

The Influence of Whitewater Kayaking on Identity Development

By

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Abstract

In this study I explore how whitewater kayaking has affected my own identity development, and compare this to the experiences of six young kayakers and recent graduates of the Adventure Guide Diploma program at Thompson Rivers University. Using autoethnography I explore and analyze my own journey with the sport. This formed the basis of my inquiry, and informed the questions I asked the 6 research participants. Through qualitative interviews I explore how these 6 kayakers feel their identities have been affected through whitewater kayaking in the two years since they learned how to kayak. This study adds to the relatively small body of research showing that adventure sports such as whitewater kayaking can have a profound affect on participants' identities. I postulate that whitewater kayaking offers opportunities for self-discovery, identity creation, and character development, and that meaningful reflection can help kayakers take advantage of these opportunities.

Thesis Supervisor: Sharman Learie (MA)

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Introduction

In this study I explore how whitewater kayaking affects identity development. I begin by providing the reader with some context by reviewing some of the literature on adventure sports and identity development. The research occurred in two phases: I explored my own journey with the sport, since I began kayaking at age thirteen, using autoethnography followed by qualitative interviews with Adventure Guide Diploma students at Thomson Rivers University.

“As a method, autoethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). In selectively writing about some of my past experiences, I explore how whitewater kayaking has shaped the person I am today. As Ellis, Adams and Bochner point out, “Autoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience, but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies” (2011). I do this by qualitatively interviewing 6 Adventure Guide Diploma students, who have been whitewater kayaking for 2 years.

I do not seek to establish universal truths about whitewater kayaking, neither through my autoethnographic writing, nor the interviews with other kayakers. Rather, I hope to add to the growing body of research that seeks to investigate how sport, adventure and serious leisure can contribute to an individual’s identity creation. The research of this study produced rich descriptions of lived experiences that highlight some of the ways in which whitewater kayaking can affect identity development. This can inform pedagogical practices for outdoor educators and outdoor skills instructors. There is opportunity for kayakers to reflect on their own experiences in light of the rich descriptions presented in this study. Movies and social

media, both of which rarely engage paddlers in meaningful reflection regarding their own relationship with paddling, heavily influence kayaking culture. While this work has deepened my own understanding of my relationship with whitewater kayaking and will undoubtedly inform my own pedagogical practices, I hope to contribute to a wider discussion within the sport.

Literature Review

The literature reviewed for this paper includes research into extreme or adventure sports and identity development and creation. While the research participants have, for the most part not engaged in the sport of kayaking to the same level as some of the research into extreme sports refers to, the perspectives of this literature can still provide context for the discussion. All of the participants in my research project have made white water kayaking a significant part of their lives, therefore I explore literature in the areas of serious leisure and how identities are structured around our professions (most of the interviewees are working in a white water environment this summer, some as kayak instructors).

Extreme or Adventure Sports

Whitewater kayaking fits into several categories, including Extreme Sports, Adventure Sports, and Lifestyle Sports. For the purpose of this paper I will use these terms interchangeably. For his research into extreme sports, Brymer defines these sports as “leisure activities where the most likely outcome of a mismanaged mistake of accident is death” (Brymer & Oades, 2009). The participants of these sports are often depicted as adrenaline junkies and thrill seekers (Baker & Simon, 2002) (Pizam, Reichel, & Uriely, 2002). The relationship with the environment is often portrayed in an equally simplified way, assuming

that the participants are there to conquer or battle against nature (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993) (Rosenblatt, 1999). The sport itself is “depicted as being dominated by commercial consumption, lacking depth of experience” and focusing on style and image (Wheaton, 2000).

The dramatic increase in popularity of extreme sports over the past 20 years stands in contrast to “a contemporary imperative of health according to which the reduction of health risks supersedes all other goals” (Willig, 2008). This creates an environment where the behavioral choices of participants of these sports, which put personal health and safety at risk, are understood as based on psychopathology or false beliefs rather than conscious choices (Willig, 2008). Theories such as sensation seeking (Zuckerman M. , 1979) (Zuckerman M. , 2000) attempt to provide explanations for why extreme sport participants would willingly expose themselves to risks. Others have assessed personality traits to better understand risk-taking behavior (Tok, 2011).

Carla Willig provides a deeper understanding with her qualitative research, investigating the experience of taking part in extreme sports. The analysis of her interview data developed constitutive themes of the participants’ experiences. The themes were Context, Challenge, Suffering, Other People, Mastery and Skill, Contrasts, Being in the Present, Compulsion, and Pleasure. Clearly, the experience of taking part in extreme or adventure sports is much more complex than the popular thrill seeking image suggests. Willig describes the theme of Context in the following way:

The fact that all participants invoked *Context* suggests that the experience of taking part in extreme sport takes place at the interface between person and environment; it

requires that the person opens up to the environment and works with it in order to bring about the experience. (p.695)

The opportunities within adventure sports for challenge and to push beyond personal limits are abundant. Overcoming fear, pushing beyond physical exhaustion, and mastering skills can provide a sense of accomplishment and perhaps lead to personal growth. If the understanding of what one is capable of is expanded, this new understanding can perhaps lead to growth in other aspects of one's life.

Suffering was a theme invoked by all participants of Willig's research. The fact that an activity involved suffering, pain, discomfort and potentially damage (injury) meant to the participants that the activity was challenging. It was essential to the experience because without it, there would be no opportunity to push beyond personal limits. Doug Ammons, author of *Whitewater Philosophy*, describes the aspect of risk in kayaking as similarly essential. In his essay *Know Thyself* he argues that without the risk, the activity would not be as meaningful, and therefore not offer the same opportunity for personal growth (Ammons, 2008). David Le Breton provides the following perspective on the generation of meaning from intense physical ordeals and risk of death:

The test of truth that emerges from playing on the razor's edge is an elegant way of putting one's life on a par with Death for an instant in order to steal some of its power. In exchange for exposing oneself to the loss of life, the player intends to hunt on Death's territory and bring back a trophy that will not be an object, but a moment; a moment in extracting from Death or physical exhaustion, the guarantee of a life lived fully. (Le Breton, 2000)

The aspect of fear was investigated by Brymer and Schweitzer, who challenge the cultural norm that fear is to be avoided. Their investigation of the experience of fear in extreme sports built on Willig's work, which explored the broad range of experience of these sports. This study showed that the transcendence of fear in extreme sports leads to a range of outcomes. These ranged from the achievement of a personal sense of mastery to a loss of sense of self and identity during which individuals describe their sense of oneness with nature. (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2012)

Because extreme sports participants experience intense fear, and continue rather than allowing their fear to control them, they are able to gain a new understanding of self (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2012). This means extreme sports participants are able to achieve lasting changes in identity through powerful, transformative experiences, including humility, courage, and a meaningful connection with nature (Brymer & Oades, 2009) (Brymer, Downey, & Gray, 2009).

Much of the research into these aspects of sport has been qualitative. Crust and Keegan conducted a quantitative study of mental toughness and risk-taking attitudes in athletes. While these were not extreme sport athletes it is interesting that this study confirms that a willingness to take calculated risks provides opportunities to learn more about oneself and avoid stagnation (Crust & Keegan, 2010).

Flow

Defining flow here serves to provide an understanding of one aspect that makes whitewater kayaking so enjoyable and motivates kayakers to continue to paddle. "The broad definition of flow is a person's sense of joy, creativity, and an experience of total involvement in life"

(Carter, River, & Sachs, 2003) Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi coined the term through his work researching optimal experience, or happiness. He developed the concept of flow in the 1970s at the University of Chicago while researching the effects of anxiety and boredom on task absorption. Athletes often describe being or feeling “in the zone” and the concept of flow describes and defines this state. It is possible to achieve the flow state doing almost anything, however sports lend themselves particularly well to creating the experience (Carter, River, & Sachs, 2003) (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008).

There are nine components that make up the experience of flow: “challenge-skills balance, merging of action-awareness, clear goals, feedback, concentration, sense of control, loss of self-consciousness, transformation of time, and autotelic experience” (Carter, River, & Sachs, 2003). The *challenge-skills balance* means there is an optimal balance between the present challenge level of an activity and the person’s skill level. This optimal level is such that the person’s skills are adequate for the challenge but the challenge level is higher than the average skill level of the person. When the challenge level is high and skill level low, the result is anxiety. Boredom is the result of low challenge and high skill; apathy occurs with low challenge and low skill (Carter, River, & Sachs, 2003).

