effort" (p. 33). Flow may be an optimal experience, but to place oneself into specific situations for flow to occur requires a high degree of commitment and energy.

As is evident, the context of leisure is relevant to the above discussion regarding flow, resonance, and discovered life themes. Leisure has been defined in many ways (Perkins & Nakamura, 2013), but one way to consider leisure is as uncoerced activity undertaken during free time (Stebbins, 2013). Although leisure can provide people with many experiences, a *serious leisure* activity (Stebbins, 2013) can be so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that the participant begins to pursue it as a leisure career. Stebbins (2005) found flow to be a key motivational force within serious leisure activities, such as kayaking, mountain/ice climbing, and snowboarding.

One component of serious leisure is that the participants tend to strongly identify with their chosen pursuits (Stebbins, 2013). Similarly, adventure recreation "... represents a nontraditional activity for many individuals and may therefore be a prime context for identity development . . . [it] is a context outside the bounds of traditional school and peer group activities" (Duerden, Widmer, Taniguchi, & McCoy, 2009, p. 345). Kleiber (1999) suggests that outdoor adventure as a leisure experience can speak to one's identity and develop a theory of self, and numerous positive outcomes have been identified (Holman & McAvoy, 2005; Loeffler, 2004). Hence, outdoor adventure within serious leisure could very much be a conduit to enhancing positive identity via flow and resonance, leading to discovered life themes, at least for some people.

## Purpose of This Study

Through participant observation and unstructured conversations, Filho (2010) examined the experiences of river guides and found that they deliberately chose their profession to blur the line between work and leisure through the creation of a unique lifestyle—they enjoyed the opportunity to engage in a leisure activity and work at the same time. Filho (2010) added, however, "there's been a lack of research on the transformation of a leisure activity into paid work" (p. 294). Thus, this study explores via in-depth interviews the experiences of outdoor leaders who chose and maintained a career over many years. Flow, resonance, and serious leisure were used as conceptual guides to discovered life themes, and the interviews focused on the stories and lived experiences of outdoor leaders relating to two primary questions: (1) How do individuals get interested in and choose outdoor leader as a career? and (2) How do individuals sustain their motivation and energy over many years as outdoor leaders?

## Method

Qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning individuals construct from their experiences (Merriam, 2002). To better understand the outdoor leaders' experiences, this study used a narrative inquiry approach (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narrative inquiry uses participant stories to understand a phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Participant narratives are first-person accounts of an experience and are typically told in story form: "The story is a basic communicative and meaning-making device pervasive in human experience" (Merriam, 2002, p. 286). This story-based, narrative-inquiry approach fits with the purpose of this study, which was to explore how individuals become interested in and maintain a career as an outdoor leader.

The study was conducted over one summer river season in a small Rocky Mountain town. The first author conducted all interviews and worked as a guide during the time of the interviews. He conducted interviews on days off and at times observed the guides working in their setting. As a sport and exercise psychology researcher interested in flow and resonance, the second author read interview transcripts, provided conceptual guidance, and collaborated on the writing process.

### Participant Recruitment, Selection, and Interviews

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling (Merriam, 2002)—each interviewee was asked to recommend an outdoor leader who might be able to contribute valuable insight and information to the study. Eight in-depth interviews with seven outdoor leaders (6 males, 1 female) were conducted. The interviews were conducted during the river season and concluded at the end of the season when guides, leaders, and the author completed seasonal work responsibilities (the lead author returned home after the season). The in-depth interviews were designed to have minimal structure (i.e., no interview guide was used), which enabled each leader to tell his or her life story. These unstructured interviews were conducted in locations of convenience for the participants (i.e., in a rafting office, inside a shuttle van, at their home). One interview was conducted over the phone due to scheduling challenges. All interviews were recorded with permission of the participant. Interviews ranged from 60 to 90 min. Although flow, resonance, and serious leisure were used at times to frame the interviewer's questions, the interviewer did not use them deductively to push or guide the interview in certain directions. That is, the interviewer did not state, "Here is what flow means. Can you tell me about a time when you experienced flow?" However, if a participant introduced the idea of flow, the interviewer would probe the participant to discuss further. The participants were encouraged to be as honest as possible in telling their story, which typically includes important events, experiences, and feelings over a lifetime (Warren & Karner, 2010).

### Overview of Participants

The seven participants interviewed were outdoor leaders in rock, mountaineering, and river activities who loosely fit within Wagstaff's (2016) Engagement, Professional Involvement, or Career Professional stages of professional development. The following brief descriptions of each participant—Pierce, Allen, Tricia, Johnny, Mac, Woody, and Lance (names changed to protect anonymity)—provide an overview of background and career focus, snapshots of each participant's life at the time of the interview.

*Pierce* is an outdoor leader in his late 20s with over 10 years of experience in the whitewater paddling industry as a river guide and program administrator. *Pierce* grew up in a "mountain family" and indicated he spent much of his life around rafting or skiing. *Pierce* initially resisted the family rafting business, recently returning to help with operations and guiding. He has over 5 years of guiding experience and approximately 3 years of outdoor administration experience.

*Allen* is an outdoor leader in his mid-30s with over 15 years of experience as a field instructor and program administrator. Allen grew up in the rural south where he recalled his early experiences going outside with his father and later exploring with his friends. During college, Allen completed an Outward Bound instructor development course that became his “launching” point into a career in the outdoors. Allen gradually became a professional outdoor leader, at first working seasonally with camps often designing and running mountain bike programs, then guiding and instructing for up to 11 months of the year, and now working for approximately 5 years in program administration.