“*Action-awareness merging* is the fusion of effort and awareness of that effort during an activity, thus creating a moment whereby the ‘feeling’ of doing is lost and the feeling of automatic response takes place” (Carter, River, & Sachs, 2003). Through a process of skill mastery, once skills are learned we can get lost in the activity without having to think about how to do the task. *Clear goals*, including clear instructions or strategies help to assess and evaluate one’s progress. “*Unambiguous feedback* refers to the automatic receipt of information from various sources during the activity that positively affects performance”

(Carter, River, & Sachs, 2003). In the case of whitewater kayaking the feedback can be internal (feeling one's body, boat, and paddle), or external (successful maneuver, catching an edge, instructor feedback).

Concentration is required to achieve the flow state, and refers to a complete focus on the task at hand. The whitewater kayaking takes place in very dynamic environment, which provides paddlers with a constant stream of information and feedback. *Sense of control* is important, however one cannot become consumed with the evaluation of it. *Loss of self-consciousness* refers to the release of ego, allowing the complete and free involvement with an activity without over-evaluation of one's activities. People, who achieve a state of flow, describe a *transformation of time*, where time either slows down or speeds up. When flow is experienced, the activity becomes an *autotelic experience*, which means we experience enjoyment and intrinsic reward from participating in the experience (Carter, River, & Sachs, 2003).

Whitewater kayaking is an activity that fosters the experience of flow at nearly every level. Once the basic skills necessary for navigating the river are mastered, there are endless ways to find the optimal challenge-skill balance and get lost in the moment. The experience of flow makes whitewater kayaking immensely enjoyable serves as a motivator to continue to paddle.

Identity

In order to understand how a sport such as whitewater kayaking can affect identity, it is important to understand what identity is, how it is defined, understood, and affected. The following section will provide an overview of the literature on identity, which I hope will

provide context for the discussion of the effects of white water kayaking on identity development. Whitewater kayaking is a complex activity, providing participants with a range of experiences that can have powerful impacts. The activity can be examined from a variety of perspectives that will bring to light different aspects. Similarly, there have been a variety of approaches to understanding identity and its development and understanding these will allow the reader to gain a more complete picture of the ways in which whitewater kayaking can affect identity development.

Erik Erikson is generally credited with being the first to bring the attention of both scientific community and the public to the meaning of identity. A German born developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst, he trained under Anna Freud, daughter of Sigmund Freud, in Vienna and later immigrated to America where he served as lecturer and professor at Harvard (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 2014). Erikson's model of identity had a tripartite nature consisting of the following three interacting elements:

1. A person's biological characteristics such as gender, body shape and physical limitations.
2. The individual's unique psychological needs, interests, and defenses.
3. The cultural milieu in which the individual exists.

(Kroger, 2007)

Erikson felt that optimal identity development occurred by finding social roles within one's community that were a good fit for one's unique biological and psychological interests and faculties (Kroger, 2007). Identity formation, according to Erikson, is the central task of adolescence but continues throughout adulthood. Contemporary approaches to identity, for the most part, fall into one of five categories that are addressed in the following paragraphs.

Historical Approaches

The *historical approach* views identity within the changing historical context. Whitewater kayaking exists in a historical context and its participants are affected by the current historical context. This can provide an appreciation for identity as a social construct, but cannot account for individual differences. However, social science historians argue that in order to fully understand adolescent and adult identity development, the social-historical context must be taken into account (Kroger, 2007). Another approach toward identity is by focusing on the internal *structural stage* of the changing ego development “from which one interprets and gives meaning to ones life experiences” (Kroger, 2007). These internal structures can be thought of as psychological filters that follow a predictable sequence of development over time; “each successive structure enables a person to have an increasingly complex way of making sense of his or her life experience” (Kroger, 2007).

Sociocultural Approaches

The *sociocultural approach* to identity tries to understand the role society plays by offering or restricting identity alternatives. Significant relationships and interpersonal interaction provide the context, while language and action are “the primary media for identity development” (Kroger, 2007). “For many sociologists there is no identity without society, and society steers identity formation while individuals attempt to navigate the passage” (Côté, 1996). Certain groups can become marginalized by identity politics based on their age, race, or gender. In the past it has, for example, been viewed inappropriate for older people to participate in outdoor adventure activities. However, this perception is changing and that is allowing older people to redefine their identities as capable, fit, and adventurous (Pike & Weinstock, 2013).

Contemporary North American society encourages a view that correlates body image with identity. In the fourth chapter of his book, *Reflections of the Socially Constructed Physical Self*, Sparks (1997) provides some context for the concepts relating to the self, identity, body image, and the individual. He begins by providing some historical background in terms of how we came to value “privatized, individualized bodies” (Sparks, 1997). This notion is so prevalent in our modern western culture, and causes people to view their bodies, similar to machines, which need to be monitored and maintained. The investment of time and resources for the maintenance of bodies is mostly to achieve a certain look of the trim, fit, and healthy body. Sparks continues by placing these individual body projects in the context of consumer culture, where “a range of technologies or ‘disciplines’ are invoked, such as diet, exercise, chemicals, and surgery” (Sparks, 1997). He provides a deeper understanding of the ideology of individualism as it pertains to the body and the self, in the context of consumer culture.

Individualism on the surface, presents itself as very positive in terms of “individual autonomy, independence, and equal opportunity” (Sparks, 1997). Some implications exist, pertaining to the notion that we are, as individuals, entirely responsible for our own actions and life situation. For example, social structures, cultural aspects, and economic factors that create social inequality and clearly limit the options of some to attain the ideal body and health. Advertising, even through government programs aimed at improving the health of the population, can stigmatize certain body types. This creates a culture of shaming individuals for their bodies, based on the notion that they have created their bodies through conscious choices or lack of self-control. A difficult dichotomy arises from this situation, where individual responsibility and free choice is valued and should be, but dangers arise in the form of victim blaming (Sparks, 1997).

Narrative Approaches

A fourth approach to understanding identity is through *narrative*, where language and the life story are the components that construct, justify, and maintain identities. As people try to create meaning in their lives, a narrative of their past experiences can provide them with a sense of coherence. This has become an increasingly popular method of identity exploration. Olympic athlete and academic Tosha Tsang (2000) used the narrative writing style to explore various identities and identity conflicts of her experience as a high-performance athlete, woman, and Chinese-Anglo Canadian. She mixed narrative and academic voices, using the narrative to tell stories, and writing with an academic voice to put the story into the context of her research (Tsang, 2000). This approach is of particular interest to me as I will use autoethnographic writing to explore my own relationship with the sport of kayaking. Narrative writing allows for the richness of experiences to be captured and shared with a broader audience.

Psychosocial Approaches

Finally, the *psychosocial* approach integrates societal aspects with an “individual’s intrapsychic dynamics and biology” (Kroger, 2007). Levinson’s (1978) book *The Season’s of a Man’s Life* proposed developmental, psychosocial stages that were linked to age. These stages were predictable and stretched from adolescence through the adult years (Levinson, *The seasons of a man's life*, 1978). He later published *The Season’s of a Woman’s Life* in which he produced the results of a similar study that again showed predictable stages of identity development (Levinson, *The seasons of a woman's life*, 1996; Wheaton, 2000; Willig, 2008).

Philosophical Views

Fundamentally, there are two different philosophical views regarding the development of identity: creation and discovery. Waterman (1984) proposes two contrasting metaphors for identity development. The concepts of *Identity Discovery* and *Identity Creation* are drawn from the philosophies of eudaimonism and existentialism respectively. The process of *discovery*, then, is based on the idea that our true self exists and it is up to us to discover who we are and develop our identity based on a process of self-actualization. The Greeks perhaps believed this to be the case, as expressed in the aphorisms “Know thyself” and “Become what you are” (Waterman, 1984).

The process of *creation* is congruent with the idea of the blank slate. Here, we are “making choices from among an almost limitless array of alternatives and becoming what [we have] chosen to become” (Waterman, 1984). There is great freedom in this idea of identity formation, yet there is an existential dilemma as well because “in the absence of an intrinsic nature, an essence, the number of possibilities is limitless and the choice of one option over all the others becomes arbitrary” (Waterman, 1984). Waterman defines the term identity as “having a clearly delineated self-definition comprised of those goals, values, and beliefs to which the person is unequivocally committed. These commitments evolve over time and are made because the chosen goals, values, and beliefs are judged worthy of giving a direction, purpose, and meaning to life” (Waterman, 1984).