*Tricia* is an outdoor leader in her mid-30s with over 15 years of experience working with outdoor schools including Outward Bound and the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). Tricia grew up in a low-key family with parents who appreciated nature and took their children on car camping trips. Tricia got involved with technical outdoor activities the moment she learned they existed. With guidance from a university program mentor, Tricia took a NOLS course halfway through college and “ate it up.” Tricia taught for Outward Bound for several years and now spends large portions of the year guiding internationally in climbing and backcountry skiing.

*Johnny* is an outdoor leader in his 40s with over 15 years of experience working for Outward Bound and rock climbing and mountain guiding. Johnny grew up in the Midwest hunting, fishing, and working with farm animals and believes he was innately interested in being in the mountains. He moved to the mountains in college and “immediately started backpacking and running out in the mountains.” As Johnny’s career with Outward Bound progressed, he began to grow tired of actively engaging with the emotions on the Outward Bound courses and decided to pick up professional guiding opportunities. He noticed that his off-season was disappearing and he was feeling more burned out. Eventually, Johnny was able to use his seniority to develop a balanced schedule, only to realize the relationships developed during his off time were suffering from his work schedule. At that point, Johnny decided to stop guiding professionally.

*Mac* is an outdoor leader in his 40s with over 15 years of experience guiding in the white-water paddling industry and now as a program administrator. Mac grew up in the Midwest and got involved at an early age with the Boy Scouts. During college, he completed a NOLS semester, then took a summer camp job in a small mountain town and gradually became more outdoor oriented. Mac started rafting with a company owned by some of the original pioneers of commercial rafting. Mac was on the water every day of the boating season for the next 10 years. Following the intense seasons, Mac would take cheap rafting vacations using his own equipment. More recently, the adventures have scaled back to spending time on the beach relaxing with his family, and soon he anticipates his children will graduate, after which he and his wife will explore adventures of their own.

*Woody* is an outdoor leader in his 30s with over 10 years of experience guiding in the white-water paddling industry as a river guide, program administrator, and owner. Woody grew up in a boating family and was around rivers at an early age. He stated that he knew one day he wanted to own a rafting company and became a guide as soon as he turned 18. Woody found his first job with a local company and guided for 2 years. After 2 years, he was promoted to the head boatman and worked in that capacity for four seasons. Woody then moved on to rafting on other rivers to diversify his skills and increase his river knowledge. He returned back to his Colorado home and worked for three more seasons before he decided to explore company ownership. Woody has been the owner and operator of his own company for over 10 seasons.

*Lance* is an outdoor leader in his late 20s with approximately 10 years of experience in the whitewater paddling industry as a river guide and program administrator. Lance grew up in Texas, spending his time outside looking for things to do, making up games, and doing whatever he could to avoid watching television. Lance experienced the outdoors through activities such as

paintball and boating on a nearby lake. One summer after graduating from high school, Lance was on vacation in the mountains to escape the Texas heat when he happened to be in the right place at the right time and stumbled on a logistics position with a rafting company. His talent involved backing up trailers and the company needed help moving shuttles around. This opportunity led to a guide position the following season. Lance continues to split his time between working river seasons as a guide and winter construction opportunities in Texas.

## Data Analysis

Generally, three strategies adapted from Luttrell (2009) were employed as part of the narrative analysis. Narratives were read first for overall gist and then topics of particular interest were selected, followed by identification of patterns across interviews. A challenge in narrative analysis is to determine what goes together, as “no formula exists for that transformation” (Patton, 2002, p. 432). The analysis process was driven by deductive and inductive content analysis. Flow, resonance, and serious leisure were not the sole drivers of the data analysis, but they certainly were deductively included in the examination of patterns related to optimal experiences. In addition, patterns were examined for such experiences within becoming an outdoor leader and maintaining that career. Within this framework, an inductive analytic process was used to enable the themes of the narratives to emerge from the raw data. Specifically, verbatim transcriptions were read and field notes were examined with NVivo software. Individual outdoor leader narratives were constructed and considered in relation to each other. The first author explored emergent patterns and themes with rounds of open coding, and he casted and recasted the data in an attempt to reflect the core essence of the data. Following Wolcott (1994), he continued this process until making some decisions about patterns and themes:

[Categories] cannot [emerge] on their own . . . you must go to their rescue or they will perish . . . you have no choice other than to transcend any commitment you may have felt toward pure description . . . for the qualitative researcher description, analysis and interpretation are a matter of emphasis. (p. 63)

Patton (2002) referred to patterns as descriptive findings, while themes represent patterns in categorical and topical form. In this study, narratives combined with data familiarity that was generated from the multiple analytic techniques produced six themes that formed the core of the findings.

## Findings and Discussion

Based on the data analysis process, six themes emerged within two broad categories that describe how outdoor leaders (1) become professionals and (2) develop and maintain fulfilling professional experiences. The first two themes relate to how outdoor leaders *Become* professional outdoor leaders. The first theme, *catalyst*, suggests this study’s outdoor leaders at some point experienced an activity in such a way that it hooked them. The experience functioned as the spark that began the process of seeking more adventure experiences. The second theme, *professional pursuit*, highlights how the outdoor leaders became aware of and sought employment in outdoor leadership. The final four themes relate to how the outdoor leaders *Maintain* a career in outdoor leadership. Findings suggest these outdoor leaders intentionally developed a *community* network, connected with *nature*, and created *goals* and *challenge* to fuel their lifestyle. Each theme will be described in further detail, providing a better understanding of the outdoor leaders’ experiences. Extensive quotes are included throughout to reflect this study’s narrative-based approach. While all participant stories informed the data analysis, the authors have chosen to represent findings with the most illustrative narratives.

## Category 1: Becoming

**Theme 1—Catalyst.** For these participants, the first steps to becoming an outdoor leader were catalyst experiences that captured or hooked them on outdoor adventure. The spirit of adventure and its integrated relationship with the psychological state of flow may be one factor in these catalyst experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). The characteristics of the flow state include intense concentration on the task at hand, feeling a sense of control where action and awareness merge, possessing the ability to process feedback immediately and accurately, feeling a loss of self-consciousness, and a loss of sense of time. The spirit of adventure augments this state through additions of challenge, risk, and uncertainty, which may help with task focus. Outdoor leader Allen described his adventure-flow-like experience that he had when he was a child and that led to an interest in and eventual discovery of outdoor adventure:

There was a trail that led out of my neighbor's house, literally right next door. The trail led out into the woods, and that was our entry point. I spent countless hours exploring. We found some really cool places and the adventures just happened from there. We were attached to this place and it was a cool time in my life. Then later in college I was introduced to mountain biking and it all sort of hit for me that I enjoyed being outside.

Similar to Ryan and Frederick's (1997) concept of subjective vitality, the catalyst may also be associated with the conscious experience of feeling alive. In multiple studies, Ryan and Frederick found subjective vitality to be associated with personal agency and self-actualization. Outdoor leader Tricia described her experience of subjective vitality:

It was the first semester of college that I did a rock climbing weekend with the outdoor program. I was the first person to sign up and I loved it . . . The director of the outdoor program where I went to school was a NOLS graduate. She recognized before I did where I was headed. She said, "Yeah you're going to be an outdoor instructor" . . . She knew who I was, almost before I did. She told me about NOLS and gave me a copy of *Freedom of the Hills*. I read that and thought it was too good to be true. I just read the whole thing. With her direction and help I went up to the Cascades for a NOLS mountaineering course when I was 20. I absolutely ate it up. I mean just ate it up.

Johnny knew how outdoor adventure would make him feel, even before he participated:

I really didn't do outdoor activities. I was interested in them; I read books on wilderness survival and hiking. I saw a National Geographic special on OB [Outward Bound] aired on TV, I was like, "That's cool. I want to do that." When it came back around later in life, I was like, "Sure I'll try that." So overall, I think I was always innately interested in being in the mountains.

Chawla (1999) explored significant life experiences in relation to pro-environmental behaviors and found that participant life histories offer two primary explanations for pro-environmental behavior: early experiences and mentors. Chawla's findings indicate that early habits and exposure predispose individuals to respond to chance events later in life, ultimately leading them to taking advantage of opportunities to develop new skills, attitudes, and environmental behavior. Accordingly, the role of outdoor experiences as a catalyst functions primarily as an initial source of flow, feel, and vitality, which may be recognized and perceived as the conscious experience of having energy available to oneself (Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2008). Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2003) suggested that as a person is drawn onward by enjoyable interaction with an object, the meaning of the relationship gradually deepens—*emergent meaning*. They added that a flow-like experience aids a person in discovering subsequent flow states: "Autotelic persons are attracted to goals that require effort to achieve . . . children who learn to enjoy investing effort in meaningful goals can count on more positive outcomes in the long run" (p. 101).

Taken together, this study's findings describe a process where early outdoor adventure experiences generate a drive as well as a preference for meaningful pursuits—the discovered life theme.

Based on the leaders' narratives, early adventure functions as an instigator involving an initial exposure or experience that leads to interest and curiosity. For these outdoor leaders, this self-propelled force emerged from engagement, interest, and curiosity (via flow and feel), fostering a desire for further experience. Chawla found that early exposure to nature and having mentors in the outdoors increased the likelihood of developing pro-environmental behaviors. Similarly, we are suggesting that early exposure to outdoor recreation and mentors increases the likelihood of becoming an outdoor leader. Of course, selecting adventure pursuits can hinge on many factors, including the physical landscape and geography as well as local traditions and expertise (Bailey, 1999). Accordingly, in this study some outdoor leaders, due to geographic location, had direct access to natural resources and pursued adventure on their own, while some lacked direct access and relied on mentors to facilitate initial experiences. While there is no specific starting point per se, the findings suggest that some outdoor experiences were engaging enough to become a desired feeling state. These findings also suggest that fewer opportunities for children (Bobilya et al., 2010; Louv, 2006) to connect with nature could lead to health issues and limit the number of young people interested in outdoor adventure as a career.

**Theme 2—Professional pursuit.** The second emergent finding involves the process through which the participants turned an interest in outdoor adventure into an income producer. Outdoor leaders described a deliberate decision to combine the traditionally separate spheres of work and leisure. Filho (2010) described this: “Experiencing both . . . can be seen as a deliberate life choice, a way to integrate and unify two secular spheres that were always conceived as distant or separate, and the creation of a unique lifestyle” (p. 294). For the outdoor leaders, income not only provided a lifestyle opportunity, but also increased opportunities to experience what they enjoyed. Stebbins (2013) calls this process serious leisure, which enables the individual in “acquiring and expressing a combination of special skills, knowledge, and experience” (p. 9). Filho (2010) added, “It is possible to conclude that during work time they [guides] are also having fun, experiencing pleasure, living in a full way their lifestyle . . . there is no difference between work, leisure, and personality; they are all included in the concept of lifestyle” (p. 293). Johnny explained,

After about three years into climbing, I started to pursue it more as an income producer . . . I realized I had this outdoor thing that I loved doing, so I started looking at ways I could pursue that . . . The first course I worked I was like, “This is it. I love this.” It was super hard, but I loved it. That was definitely a moment. I was searching for something and I found that. It was combining everything that was going on in my life and gave me a way to experience it, share it with other people, and produce an income.