Combined Approaches

Many researchers use combinations of various approaches to understand identity development. Christiansen (1999) proposes that occupations serve as primary ways to

express and develop our identities and create meaning of experiences and our lives over time. He also suggests that identities provide a framework for goal setting and motivation. His views are based on several propositions, which are all based on the premise that as humans we have a compelling need to express our identity in a way that gives meaning to life. The four propositions are:

1. Identity is an overarching concept that shapes and is shaped by our relationships with others.
2. Identities are closely tied to what we do and our interpretations of those actions in the context of our relationships with others.
3. Identities provide an important central figure in a self-narrative or life story that provides coherence and meaning for everyday events and life itself.

(Christiansen, 1999)

My own relationship with kayaking has been, in part, a professional one and working as a kayak instructor has shaped my identity. Similarly, most of the research participants view kayaking not only as a leisure pursuit, but also have professional aspirations.

Self-concept, Self-esteem, and confidence

Because life meaning is derived in the context of identity, it is an essential element in promoting well-being and life-satisfaction. As adults, we are motivated to maintain a certain consistency in how we view ourselves, as well as how others view us. We try to avoid feedback that is not consistent with our view of ourselves (Swann, 1987) (Swann & Hill, 1982). “To the extent that we perceive discrepancies between our perceived and ideal selves, we are motivated to change” (Christiansen, 1999). This is known as *self-concept*; it is our understanding of our “personality traits and characteristics, our social roles, and our relationships” (Christiansen, 1999).

Self-esteem is the evaluative aspect of self-concept, whereby the individual draws conclusions about their own actions and social approval they yield. A person with high self-esteem expects admiration and respect in social interactions, while a person with low self-esteem anticipates disapproval and rejection. "...people seek to maintain, protect, and enhance self-esteem by attempting to obtain success and avoid failure in domains on which their self-worth has been staked" (Croocker & Park, 2003). Self-confidence then relates to a person's willingness to take risks. Clearly, self-esteem and self-confidence are linked (Baumeister R. F., 1982).

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy beliefs are related to the concepts of self-esteem and self-confidence in that they are specific beliefs about what a person is able to do. They are not predictions about a person's behavior, but what a person thinks he or she can do under specific, often challenging or changing circumstances. Muddux and Gosselin (2003) indicate that self-efficacy beliefs are built on information that is integrated from five sources: "performance experiences, vicarious experiences, imaginal experiences, verbal persuasion, and affective and physiological states" (Maddux & Gosselin, 2003).

It is interesting to note that while self-efficacy beliefs can be based on a real performance experience, where in the past a person failed at a certain activity or skill and built a belief around that, the self-efficacy belief can also be based on an imagined experience, or simply negative self-talk. While it may be of value for the individual to identify the source of the belief, a self-efficacy belief is a limitation regardless of the source (Maddux & Gosselin, 2003). Performance experiences represent the most powerful source of self-efficacy beliefs (Maddux & Gosselin, 2003).

Identity and Leisure

While most of the research participants use their kayaking skills professionally either as instructors or as safety kayakers for raft companies, their relationship to kayaking is not entirely based on their professional identities. Their relationship to the sport can, at least in part, be described by the concept of *serious leisure*. There is support in the literature for an influence of leisure pursuits on identity development. Serious leisure, as described by Cohen-Gewerc & Stebbins in *Serious Leisure and Individuality*, can provide a space for people to develop unique identities they are not able to express in other areas of their lives. The leisure space provides opportunities to both discover and create oneself; to realize and develop our uniqueness.

Leisure education means a serious rehearsal for a new kind of game of life. Within this endeavor, the aims of education itself will have changed: we will no longer be looking for ways to achieve something *in* life, but aspire to achieve life itself, a life with all angles considered, life with its innumerable facets, phases, and possibilities. In this sense, the leisure state of mind invites us, not only to consume, to copy, to reproduce – but to create. (Cohen-Gewerc & Stebbins, 2013)

The authors, here, speak about an “open dialogue with life” that leads to artistic creation in this leisure space. The authors do not provide guidelines or specific instructions for leisure education, but simply place it in context with the philosophical prerogative of self-improvement and self-actualization. In the final paragraph of the book the authors state the following:

To be oneself means not to be dissolved in the mass, shaped by ongoing circumstances. To be oneself means to be aware of one’s individuality and conscious

of one's presence in a fascinating dialogue with the world – a dialogue that is the sole way to improve and empower our uniqueness, our individuality, and thereby avoid the trap of individualism. (Cohen-Gewerc & Stebbins, 2013)

Green and Jones draw on Stebbins work when they describe the concept of serious leisure by contrasting it to casual leisure using six distinctive qualities. The first quality is *perseverance*, which suggests that participants have to negotiate barriers such as embarrassment, dangers and discomfort. The second quality is that the pursuit of the activity leads to the development of a “long-term career.” This involves “stages of achievement” and skill mastery. A third characteristic of serious leisure is *significant personal effort*. The fourth quality is the “range of durable benefits” that are the result of the continued participation in the activity. “Thus serious leisure may result in one or more of the following: the enhancement of the self-concept, self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, feelings of accomplishment, enhanced self-image and self-esteem, and social interaction.” (Green & Jones, 2005)

The fifth and sixth characteristics of serious leisure, as Green & Jones suggest, relate to the social world of the activity and the social identification with the activity. The unique ethos of an activity is defined through language, apparel, equipment, and even transportation. The social identities within the social world of an activity can provide the participant with a sense of belonging, and enhance their sense of self-esteem and self-worth. Casual leisure, by contrast, cannot provide identities because it is not interesting enough and does not demand the same commitment.

I have provided an overview of approaches to understanding identity in an effort to ground my research into the effect of whitewater kayaking on identity development in the existing

literature. The historical and social context in which whitewater kayaking participants exist, shape their identity development as well as the development of the sport. While profound changes are possible through the conscious participation in whitewater kayaking and meaningful reflection, common and early impacts of the sport are on self-efficacy beliefs and self-confidence. These aspects were addressed to provide a clear understanding of these concepts. The narrative writing I will use through my auto ethnographic approach has been used in order to explore issues of identity (Tsang, 2000) and is useful in providing rich descriptions of the experiences possible through the sport. Understanding that serious leisure pursuits can impact identity development, discovery, and creation (Cohen-Gewerc & Stebbins, 2013) helps set the stage for this thesis.

Methodology

For this thesis I used autoethnographic writing to explore my own experience with whitewater kayaking and establish my position as a researcher. My experience with the sport has informed the research question for this thesis. I used qualitative interviews to explore other kayakers' experiences, allowing me to compare these to my own experience.

Objectives

I set out to explore how white water kayaking affects identity development. Using auto ethnographic writing, I have been able to explore my own journey with the sport, and how it has shaped my identity. Interviewing second-year students in the Adventure Guide Program at TRU, who have focused on kayaking and were enrolled in second year kayak courses, provided an opportunity for reflexivity and comparison. These students began kayaking with

TRU's Kayak I course in the fall of 2012, and have incorporated the sport into their identities to varying degrees.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided my interviews, autoethnographic writing, as well as much of my research of the existing literature:

- 1) *In what ways does whitewater kayaking, as a serious leisure activity, have an effect on identity development?*
- 2) *When participation is combined with conscious reflection, can the sport offer an opportunity for personal growth and identity creation?*

Methods

This research project consisted of two main processes, an autoethnographic process and qualitative interviews. Ellis et al. describe *Autoethnography* as a method that is “both process and product” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). “Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). By being or becoming a *participant observer*, the ethnographic researcher can study aspects of a specific culture, such as common practices, values and beliefs, and shared experiences. This can help both people within the culture as well as outsiders to better understand the specific culture (Maso, 2001). My longtime involvement with kayaking lends itself to be explored and analyzed using this method.

My experience of kayaking since age 13, has undoubtedly affected my identity in numerous ways; particularly my identity as a kayaking instructor has affected other aspects of my

personality. Using autoethnography I am able to establish a baseline of what kayaking has meant to me and how it has affected my identity. Through a review of the literature I establish that extreme or adventure sports can have an affect on identity. Here I also allow the reader to gain a better understanding of identity and related concepts self-confidence and self-esteem. Interviews with my research participants provide an opportunity to look for commonalities and areas of divergence. My involvement with the sport, the adventure guide program, and the close relationship with the research participants, makes this research approach particularly appropriate.

In order to explore commonalities and differences in other kayakers' experiences, I conducted one-on-one interviews of about 45 – 60 min. The research participants, a group of 6 Adventure Guide Diploma students, were nearing the end of their last semester at TRU. I interviewed the participants and analyzed the transcripts using the methods outlined in *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* as guidance (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The kind of broad understanding I seek can only be explored using qualitative methods. Patricia Leavy describes ethnography in her book *Method Meets Art – Arts-Based Research Practice*:

Ethnography produced what Clifford Geertz (1973) later termed “thick descriptions” of social life from the perspective of research participants (as well as the researcher’s own interpretation of what he or she learns in the field). Moreover, this method required the researcher to develop rapport with his or her research participants, collaborate with them, and embark of weighty and unpredictable emotional as well as intellectual processes. (p.7)

Leavy goes on to describe the strengths of arts-based research practices and notes that such methods are “particularly useful for research projects that aim to *describe, explore, or*

discover.” (p.12) This is congruent with my goals for this project of exploring identity development in kayaking.

Arts-based practices are often useful in studies involving *identity work*... As with most identity-based research, part of the goal is to communicate the data in such a way as to challenge stereotypes, build empathy, promote awareness, and stimulate dialogue. (p.13)

The six interviews were between 37min and 51min in length and were conducted in a variety of locations. Three participants were met in Kamloops, one in Nelson, one in Squamish, and one interview was conducted on a multi-day river trip on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River in Idaho. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and lines were numbered before being analyzed. The initial analysis involved listening to the interviews while reviewing the transcripts. This allowed me to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts as well as hear the tone in the interviewee’s voice, which is lost on the text. During the initial review broad themes were color coded and highlighted. Finally themes were then grouped together and further analyzed, looking for rich descriptions that captured the essence of the participant’s lived experience. In this document I use line numbers and names to quote participants; their names were changed to maintain anonymity.

My aim is not to find a universal truth with regard to the research question, or establish rules that can be generally applied to all kayakers. With this project I wanted to explore what is true to me; using qualitative interviews allowed me to find commonalities with other kayakers. My hope is that this work will provide the reader with an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the sport of kayaking as well as identity development. There is an

opportunity for this work to inform pedagogical practices that foster a deeper, more meaningful interaction with rivers rather than a focus solely on skill development. By exploring my own relationship with kayaking, I hope to inspire others in the kayaking community to reflect on the ways in which kayaking offers them opportunities for personal growth and identity creation. Whitewater kayaking culture, much like in other adventure sports, idolizes professional, sponsored kayakers who push the boundaries of the sport; movies and photos of their pursuits are consumed by participants of the sport, paid for by companies that sell equipment and clothing. Little in this process, however, challenges kayakers to examine their own relationships with kayaking and to ask themselves questions about the value of kayaking in their lives. In the following pages I explore my own relationship with whitewater kayaking and share stories that are shaped my identity. In doing so I hope to add my voice to a dialogue within the kayaking community, and thereby broaden its scale.

The researcher's position: an autoethnographic narrative

Autoethnography was born from a desire of post-modernist researchers to transcend the epistemological and ontological limitations of the social sciences. The desire was to find “ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience, research that would sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The following presents my own position as a researcher and provides a baseline for comparison with the interview data with regard to the ways in which whitewater kayaking affects identity development and the

role of conscious reflection. The research questions as well as the questions I asked the interview participants were informed by autoethnographic exploration of my own involvement with the sport of whitewater kayaking.

The early days of kayaking – motivators

I began white water kayaking at age 13 in Switzerland. My father and I joined a local paddling club, where we took lessons once a week and participated in several river trips on weekends. As a teenager, I had an opportunity to continue my journey as a kayaker while I attended boarding school from age 15 to 19. Early on, what appealed to me about whitewater kayaking was the skill mastery process, the freedom of autonomous movement in a truly beautiful and unique environment, the flow experience of becoming lost in the moment, and the community of friends I was sharing the time on the water with.

At boarding school, kayaking created a unique bond among a group of students, who were often part of different social groups outside of the kayak course. But the times spent in the van driving to and from rivers and paddling together encouraged friendships based on trust and a shared passion for this unique sport. Right from the start kayaking offers seemingly endless opportunities to learn and improve skills. At the beginning, it was about navigating currents without tipping over, but once I had mastered the basics of navigation there was so much more to explore. The way a kayak interacts with the current is very immediate and intimate. Unlike bigger crafts such as inflatable rafts, kayaks allow you to feel every little current either with your boat, or the paddle.

Navigating a river in a kayak requires you to visualize a path, or line, that takes into account the dynamics of the current. The interaction between the angle, speed, and direction of your

kayak with the angle, speed, and direction of the current is blissfully dynamic. Fighting this powerful force of nature is exhausting and hopeless; but when you work with the current and align the angle of your boat in just the right way, apply power at just the right time, then the experience becomes both effortless and magical.

Surfing waves in a kayak, is the perfect example of a flow experience attained through a process of skill mastery. In order to surf a wave, kayakers often look for calm places called eddies on either side of the river that allow them to repeatedly access the wave. Once I had mastered the basics of navigating rivers, surfing became one of my main goals while I was on the water. When I started kayaking, boats were much longer than they are now, some over 12 feet long. When you were sitting in the eddy, about to enter the wave you had to not only control your position but also the angle of the boat in relation to the current. A few degrees off meant the current would take a hold of your kayak and send you across the wave and to the other side of the river. But the right angle, entering the current in just the right place and all of a sudden the kayak would effortlessly glide into the trough of the wave; the forces of gravity and the current in perfect equilibrium. These were magical moments, a sensation of speed while staying still, the water rushing under the boat. Through changes of boat angle and tilt I would cut back and forth across the wave, allowing me to dance with the river.

The skill mastery process, the experience of the flow state, the community of friends I paddled with, and the autonomous movement in a unique and beautiful environment made kayaking immensely enjoyable and motivated me to keep going with the sport. As a teenager I excelled at kayaking and was able to build positive self-efficacy beliefs, increasing my self-confidence. These positive experiences motivated me not just to maintain whitewater kayaking as a part of my life but to incorporate it into my self-concept.

The birth of an idea: Whitewater and identity

It was during these years that a seed was planted about the possibility that this sport could have an impact on my identity. At boarding school, my kayak instructor was in a unique position to observe me both on and off the river. One day, he walked up to me on the schoolyard. “You know,” he said to me. “You’re quite a different person on the river.” I was taken aback and did not know what to say, “What do you mean?” I asked. “Well, I am not sure if you’ve noticed this about yourself but I certainly see it. You are much more decisive on the water. You make decisions quickly and confidently and I don’t see that so much in you off the water” he said. “You often seem to struggle with decisions and you don’t have the same kind of confidence than when you’re kayaking.” It had never even occurred to me that there would be more to kayaking than learning and improving skills, and having a good time. I tried to think back on the last time I was on the river to see if my memory of that day would reveal anything that would confirm his observation, but I couldn’t tell. “If you look for it, you might be able to notice it and bring it into your life a little more” he said to me before he continued to walk again. “I’ll try.” Was all I could promise at the time.

At the time I was enrolled in a philosophy class and brought up the topic in a conversation with my philosophy teacher. He was an American in his mid thirties and told me that he used to be a climber. “Yeah, totally man!” he said, “That’s what it’s all about. I used to climb, and once I became the climber, I stopped climbing.” He had recognized early on that there were aspects of his climbing identity that were different from other aspects of his life. He felt that climbing allowed him to do and explore things that he couldn’t in other parts of his life. Once he felt this difference had disappeared and that he was able to do, in life, what he had only been able to do on the wall, he no longer felt the need to climb.

I found the concept fascinating and continued to ponder it. I began to pay attention to my emotions, thoughts and behaviors while paddling; trying to understand who I was as a kayaker, and how that was different from who I was off the river. I quickly began to understand that this process of self-discovery was a slow process. There was no flood of epiphanies and revelations. I did not simply transform into a more decisive and confident person, just because I had opened my eyes to a new dimension of the sport.