Allen described an experience that transformed his outdoor adventure experience from personal to professional:

I had no idea what I was getting into. When I saw a flyer in college I thought it looked cool, but I don't think I was thinking career. I did the IDP [Instructor Development Program, which was a 55-day introduction into being an OB instructor. That was my launching point . . . I loved that program. It just changed my perception of the world, and I knew that's what I wanted to do when I finished. That was a pivotal point for me. That course was my introduction and complete learning experience. I went to work for a camp and spent a bunch of time in the field that summer.

The examples from Johnny and Allen of transforming interest into lifestyle can be explained by the Resonance Performance Model (Newburg et al., 2002), which proposes that when individuals discover a feel for how they want to live, they begin to seek out situations and environments

to experience just that. It appears that the participants in this study vigorously went after that connection between experiences and feel, allowing each to propagate the other. In other words, the adventure experience produced a unique feeling state; the desired feeling state propelled the participants into engaging in subsequent adventures. Relatedly, Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2003), in a review of flow studies, concluded that past flow experiences are key to future pursuits. In essence, flow drives flow; therefore, individuals find more flow once they experience it. In this study, the outdoor leaders' lives were grounded by desired feeling states and they engaged in adventure experiences to reproduce these states, facilitating the formation of an action intention for continued participation. Tricia described this integrative process:

It's another piece: making money—the reality of money, the financial income . . . I like the reality of life of it [working adventure]. I like for what I'm doing to be more sustainable and more real. I think work is more real. It's more engaging when you have to learn your stuff and there's more of a purpose to it than just "oh I'm here to have fun." It's got to be work; it's got to be life.

Stories such as Tricia's provide insight into how outdoor leaders may extend interest and form an action intention that ultimately leads to activity engagement. According to Tsai (2005), an action intention can move an individual from having an interest in to consistently engaging in an activity. Outdoor leaders' ability to deliberately plan opportunities to experience adventure sustainably connects interest and engagement with the action intention. For the outdoor leaders in this study, the professional action intention that developed was maintained with four lifestyle "fuels": community, nature, goals, and challenge.

## Category 2: Maintaining

**Theme 3—Community.** To sustain their professional engagement, the outdoor leaders in this study used social relationships and relationships formed through adventure experiences to access flow states and feel how they wanted to feel. In this capacity, the adventure experience, which was pursued for its potential to produce optimal experience, also fostered and developed deep relationships. These relationships helped facilitate future adventure opportunities, which led to frequent potential for experiencing one's desired feeling state. The development of relationships can help facilitate adventure experiences and propel this cycle of living adventure with anticipation of future experiences and direct facilitation of adventure experiences. Pohl, Borrie, and Patterson (2000) found that wilderness recreation fostered a connection with others and helped form strong bonds that were maintained by "sharing periodic trips . . . [into] the wilderness" (p. 426). Filho's (2013) interviews of adventure guides demonstrated that they established a family relationship among themselves. In this study, the maintenance and/or growth of relationships involved sharing adventure experiences, which fueled resonance and maintained an outdoor leader's lifestyle. An example of the influence of community appears in Lance's comments that highlight the blurred lines between leisure time and work:

I didn't have friends in the area other than these people I worked with, so I needed to get a bike if I wanted to go with them when they went riding, and I wanted to do that. I picked up a bike and started riding and that's how I got started getting a lot more involved in outdoor activities. It's easy when you live in it. It's hard when you live out of it.

Lance explored a new outdoor pursuit with members of the adventure community he knew and worked with. Similarly, Allen discussed the role of community in perpetuating adventure experiences through ideas and convenient opportunities:

Hell, more than half the things I've done in my life have probably been somebody else's dream. I jumped on their coattails and went with it because it sounded cool and

something I'd be interested in doing. I'm sure in those early days living in a group of people who had similar interests we spurred each other to take these steps. "Let's go climb this route. Let's go paddle the Gun Powder. Let's do this and that." That's how it happens, definitely at times over a cheap, nasty beer. You get talked into it by your friends and colleagues. You get excited and you go do it. Most of it is being in the right place at the right time with the right group of people.

Finally, Tricia and Allen noted the aspect of community that includes shared understanding. Tricia appreciated knowing members of the community, and Allen described bonds that are formed:

It's really nice to have a community . . . I know who the players are. I know the community. I know I can get stuff. I really understand, as much as I want to be involved, the climbing community. It's really cool to have friends and be out on the road and meet people who've been climbing for a long period of time. There's a real shared cultural history. (Tricia)

The things that really connect me to points and places are the people . . . It's a very tight network and there are bonds that can't really ever completely be described, and probably shouldn't be. The unspoken glances that said, "We pretty much almost died. Now we got to get our shit together and move on. Let's not let that happen again". . . It's unspoken about, we don't have to tell the stories but there's an understanding, an appreciation. As I've talked with some guides, we realized it's hard for us to form those bonds with people who haven't been in those situations. (Allen)