By paying attention and observing myself, however, I had begun to change the way I kayaked. I now saw paddling as an interaction with the river, rather than a simple performance of complex maneuvers in the river environment. By experiencing paddling as an interaction, I was able to become much more playful and exploratory. While to an outside observer, nothing would have appeared to have changed, in my mind a whole new world had opened up. In the past a failed attempt of a maneuver meant nothing more to me than the wrong execution of biomechanical sequences. Perhaps I hadn't rotated my torso enough, exposed the wrong edge to the current, or chosen the wrong angle in relation to the current; adjust and repeat.

Now that I saw paddling as an interaction with the river, I recognized the river as having a character, even a personality. Some rivers were forgiving, easy, simple, fun and bubbly. Others, however, were analogous of a stern, highly perceptive, unforgiving, demanding, and wise teacher. The same failed maneuver, to the outside observer, would result in the same behavior: adjust and repeat. But the outside observer couldn't hear the conversation I was engaged in with the river.

"Oh really? So that's how it's going to be!" I would laugh after rolling up, having just been forcefully flipped by the current. Recognizing the powerful nature of the river, I would see

my experience as slap on the wrist from the river. “Straighten up! Maintain your focus and stop being lazy! You’re better than this, and have some confidence for crying out loud. Again!” I could hear the river’s voice in my head.

By seeing the river as more than just an arrangement of currents, and paddling more than just a set of skillfully executed maneuvers but instead realizing it was a playful interaction, I was able to take the experience of whitewater kayaking to another level. I stepped up to the demands of the river to be more confident, forceful, focused, and precise. I learned that the river quickly punished me for being cocky, and was grateful for the reminder to shed such an unbecoming attitude. I developed a skillful elegance that was often rewarded by the river, but knew to remain humble for it was no guarantee of success.

Risk, Trust and Profound Experiences

When I started kayaking I was almost oblivious to the risks involved. I do remember experiencing some fear and even moments of panic early on. I was 13 years old when I began to kayak and still somewhat timid. The first time I flipped over, I felt trapped in my boat and instantly panicked. However, once I became comfortable with the process of getting out of my boat under water, I was no longer scared of flipping. I didn’t become aware of all of the risks until I began to work as a guide. It may have been age, but certainly the reality of relying on my body to be healthy in order to work and earn a living changed my views on risk.

There wasn’t one pivotal moment when my perception of risk changed, but the process of assessing risk for others placed a responsibility on me to be diligent, thorough, and err on the side of caution. Realizing that even a minor injury had immediate financial repercussions for

me changed my attitude as well. Near the end of a summer of raft guiding, I stood beside Rearguard Falls and contemplated a new line. My friend John and I were looking at the impressive, river wide drop, discussing the centerline, which neither one of us had run at that point. The significant drop in gradient creates a massive horizon line that makes it difficult to be accurate when dropping into this wide feature. It is easy to end up off line by a meter or more and there are consequences to that.

It is the first time I can remember really thinking about the consequences of my actions and how a mistake might impact my ability to work. Standing there with John, I noted the exposed rocks. “It looks a bit low” I said, “At this point, even if I just smash my elbow on a rock, it’s going to cost me a bunch of money. I teach Kayak I in two weeks...” A few years prior, such considerations simply were not part of my decision-making process. I would have thought about how good it would feel to have run this rapid, the sense of accomplishment it would give me, and perhaps I would have thought of it as a photo opportunity. Now, my decision-making process was much more complex and included how my actions would affect others.

As I began to run harder whitewater, I began to think more carefully about my paddling partners. I wanted the people I paddled with have similar views on risk and decision-making, because their decisions would impact me if I were in a position to perform a rescue. I also preferred to share moments of elation with friends as well as trust them to support me when things didn’t go well for me.

Paddling the Kiwa River was an exiting and truly adventurous experience, but at the heart of the experience it was about trust and friendship. There were three of us, Adam, Sharman and I, and after driving past the Kiwa countless times we had decided to try and run it. Without

any information and only a very small portion visible from the road, this would be an adventure. Small rivers in BC are prone for logjams, strainers and fallen trees that span the entire river, and the Kiwa proved to be no exception. The gradient of the river was significant and so we were travelling fast down a winding river. We leapfrogged each other and often pulled over, allowing one of us to get out and hike through the thick forest to see around an otherwise blind corner. The consequences of miscommunication or other mistakes were serious, which became apparent when Adam came around a corner and saw a river-wide fallen tree. By calling out to us, he allowed us to get to shore safely with room to spare as we watched him just barely reach shore with the back of his kayak touching the tree. Getting swept into the tree might have resulted in him getting pinned under water and us struggling to rescue him.

The experience of paddling the Kiwa River, left me with a sense of adventure and the memory of having explored a beautiful part of BC seen by few people. There was, however, another aspect of the experience that made it profound and meaningful. The level of risk had demanded that the three of us trust each other and our abilities to safely navigate this wild river. Our friendship was enriched by a deeper level of trust.

It's not as though every time I went paddling I discovered new things about myself. In fact for a few years I was much more focused on skill mastery because I was working to improve my technique and become an instructor. Then all of a sudden, I had another moment on the river that shed light on so much more of my experience in life than what was happening in that moment on the river.

I was paddling on the upper Fraser River, on a demanding Class IV section near Mount Robson. My skills were that of a solid Class IV boater and I had paddled a bit of Class V

already. I had even paddled this particular stretch of river before, although it been a while and I couldn't always remember each rapid fully. Class IV whitewater, often has enough gradient to present a horizon line, meaning that as you approach a rapid you can't see the majority of the rapid because the river drops out of sight. As I approached one particular rapid with such a horizon line, I began to feel a sense of anxiety. Not seeing the whole rapid meant that I couldn't plan any of my moves, make any decisions about where to go and what to do. The anxiety grew right up to the point where the whole rapid came into view, which happened right as I dropped into it. Upon seeing the whole rapid I quickly realized that it was well within my abilities, I saw the line I needed to take and knew that I would confidently maneuver my boat along that path. The anxiety instantly lifted and was replaced by a calm focus.

Once I got to the bottom of the rapid where the river slowed down somewhat I smiled as I reflected on what had just happened. My anxiety had been the result of not trusting my own abilities. Had I just had faith that whatever lied ahead was well within my abilities, and that even though I was not able to see it all, I was going to deal with whatever came up, I could have avoided feeling anxious and stressed. It occurred to me that the same could be said about many other situations in my life. I often experienced the exact same anxiety over an uncertain future. Between seasonal work, finding and realizing professional and educational aspirations, relationships, and the interplay of these and other factors there was plenty of uncertainty in my life. Yet, not only was the feeling of anxiety identical to what I had felt on the river, the solution was the same as well. "Know that what lies ahead, is within your abilities" is the lesson I learned that day. I have often remembered it since, when I felt anxiety and stress.

Becoming a teacher

As an instructor in the Adventure Studies Department for the past 7 years, I have continued to ponder and discuss the connection between kayaking and identity with my colleagues and friends. Faced with a program dominated by skill development and a culture within the sport that is arguably shallow, many of us in the water-based courses of the Adventure Studies Department have tried to engage students in a dialogue around this topic. I am concerned that the purpose of white water kayaking, as it is portrayed in most popular kayak movies, is somewhat shallow and does not adequately justify the ever-increasing risks taken. The influence of social media on the culture of the sport also concerns me. I worry that students of mine, as they progress to more difficult white water, will be focused on pushing their limits just to ‘get a rad picture’ to put up as their profile picture on Facebook.

The dialogue I, and other instructors, have tried to engage the students in, is centered on the notion that kayaking can serve as a platform for introspection, reflection, and learning. My hope has been to plant seeds in the students’ minds that cause them to think carefully about what kayaking means to them, what risks they are willing to take, and perhaps most importantly: the reasons for taking these risks. The following is a story about a powerful lesson I learned through my role as a kayak instructor, which has had a profound influence on my teacher identity as well as other aspects of my personality.

Given the time of year, I am either a guide or a teacher. I most certainly enjoy both, but find teaching to be the most fulfilling. Maybe that is why I most identify myself as a teacher. I have a great desire to be a very good teacher, and my self-esteem is very much tied to this profession. As a teacher I have had to reflect on my own journey, my own way of learning, in order to relate to my students. As I made mistakes along the way, I have learned that

vulnerability is a good thing. It allows my students to relate to me, and so I have had to challenge myself to continue to break down walls I build up and remain vulnerable.

I remember feeling shaken in my self-confidence. I had gained a little bit of weight over the summer, and I hadn't kayaked very much. I felt like I was sinking my kayak, I imagined myself to look like a fat guy on a miniature pony. All of this was amplified by the presence of one of the second year students, who was assisting on this Kayak I course. Sam clearly had more natural talent than me, and was without any doubt a better kayaker. I perceived his smooth skill not just as a contrast to my feeling a little rusty, but as a threat to my authority as an instructor. It was the beginning of a great learning experience in my career as a teacher.

Shortly after this course, I learned that I would have an opportunity to instruct on the Kayak II course for the first time. Here I would teach students with higher kayak skills including one particularly talented student: Gabe. He was another example of someone who had more natural talent than I. Although I had paddled for many more years than him, Gabe already displayed a grace that often eluded me. My experience in the fall had rattled my cage and I thought about my role as an instructor on the upcoming Kayak II course throughout the fall. My instructional style for Kayak I had been mostly based on the simple premise that I possessed a skill that my students did not. They wanted to learn how to kayak, and I was good at it. This was the source of my confidence as a teacher. I realized that this mindset would probably not hold up for higher-level courses such as Kayak II, particularly with students like Gabe.

The thought remained with me throughout the winter and by the time I embarked on the course in April I had developed a different teaching approach. I had realized that my years of teaching had provided me with keen observational skills. I could therefore assume the role of

a coach. The premise now was that the students wanted to learn, and I possessed detection and correction skills that would help facilitate their learning. I allowed myself to make mistakes, and instead of judging myself I would laugh with the students. I allowed myself to be vulnerable and it created more magic than I could have hoped for. Being vulnerable turned out to make me more accessible for the students. It broke down barriers and allowed the students to take risks themselves. It created a learning environment where everyone felt free to try new things and push their skills. During the personal course debrief with Gabe, he told me how much he felt he had learned and that I was his favorite TRU instructor. In the context of working alongside my mentors I couldn't think of a greater compliment. It was a wonderful reward, and affirmation for taking the leap of faith in being vulnerable.

By changing the way I view whitewater kayaking and actively reflecting on my experiences on the river, I have both created and discovered my identity congruent with the concepts presented by Waterman (Identity Formation: Discovery of Creation?, 1984). Seeing kayaking as an opportunity to not just practice physical skills, but explore character traits and establish powerful self-efficacy beliefs, allowed me to grow as a person. Kayaking has allowed me to feel profoundly connected with nature, through my intimate interaction with the river environment. Similar experiences have been documented by other researchers (Brymer, Downey, & Gray, Extreme Sports as a Precursor to Environmental Sustainability, 2009) (Brymer & Oades, Extreme Sports: A Positive Transformation in Courage and Humility, 2009).

Whitewater kayaking has taught me many things, and through active and meaningful reflection I was able to take some of these lessons and integrate them into my life. By seeing kayaking as an interaction with the river I realized the opportunity to practice being a certain

kind of person. Through my work as a kayak instructor I have invested a significant portion of my self-concept into the role of a teacher. This further increased my commitment to the sport and placed additional weight on the self-efficacy beliefs I established through my experiences. My journey with the sport and the reflective process has shaped my identity, spurred my interest in the research questions and guided my inquiry throughout this project.

Writing autoethnographically about whitewater kayaking, I have been able to explore the ways in which the sport has changed my identity and allowed me to grow as a person. The whitewater environment has placed certain demands on me as a paddler: to be decisive, confident, calm under pressure, focused and to trust my friends. As I have embodied these qualities on the river, I have been able to incorporate them into my identity. Through qualitative interviews I went on to explore commonalities with other kayakers, to find out if they had also experienced identity developments through their kayaking experiences.

Interview data

The following section presents some of the interview data following my analysis. While none of the research participants had any previous whitewater kayaking experience, all but one had a fairly strong connection to either lakes and/or rivers through canoeing (4/6) or living on a river (2/6). The names of the interviewees have been changed here.

A common experience that had an impact on all participants was the death of a fellow student, while running a Class IV waterfall on the Upper Cheakamus River. This event mostly affected the participants' perceptions and attitudes toward risk, but for some their friendship with this student and his love for the sport became a powerful motivator to continue to paddle.

Motivations

I wanted to get an understanding of the participants' motivations for whitewater kayaking. Cohen-Gewerc & Stebbins describe how serious leisure provides opportunities for self-discovery and creation. For a pursuit such as whitewater kayaking to be a serious leisure activity, the participant must have a significant commitment to it. Motivators therefore explain the significant commitment as well provide an understanding of the experience of whitewater kayaking. The following five themes emerged as motivators: *Skill Mastery*, *Flow experience/mental aspect*, *Community*, *Culture & Travel*, *Trust*, and *Profound or Unique Kayaking Experiences*.

Skill Mastery

This theme emerged in five out of six interviews as a motivator for kayaking. The skill mastery process is the experience of learning a skill, improving over time, and is accompanied by setbacks and frustration, but ultimately a sense of accomplishment as certain goals are reached. Successful skill mastery experiences can have a positive effect on self-efficacy beliefs and improve self-confidence (Maddux & Gosselin, 2003).

For example, Dan excelled at kayaking right from the start and for the first time in his life he was very good at a sport compared to his peer group, which gave him a sense of accomplishment. The prospect of working as a kayak instructor in the summer gave him a goal to work toward. “...now I am motivated by the fact that I am hopefully going to be a kayak instructor this summer and I’ll be paddling all the time. So, I am basically almost training for that...” (Dan, line 177)

For Mark, both the skill mastery process inherent in the sport as well as professional aspirations, are powerful motivators. *“...and I think now what motivates me is the fact that I do want to push my self and I do want to become a pro kayaker, or at least a guide, and I am already committing my life to kayaking.”* (Mark, line 110)

For Julia, the skill mastery process sometimes produces a sense of accomplishment, but she also struggles with frustration as she compares herself to better paddlers.

“I am boating because I see a goal, a destination and I want to get there, and I am pushing myself. I feel like I am forgetting to enjoy the process.” (Julia, line 110)

While goals and the skill mastery process can be powerful motivators and provide opportunities to affect self-efficacy beliefs as skills are improved, struggle and frustration are perhaps inherent in the process. Meaningful reflection may offer a way to move beyond the setbacks. Our desire to express our identity in ways that create meaning (Christiansen, 1999) may explain why some are drawn toward leisure activities that provide a space for identity creation (Cohen-Gewerc & Stebbins, 2013).

Flow Experience/Mental Aspect

Whitewater kayaking is a sport that requires significant focus, especially in continuous whitewater. Csikszentmihalyi's investigation into optimal experience describes a state of consciousness he calls “flow”. This state is achieved when we are involved in an activity where our skills are adequate to cope with the challenges, we are directed by a goal, the activity is bound by some rules, and we receive some direct clues about how well we are doing. The activity becomes intrinsically rewarding and our concentration is so intense that it is impossible to think about anything else or be consumed with worry; it is a feeling of being

in the moment (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Three out of six participants described the mental aspect of the sport, or the experience of flow as a motivator.

Dan describes the rush of paddling challenging whitewater, resulting in a state of flow. *“...there is definitely this certain adrenaline rush, awesome feeling when you’re paddling and especially when you’re paddling harder stuff that is hard for you and a little bit technical. ...while you’re on the river and really switched-on, in the zone feeling.”* (Dan, line 171) For Brett, the mental aspect of the sport requiring him to visualize his maneuvers provides enjoyment. *“...the way everything is fluid and always moving. There is always a way through things, it’s like a mind puzzle... ...you visualize what you are going to do, what maneuvers you are going to do and what things can affect you, and you do it... and that it’s like a mind game as well as a physical game.”* (Brett, line 78) The mental focus, both before running a rapid through visualization and during the activity, provides immense enjoyment and motivates the continued commitment to the sport.

Molly also describes the intense focus required in whitewater that challenges her as an experience she seeks. *“I think when you are that alert about everything, I function so much better.”* (Molly, line 102) Csikszentmihalyi described how activities that lead to the attainment of a state of flow become intrinsically motivating. This does occur in whitewater kayaking when participants are sufficiently challenged, and it may help explain the commitment of the participants to make kayaking such significant part of their lives.