**Theme 4—Nature.** The location of the adventure experiences also helps fuel the outdoor leader's lifestyle. Outdoor adventure, by definition, involves experiences where the natural environment plays an integral role. This study's findings suggest that connecting with the natural environment helps provide the conditions for the outdoor leader's desired feeling states. According to Pohl et al. (2000), through "travels into wilderness, one may experience an overwhelming sense of intellectual clarity or a heightened sense of mental awareness . . . Absorption in the environment and slowing down allowed one to become fully involved in the moment, experiencing everything" (pp. 427–428). Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2003) added, "Intense concentration [is] perhaps the defining quality of flow" (p. 92) where there is no room for any other attentional focus. As such, the outdoor leaders in this study identified and allowed inherent features of the natural environment to foster flow, feel, and vitality, which kept them coming back. Pierce, Tricia, and Johnny described their maintenance of the outdoor leader lifestyle fueled by an intentional engagement with the natural environment, which facilitated their desired feeling states:

I just like it, the whole feeling of being out on the water . . . It's so much fun and that's what I like about it, all that energy in one place. In the wilderness, all of a sudden you look out and there is nothing, no one as far as the eye can see . . . I would look around and think, "I'm the luckiest person in the world" . . . That's a great feeling to me and that's what keeps me coming back . . . taking myself completely out of that [routine] and being on nature's cycle for a minute is the most awesome thing that I can do for myself . . . That to me is how I get in touch with that greater energy, whatever you want to call it. And I stay in it, I stay in it . . . It's like knowing that you are feeling as good as you are going to feel probably ever in your life. That part's addicting . . . It creates everything else around what I do . . . if I completely disconnected from nature my whole mental and physical position, outlook, and feeling change when I disconnect from nature and I don't like that. (Pierce)

Being outside, the whole nature bit, being out in the landscape is really fundamental to everything in my life. Natural places, they're powerful, powerful places. It gets in your blood. I've spent a lot of time and energy focusing on what's happening in the landscape . . . I like to be out. That's really the bottom line . . . I love being out, that's why we do this. All of us do. (Tricia)

The climbing was what interested me, but the mountains and being out in the wild was a very cathartic thing for me. It was a very spiritual thing for me, having that connection with the wilderness . . . While the outdoors was a testing ground, and I went out there to push my limits, but in the end, it was more that connection to the wilderness that was my base for what I did and with climbing shaped my whole outdoor career. (Johnny)

Each of these stories demonstrates the fundamental role that nature or the outdoors plays in maintaining a fulfilling lifestyle for the outdoor leader. For ease of presentation, this paper has organized themes, such as nature and community, as separate, but they are likely interdependent and work together to help outdoor leaders maintain their integrated work–leisure lifestyle. For example, studies on awe—a perception of being in the presence of something vast that the individual does not immediately understand—have connected this self-transcendent emotion to prosocial behavior (Piff, Dietze, Feinberg, Stancato, & Keltner, 2015). As suggested by the outdoor leaders interviewed, being out in nature and the wild elicited a sense of awe, which is one explanation for their strong social connections with others (community). Supporting this idea, Pohl et al. (2000) found that women's participation in wilderness recreation led to them seeing others in a new light, such as being more patient.

**Theme 5—Goals.** The outdoor leaders in this study used goals to access and experience their desired feeling states. People need to have clear goals to experience these states, which direct action and provide focus (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; S. Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Allen described this process:

I was trying to figure out what it was this year that I wanted to set my sights on, because otherwise, I have a hard time making sure I make time for a big adventure . . . at this point anyway . . . So, I spent from the end of February on the bike in the saddle training and kinda picking events trying to put in the mileage that was necessary . . . I wouldn't say that I was all giggles, but during the long training rides and the race it's meditative. You're in the moment. You feel attached to your bike and you feel attached to the people around you, attached to the environment. All this information is coming, flying into your head and you're processing it perfectly.

Goals led Allen to opportunities to experience how he liked to feel—attached to his bike and the people around him. Goals help to create an ownership for one's actions, particularly autonomous or self-concordant goals (Sheldon 2014), which are deeply connected to a person's actual interests. The outdoor leaders in this study generated motivation through goals that helped propel them to enhance and maintain their discovered life theme. For example, Johnny planned a long way out so that he could work on his climbing:

It became a little more methodical planning and figuring out when I was going to work on my own climbing. I would have to plan that into the year. "Well, I'm going to go to Ecuador and I'm going to work January and February, ok I've got March off. I need to find a climbing partner now." It's November, so I'm looking for someone to go climbing with in March. Being methodical about finding a partner and then planning it into your schedule, just like any other trip, are two aspects of it. That worked pretty well. I was happy doing that for a long time. It seems crazy; clients would always ask

me, "What do you do in your free time?" "Well, I go climbing." That's what I was doing and I enjoyed it. (Johnny)

These examples from Johnny and Allen demonstrate the link among goals, planning, and experience. These outdoor leaders knew how they wanted to feel and then built their lives around those desired feeling states.

**Theme 6—Challenge.** The final theme to emerge within the Maintaining category involved embracing and seeking challenges that are inherent in outdoor adventure. The outdoor leaders in this study used challenge to experience self-discovery, flow states, and a feeling of being free. Challenge is slightly different from goals in that it refers to how the leaders approached an activity or the experience itself. Similar to the community and nature themes, the challenge theme involves overlap and interdependence between goals and challenge. Regardless, the outdoor leaders consciously used their adventure to explore new challenges (they used goals to create those challenges), which required increased skill and competence to navigate successfully through the experience. This is a direct reference to the flow model, in which the balance of challenge and skill underlies optimal experience (S. Jackson & Kimiecik, 2008). It is a delicate balance for a person to know when to up the challenge as skill improves, to prevent boredom. Handling this process correctly is even more essential in outdoor adventure when risk and safety are paramount. Allen described his experience with challenge:

Every year I choose something to try and some of those things still defeat me. I just think it's good to keep challenging yourself. That's the underlying thing here in a lot of ways. If you believe in outdoor adventure and adventure recreation you know that those things don't come easy. It's not like just fly up a peak and "Wahoo another peak." There's a lot of pain and suffering involved. You stay at it long enough and you're going to lose close friends; people are going to die in the mountains. You are going to deal with a lot of death and tragedy too. That's pain and suffering too. All of that is part of the challenge, and in challenge is self-discovery. I think that's what most of us are driven by, if I push myself here, what am I going to take away from this? What will be new for me? I think that's it. For years now, every year I select the thing that will kick my ass for the year.

Similar to the flow model, the Adventure Experience Paradigm (Martin & Priest, 1986; Priest & Bunting, 1993) proposes that peak adventure occurs when perceived risk and competence are closely matched at a relatively high level. Peak adventure, similar to the flow state, involves some intense experiences. Lance described,

For me, the challenge and everything, when I get it after struggling I'm like, "I got it now." I like that. For me, the most exciting thing I've ever done in my life is literally going down a rapid and not having an idea of what's happening next . . . I loved that, just going down and looking for myself and thinking what do I want to do. Which way do I want to go? All this is free, 100% free will. That's the most freedom I ever felt.

Priest (1992) noted, "There can be little doubt in the minds of recreationists that the challenging nature of their adventure experiences come from the interaction of situational risk and personal competence" (p. 127). Challenge is the intersection of skill and risk (Priest, 1992). However, the role of challenge in maintaining the outdoor leader's discovered life theme extends beyond a matched balance of these variables. Much of the role of adventure in the lives of outdoor leaders is to provide challenging experiences for the opportunity to learn about oneself through failure. Priest suggested that an important feature of the adventure experience is misadventure, "because people learn from their mistakes" (p. 129). Pierce described learning from his inability to match a challenge and how it changed him:

When I got taken down a notch by the river, I learned a little humility, and it was good. That was the best thing that I could have done, because it made me know what I didn't know, and that's good . . . so when I went back to big water after the West Water trip where I flipped and knowing that I was putting myself back in the situation which was scary absolutely changed my life; it changed everything about what I thought and what I did and what I wanted to do with my life. West Water, more than anything, it was a confidence builder because I didn't know having never done that how I would handle that and if I could handle that. Fear ended on that trip. I thought for sure that thing was going to get me. But it was a defining moment that set me straight, and being in that reality set me straight with what the reality of things actually are and can be.

A central feature for experiencing flow involves the perception that a challenge, within a clear goal and immediate feedback structure, will stretch an individual's skills (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). The challenge, however, must be reasonably perceived to be within a person's capabilities for the person to avoid disaster (Priest, 1992). Astuteness of perceived competence in relation to perceived risk improves with experience (Della Fave, Bassi, & Massimini, 2003; Priest, 1992). For instance, Della Fave et al. (2003) found that as high-altitude rock climbers faced more complex challenges, they sharpened their skills to create that integrative balance for flow, which led to personal growth and development of life themes. A final quote from Tricia captures the essence of challenge for the outdoor leader: "I love getting my butt kicked. Struggling is something I like in my life, and I think that's partly why I stayed with it. I like being challenged."

In sum, this study conducted in-depth interviews with experienced outdoor leaders. Using optimal experience models (i.e., flow, resonance, serious leisure) as the conceptual backdrop, this study explored how outdoor leaders become interested in their profession and how they maintain the outdoor lifestyle. Via narrative analysis, the findings suggest that optimal feeling states are a significant factor in becoming and maintaining the discovered life theme of outdoor leader. In Becoming, catalytic outdoor experiences grew into developing interests in professional pursuits. Relating to Maintaining a lifestyle that integrates work and leisure, the outdoor leaders vigorously created community, immersed themselves in the natural environment, and used goals and challenge to continue to create fulfilling outdoor experiences over many years.

## Implications

This study's main findings—that the outdoor leaders built an integrative lifestyle around optimal inner experience—have several professional implications. Overall, the findings augment Wagstaff's (2016) five stages of the outdoor leader profession. For instance, Wagstaff pointed out that individuals in the early professional stages (Exploration, Contemplation) are developing their place and passions related to outdoor leadership. Each of the outdoor leaders' stories supports the importance of these stages from an inner experience perspective. Related to long-term career fulfillment, it appears crucial that individuals experience flow and develop their feel for the outdoor adventure experience. If the burgeoning outdoor leader is inundated with technical skill development before this passion is developed, he or she may not develop the artistry needed for the outdoor leader role and could be at risk for burnout.

Additionally, the findings suggest that mentorship may help leaders better anticipate and implement integrative lifestyle-establishment strategies. More specifically, this study identifies techniques for maintaining adventure throughout one's career (e.g., building strong community networks). While useful for avoiding burnout, these lifestyle techniques may also help with "life" challenges that can derail an outdoor career. Perhaps future research can seek to better understand the role of inner experience for outdoor leaders who choose to change careers.