Community, Culture & Travel

This is a theme that also emerged in five out of six interviews. I decided to group community, culture and travel themes together because they all describe a social aspect of the

sport. While trust is arguably a socially constructed concept as well, I feel that it exists on a different and more intimate level. Trust in the sport of whitewater kayaking is also strongly related to the risks of the sport, which is different from community, culture and travel themes.

This theme appears to be a powerful motivator, and for Molly it proved to be the main motivator that kept her involved before the activity itself became enjoyable enough to become intrinsically motivating. *“I wasn’t sure I was going to keep paddling... But I made a lot of really good friends who were into it and I just really liked being able to relate myself to what they do, and go and hang out with them doing these things.”* (Molly, line 71)

For Dan, the culture, community and travel aspect of the sport is very attractive and something he deeply enjoys. *“...realizing that the culture of kayaking is something I really admire and am interested in. I’ve already been travelling twice, kayaking in two different countries, or three if you include the States and it’s just, I’ve met these amazing people through the sport of kayaking and it’s so easy to meet people.”* (Dan, line 179) Julia also thrives on this social aspect of the sport. *“I just love going with my friends and all connecting that way. And then meeting new people, kayaking brings so many people together. So, building connections that way, that I would never have made any other way.”*

Kayaking is a unique sport, where although each participant is in his or her own craft, it is uncommon to be on the river alone. Sharing unique experiences in beautiful places with fellow paddlers creates powerful bonds. The social identity within the community of the sport can provide the participants with a sense of belonging and improve their self-esteem and self-worth (Green & Jones, 2005).

Trust

Trust themes came up later in the interviews when I explored the element of risk as well as changes in identity. But it appeared early on in three out of six interviews when participants talked about motivators. Christiansen's proposition that our identities are closely tied to what we do and our interpretations of those actions in the context of our relationships with others, suggests that trust is perhaps an important element for a socially constructed identity.

Brett enjoys the unique team aspect of the sport, which is a result of the risk and trust dynamic. *"I really like how it is a team sport and not a team sport at the same time... at moments you just have to just stop and you gotta not be competitive, you have to save someone's life"* (Brett, line 67) Nathan also describes the trust – risk dynamic as something he enjoys about the sport. *"And I guess the other aspect I really like about it is it's one of the few parts of society right now that you can't really afford bullshit... If you're standing above a pretty sizable rapid that is pushing your limit, you have to be honest with yourself... for people who I would like to go with and myself, you can't have ego play a part in deciding if you want to run a rapid or not and that's really refreshing."* (Nathan, line 143) For Nathan the trust and respect between paddlers isn't limited to trusting your partners to rescue you in difficult rapids, but extends to being supportive when someone decides not to run a rapid.

How risk is perceived and how it is managed can have a profound impact on the trust in a relationship. Mark described to me that when he feels someone's risk perception is skewed, he cannot fully trust the person. Julia is also aware of the importance of trust in a whitewater environment. *"I am a fairly trusting person in life, but when it comes to the river, I trust very few people."* (Julia, 294) She learned that the two most important factors in her decision-

making on hard whitewater are the confidence in her own ability and her trust in the other paddlers to rescue her.

In order for a leisure activity to have a significant impact on identity, considerable commitment and perseverance are necessary (Cohen-Gewerc & Stebbins, 2013). Understanding the motivations of kayakers may help to understand why they commit such significant time and resources to the sport and accept the risk exposure. Whitewater kayaking is a sport that offers an array of unique aspects that appeal to participants.

The Element of Risk

Whitewater kayaking is inherently dangerous, especially at the class IV and V level. I wanted to explore this aspect of the sport in my interviews because I feel that this aspect of risk forms the basis for many of the profound experiences, interpersonal dynamics relating to trust, decision-making and other themes. If whitewater kayaking were risk-free, then none of the decisions would have any consequences and paddlers would not have to trust each other. While risk is viewed as a negative in the media and society generally advocated risk avoidance, the importance of risk in terms of creating meaningful personal changes are supported in the literature (Ammons, 2008) (Brymer & Oades, *Extreme Sports: A Positive Transformation in Courage and Humility*, 2009) (Brymer & Schweitzer, *Extreme sports are good for your health: A phenomenological understanding of fear and anxiety in extreme sport*, 2012) (Brymer, Downey, & Gray, *Extreme Sports as a Precursor to Environmental Sustainability*, 2009).

While all of the interviewees had their own unique relationship with risk, most of them described themselves as having grown up with a high risk tolerance and a propensity to want

to push themselves or try anything regardless of the risks. As students of the Adventure Guide Program, all of them experienced changes in their attitudes toward risk. This likely happened partly because they learned to analyze and manage risk as they trained to become guides and instructors, and partly because they were now older and were entering an industry where an injury can have a direct impact on their livelihood. The experience of their classmate's death had, of course, a profound impact on all of them. It brought a tragic reality to the inherent risks of adventure sports and whitewater kayaking in particular.

Julia describes being confronted with risk and the possibility of dying while kayaking. *"...but I've definitely gotten myself into situations that could have gone terribly wrong. And that's really made me appreciate the dangers. Kayaking is the only thing so far in my life that has really made me wonder what is going to happen to me if I do [something] ... and the idea of dying definitely comes up for me, almost every time I go boating."* (Julia, line 74) She has experienced a change in her risk tolerance, and experiences that as a road block to progressing to harder whitewater, but also realizes that she has gained a greater appreciation for life. *"I have a new appreciation for risk and danger; especially [our classmate's] death last year really shook me... So, boating now I am much more cautious than I used to be, I don't know if that's necessarily good because it's a bit of a road block for me in my boating, but I definitely have more of appreciation for life in general, being alive and being able to go on the river and paddle it, go places that other people will never see... So, it's definitely taken me to places, it's taught me more about appreciating life and it's definitely humbled me in terms of my capabilities and my limitations and how much I am willing to risk. If it means a dislocated shoulder, or if it means a sprained wrist versus death... It's made me more cautious for myself and others."*

For Dan, the impact of his classmate's death was also profound. At first it was a deterrent to continue, but ultimately his classmate's enthusiasm for the sport as well as the joy Dan derives from it made it worthwhile to him to continue. *"I feel like it gives me a lot of life. The way you feel when you get off the river is pretty amazing or while you're on the river. That doesn't really happen with many other sports, for me anyway. I think it's pretty amazing in that way. So after he passed away, after a little while that I was thinking I was never going to paddle again I decided to follow it and definitely go to Nepal. Partly for him because I know that's what he would want me to do and partly just because I decided that I really love the sport and I want to follow it. I know that if he could see me right now, he would be really stoked that I am enjoying it that much and I went to Nepal and now Ecuador. He would be thrilled to see that."* (Dan, 117)

The inherent risk in whitewater kayaking, places the sport in the controversial category of extreme sports. Yet, risk is an essential component that creates opportunities for personal growth. Without risk, there would be no fear to overcome, courage to be found, or humility to be discovered (Brymer & Oades, *Extreme Sports: A Positive Transformation in Courage and Humility*, 2009). In a risk-free environment, decisions would not matter as much and paddlers would not have to trust each other (Ammons, 2008).

Profound Experiences

I have been fortunate to have had some profound experiences while kayaking, and the reflection on these experiences has allowed me to grow as a person. I wanted know if these young kayakers had, in the two years since starting to kayak, had any profound experiences that might have provided them with opportunities for self-discovery and growth. I defined

profound experiences as being meaningful beyond the immediate experience, as being particularly memorable and having moved the person significantly.

When asked to describe a profound whitewater kayaking experience, several of the interviewees described being in beautiful places and the unique perspective of being in a kayak in these places. Dan described the multi-day trips he did in Nepal as profound and unique because they allowed him to see very remote places that were off the beaten path. Being able to interact with local people in villages that don't get much tourism traffic allowed him to have an authentic cultural experience. Because he had time to journal and reflect on these multi-day trips, he was able to deeply appreciate the experience. Brett described that kayaking had taken him to places where he came to the realization as he paddled down the river that it was the most beautiful place he had ever been in his life.