Another implication of this study's findings relates to seasonal employers and employee retention. The quality of employer mentorship could improve with an increased awareness of the process underlying the development of outdoor leaders' integrative, holistic lifestyle. If employers develop community and foster leader-centered, self-concordant goals and challenge within the natural environment, outdoor leader employees may have higher quality experiences, thus remaining in the industry for a longer time and returning for multiple seasons. This increased employee retention could reduce training expenses while minimizing institutional knowledge loss, culminating in an enhanced customer experience. J. Jackson and Heshka (2011) proposed that employers collaborate with local and regional opposing off-season employers to facilitate employee retention and improve risk management. For example, a river rafting provider could collaborate with the local ski area to provide outdoor leaders more year-round employment opportunities. Additionally, employers could arrange on-site housing and host professional development events, workshops, and clinics to facilitate the development of community. Employers could also provide formal and informal peer mentorship structures to connect emerging and more seasoned outdoor leaders. Ultimately, while these measures should improve employee retention, as J. Jackson and Heshka suggest, they would also assist in community development and potential professional persistence. Further research should explore the efficacy of community in professional persistence and, specifically, effective approaches to community development.

Finally, the title of this article alludes to the notion that prospective outdoor leaders in this study embraced uncertainty, ambiguity, and adventure—all covered in mystery—in discovering a life theme. Specifically, the findings of the study suggest that a person's inner experience has a lot to do with embracing this mystery in becoming an outdoor leader and sustaining that way of life. However, the findings are limited by the number of and type of outdoor leaders interviewed, so future research should extend this line of inquiry more broadly with other groups working in various outdoor environments. For example, this study included the experience of one female outdoor leader. Gray (2016) identified nine themes uniquely associated with the female experience in the outdoor leader's workplace: self-doubt, alternate approaches to leadership, motherhood, heroism issues, perfectionism challenges, "imposter syndrome," staying silent and deference, "feminism fatigue," and failure. Future research should explore the efficacy and interaction of current findings with the female outdoor leader experience, as well as that of leaders of diverse backgrounds, including African American, Asian, and Hispanic outdoor leaders.

## Conclusion

To conclude, this research supports Filho's (2010, 2013) research, with outdoor leaders in this study telling stories about optimal inner experience underlying the creation and maintenance of an integrative or holistic lifestyle. Following a catalytic experience of some kind, which propelled the participants into the outdoor adventure world, they worked on forming a community, experiencing awe in nature, setting self-concordant goals, and embracing challenge to push skill development. It remains for future research to determine if other optimal experience processes are involved and whether they can be taught or just happen naturally for some people.

## References

- Arcand, I., Durand-Bush, N., & Miall, J. (2007). 'You have to let go to hold on': A rock climber's reflective process through resonance. *Reflective Practice*, 8, 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623940601138873>
- Allin, L., & Humberstone, B. (2006). Exploring careership in outdoor education and the lives of women outdoor educators. *Sport, Education, and Society*, 11, 135–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573320600640678>

- Bailey, J. (1999). A world of adventure education. In J. C. Miles & S. Priest (Eds.), *Adventure programming* (pp. 39–42). State College, PA: Venture.
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2008). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap from beginning to end*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Bobilya, A. J., Holman, T., Lindley, B., & McAvoy, L. H. (2010). Developing trends and issues in U.S. outdoor and adventure-based programming. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership, 2*, 301–321.
- Burke, A., Durand-Bush, N., & Doell, K. (2010). Exploring feel and motivation with recreational and elite Mount Everest climbers: An ethnographic study. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 8*, 373–393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2010.9671959>
- Chawla, L. (1999). Life paths into effective environmental action. *Journal of Environmental Education, 31*, 15–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00958969909598628>
- Clawson, J. G. S., & Newburg, D. (2009). *Powered by feel*. Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific Publishing.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher, 19*, 2–14. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X019005002>
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). *Beyond boredom and anxiety: Experiencing flow in work and play*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Csikszentmihalyi, C. (1985). Emergent motivation and the evolution of the self. In D. Kleiber & M. Maehr (Eds.), *Advances in Motivation and Achievement: Vol 4. Motivation and adulthood* (pp. 93–113). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience steps toward enhancing the quality of life*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Finding flow: The psychology of engagement in everyday life*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Della Fave, A., Bassi, M., & Massimini, F. (2003). Quality of experience and risk perception in high-altitude rock climbing. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 15*, 82–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200305402>
- Duerden, M. D., Widmer, M. A., Taniguchi, S. T., & McCoy, J. K. (2009). Adventures in identity development: The impact of adventure recreation on adolescent identity development. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research, 9*, 341–359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15283480903422806>
- Field, S. C., Lauzon, L. L., & Meldrum, J. T. (2016). A phenomenology of outdoor education leader experiences. *Journal of Experiential Education, 39*(1), 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825915609950>
- Filho, S. C. (2010). Rafting guides: Leisure, work, and lifestyle. *Annals of Leisure Research, 13*, 282–297. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2010.9686848>
- Filho, S. C. (2013). The emotional lives of adventure guides. *Annals of Tourism Research, 43*, 192–209. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2013.05.003>
- Gookin, J. (2006). Turning students loose: NOLS student supervision practices. In J. Gookin (Ed.), *Wilderness educator notebook* (pp. 119–121). Lander, WY: NOLS.
- Gray, T. (2016). The “F” word: Feminism in outdoor education. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education, 19*, 25–41. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03440092>
- Hattie, J., Marsh, H. W., Neill, J. T., & Richards, G. E. (1997). Adventure education and Outward Bound: Out-of-class experiences that make a lasting difference. *Review of Educational Research, 67*, 43–87. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543067001043>
- Holman, T., & McAvoy, L. H. (2005). Transferring benefits of participation in an integrated wilderness adventure program to daily life. *Journal of Experiential Education, 27*, 322–325.
- Jackson, J., & Heshka, J. (2011). *Managing risk: Systems planning for outdoor adventure programs*. Palmer Rapids, Canada: Direct Bearing.

- Jackson, S. A., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1999). *Flow in sports: The keys to optimal experiences and performances*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Jackson, S. A., & Kimiecik, J. C. (2008). The flow perspective of optimal experience in sport and physical activity. In T. S. Horn (Ed.), *Advances in sport and exercise psychology* (3rd ed., pp. 377–399). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Kleiber, D. (1999). *Leisure experience and human development: A dialectical interpretation*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Loeffler, T. A. (2004). A photo elicitation study of the meaning of outdoor adventure experiences. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 36, 536–556. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2004.11950035>
- Louv, R. (2006). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin.
- Luttrell, W. (2009). “Good enough” methods for life-story analysis. In W. Luttrell (Ed.), *Qualitative educational research: Readings in reflexive methodology and transformative practice* (pp. 258–278). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Martin, B., Breunig, M., Wagstaff, M., & Goldenberg, M. (2017). *Outdoor leadership: Theory and practice*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Martin, P., & Priest, S. (1986). Understanding adventure experience. *Adventure Education*, 3, 18–21.
- Medina, J. (2001). Types of positions, jobs responsibilities, and training backgrounds of outdoor/ adventure leaders. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 24, 150–159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105382590102400305>
- Merriam, S. B. (2002). Narrative analysis. In S. Merriam (Ed.), *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis* (pp. 286–288). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Nakamura, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2003). The construction of meaning through vital engagement. In C. Keyes & J. Haidt (Eds.), *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived* (pp. 83–104). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10594-004>
- Newburg, D. (1993). *The role of freedom in the performance of a professional musician and an Olympic swimmer* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA.
- Newburg, D., Kimiecik, J., Durand-Bush, N., & Doell, K. (2002). The role of resonance in performance excellence and life engagement. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 14, 249–267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200290103545>
- Nicolazzo, P. (2012). *Effective outdoor program design and management*. Winthrop, WA: Wilderness Medicine Training Center.
- Osipow, S. (1990). Careers: Research and personal or how I think an individual’s personal and career life intertwine: A personal example. *Counseling Psychologist*, 18, 338–347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000090182016>
- Outdoor Industry Association. (2017). *The outdoor recreation economy*. Boulder, CO: Author.
- Outdoor Foundation (2016). *Outdoor recreation participation topline report 2016*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Perkins, K., & Nakamura, J. (2013). Flow and leisure. In T. Freire (Ed.), *Positive leisure science: From subjective experience to social contexts* (pp. 141–157). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5058-6\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5058-6_8)
- Piff, P., Dietze, P., Feinberg, M., Stancato, D., & Keltner, D. (2015). Awe, the small self, and prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108, 883–899. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000018>

- Pohl, S., Borrie, W., & Patterson, M. (2000). Women, wilderness, and everyday life: A documentation of the connection between wilderness recreation and women's everyday lives. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 32, 415–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2000.11949925>
- Priest, S. (1992). Factor exploration and confirmation for the dimensions of an adventure experience. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 24, 127–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.1992.11969881>
- Priest, S., & Bunting, C. (1993). Changes in perceived risk and competence during whitewater canoeing. *Journal of Applied Recreation Research*, 18, 265–280.
- Priest, S., & Gass, M. (2018). *Effective leadership in adventure programming* (3rd ed.). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2008). A self-determination approach to psychotherapy: The motivational basis for effective change. *Canadian Psychology*, 49, 186–193. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012753>
- Ryan, R. M., & Frederick, C. (1997). On energy, personality, and health: Subjective vitality as a dynamic reflection of well-being. *Journal of Personality*, 65, 529–565. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1997.tb00326.x>
- Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (2009). Narrative analysis and sport and exercise psychology: Understanding lives in diverse ways. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 10, 279–288. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2008.07.012>
- Sheldon, K. M. (2014). Becoming oneself: The central role of self-concordant goal selection. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 18, 349–365. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868314538549>
- Shooter, W., Sibthorp, J., & Paisley, K. (2009). Outdoor leadership skills: A program perspective. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 32(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105382590903200102>
- Stebbins, R. (2005). *Challenging mountain nature: Risk, motive, and lifestyle in three hobbyist sports*. Calgary, Canada: Detselig.
- Stebbins, R. (2013). Research and theory and positiveness in the social sciences: The central role of leisure. In T. Freire (Ed.), *Positive leisure science: From subjective experience to social contexts* (pp. 3–19). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5058-6\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5058-6_1)
- Teeters, C. E., & Lupton, F. (1999). The Wilderness Education Association: History and change. In J. Miles & S. Priest (Eds.), *Adventure programming* (pp. 77–83). State College, PA: Venture.
- Thomas, G. (2001). Thriving in the outdoor education profession: A management perspective. *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*, 6, 13–24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03400740>
- Tsai, E. H.-L. (2005). A cross-cultural study of the influence of perceived positive outcomes on participation in regular active recreation: Hong Kong and Australian university students. *Leisure Sciences*, 27, 385–404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400500227290>
- Wagstaff, M. (2011). Do outdoor leaders have careers? An introduction to the outdoor leader career development model. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership*, 3, 116–119.
- Wagstaff, M. (2016). Outdoor leader career development: Exploration of a career path. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership*, 8(1), 75–95. <https://doi.org/10.18666/JOREL-2016-V8-I1-7284>
- Warren, C. A. B., & Karner, T. X. (2010). *Discovering qualitative methods: Field research, interviews, and analysis* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.