Nathan decided to paddle solo and found the experience deeply profound. It is fairly uncommon for kayakers to paddle alone, yet the experience can be deeply powerful and unique. Doug Ammons describes the experience of solo paddling as follows:

My experience is that when you are paddling with somebody else, it is a social experience. But when you're alone, *the river is your partner*. Unless you have had such an experience, I can't tell you how deeply that shift in perspective will pierce you. When you are soloing, you are compelled to intimacy with the river and your surroundings. There aren't *any* distractions. (Ammons, 2008)

Nathan's account of the experience mirrors this: *"It was completely different than any other boating experience I had... Just having no one else there and seeing everything around you and just having so much attention to it and not knowing what was around the corner, it was a*

deeper connection with boating than I think I had ever had before that point... It totally blew me away." (Nathan, line 191)

Julia described an experience that shook her confidence. Having ventured down a river beyond her abilities, she became overwhelmed, lost all confidence and broke down in tears. The experience affected her for some time: *"And I think I broke down crying, I was just like way too overwhelmed, I knew it was a huge mistake for me to have gone to the Thompson at that stage of my boating and that really shook me and affected my boating for a while, for probably the next month."* (Julia, line 176) But she also recalled an experience where the successful run of a difficult river gave her a sense of accomplishment and a confidence boost. While travelling she came across a section of river that enticed her but was a challenge she knew would require some training to accomplish successfully. Once she ran the section of river she felt a sense of accomplishment and a lasting lesson that she could set goals and accomplish them. *"...actually following through with something like that showed me that I am improving and I am progressing and anything that I feel like I can do, if I put the steps in motion, then I'll get there eventually."*

Whitewater kayaking is a unique sport that offers opportunities to have profound experiences, some of which can have lasting impacts on the participants. The unique interaction with this fundamental, earth shaping, powerful elemental force allows kayakers to discover themselves and form unique bonds with nature and each other. Often, these experiences form the basis for identity changes.

The effect on Identity

As outlined by my research question, I wanted to understand how interviewees felt their identities had been affected by whitewater kayaking. Many felt they had learned powerful lessons through their participation in the sport, and that it had in some way shaped them as people. The lessons and ways in which they had been affected were highly individual, but themes around trust, confidence, and stress management were common.

Dan has noticed changes in the way he trusts people. He thinks more carefully about whom he paddles and engages in adventure sports with, which he feels has shaped him in general.

“That whole trusting the people who you are with thing...that has definitely changed me a little bit, because it’s made me look differently at the whole aspect of who you go do things with.” (Dan, line 267) Connecting with other kayakers has opened his eyes to a deeper meaning within whitewater kayaking. He feels that it is easy to have philosophical conversations with people, when kayaking is the connection, and that the kayaking community has had an impact on him. *“It opened my eyes to the fact that there is a deeper meaning to kayaking and other sports than just going out there and having fun. It could be partly just because I am growing up, but I think it’s also because of kayaking and going to all these places and having conversations with all these people; it really helped that process along.”* (Dan, line 288)

Erikson tripartite definition of identity included the cultural milieu in which the individual exists (Kroger, 2007). Green and Jones refer to language, clothing, equipment, and transportation as the unique ethos of an activity, which becomes part of the social identification of a serious leisure participant. In defining his identity as a kayaker, Dan talks about aspiring to be part of the laid-back attitude he sees in other kayakers. *“...basically,*

when I think about a kayaker, I think about the aspects that appeal the most to me, any time I think about calling myself a kayaker. And the big ones are, I think, the laid back atmosphere of kayakers. I think that's what I strive for as a kayaker, just to lead that really fun, relaxed atmosphere, but still be professional on the water." (Dan, line 299)

The effect of social media on our society is undeniable (Koles & Nagy, 2014), and perhaps it not surprising that in the context of extreme sports it is a factor that can affect decision-making processes. Mark knows he is affected by social media and often bases his decisions on how the activity will impact his social media identity. *"...a lot of times I think whether people will think this is awesome. Yes? Do it, this is going to be a sweet story...Still lots of my decisions are based on that factor, which is not always a good thing."* (Mark, line 223)

Brett feels that kayaking has helped him deal with other stressful situations in life. *"...dealing with problems and keeping my head on."* (Brett, line 182) And he has noticed that the decision-making process required for hard whitewater kayaking has influenced his thinking in other aspects of his life. *"Decision making and how I think about things, then also like actually thinking about risk involved with regular decisions. I weigh options a lot more than I did before kayaking."* (Brett, line 192) He learned to carefully analyze his options on the river, consider every aspect of the various currents and how they will affect him. He now applies this to decisions in his life, rather than simply picking the easiest option.

Kayaking allowed Nathan to learn how to differentiate between different kinds of nervousness and anxiety, leading to improved stress management skills. While he was initially nervous about all whitewater, he learned to break rapids apart into different sections and components. As he became more confident in his own abilities, he was able to look at rapids more analytically and differentiate between the kind of nervousness that stems from

simply running a new section of whitewater, and the anxiety that he felt when he was truly in over his head. *“I think one thing that kayaking has definitely taught me that could transfer over to different aspects of my life, and I guess it does have something to do with confidence, is how I deal with the anxiety... So it’s aided me in definitely managing stress and managing anxiety and just breaking it down a little...”* (Nathan, line 291) He applies the analogy of breaking apart rapids to stressful situations in his life, breaking problems and challenges into smaller components allows him to manage anxiety.

The fact that kayaking will place people in stressful situations helped him with his interpersonal skills. *“It helped me to read people a lot better and figure out what will help them in the situation and what won’t... I’d say that most certainly helped in relationships with people and knowing how to deal with people when stressful situations come up.”* (Nathan, line 340)

Struggling through the frustrations of learning kayaking, Molly gained a sense of accomplishment and learned the lesson that perseverance will eventually pay off. *“...once I got it, it was a really great feeling that I stuck with it and kind of persevered through the challenges that came with it, you know mentally and physically, whatever...so just knowing that if you put enough time and effort into something, you’ll pretty much always be able to get it eventually, or be able to understand or achieve something if you stick with it long enough. So that is good to keep in mind, that feeling of perseverance and accomplishing things, even if it takes a while to get it...”* (Molly, line 164) Lessons in perseverance were brought up by Julia and Nathan as well, who described situations where they either waited to run a difficult rapid instead of pushing for the instant gratification, or set a goal and put steps in motion to accomplish it.

Through reflection, Molly came to realize that the river environment had placed different demands on her, which she had to respond to. She described that being decisive on the river had helped her be more decisive and confident in life. *“I feel like have the ability to lead people, have stronger leadership than before. On the river you have to be clear in your decisions and your instructions to other people. It’s good to be decisive I guess and it’s taught me some things about decisive action, I am a pretty indecisive person in general, so that’s good to have decisive things and stick with it.”* (Molly, line 173)

The river environment demands a certain decisiveness and confidence, which differentiates her kayaking identity. *“I think on the river, especially in more dynamic environments, you have to be decisive and you have to be confident in what you are saying and that’s something that comes really naturally on the river... I don’t really impose my opinions on people usually, but I will on the river if I feel like I have to.”* (Molly, line 247) She sees her kayaking identity as different, but is beginning to see transfer to other aspects of her life. *“So my personality is definitely different on the river, I am definitely more decisive and confident on the river than I am a lot of times...that’s the reason why I love it so much, it’s good, it teaches me that (decisiveness and confidence) and I think that will start...it will be reflected in other aspects of my life at some point...it is now, but it will be more I think.”* (Molly, line 267)

For Nathan, his solo kayaking experience gave him a huge confidence boost. *“...there is something to be said for just being totally reliant on yourself and knowing that you can do it and it’s a huge confidence booster...”* (Nathan, line 221)

That extreme sports participants can learn powerful lessons of courage and humility is supported in the literature (Brymer & Oades, 2009), and in fact humility is a quality Julia felt

she developed through kayaking. *“And then being humble, I think. That’s something that comes with kayaking and teaches you as you progress...”* (Julia, line 397)

Through these interviews I have been able to explore how whitewater kayaking has affected the identities of six young kayakers. The lessons they learned and the ways in which their identities were shaped through the sport were grounded in each individual’s experiences, however many commonalities emerged both within the group and in comparison to my own experiences. Effects on self-efficacy beliefs, self-confidence, stress-management, decision-making, and trust emerged in the research participants’ reflections. In the following section I compare the interview data with the experiences I explored in the autoethnographic portion of this research.

Summary & Discussion

I have presented a review of literature on the research into adventure or extreme sports, provided an overview of some of the ways the concept of identity has been described and studied, and shown some researchers work on the concepts of *serious leisure* and how it can affect identity development. By sharing my own story about whitewater kayaking I have both disclosed my position as a researcher and provided some examples of ways in which identity development can be affected by whitewater kayaking and reflecting on the experiences on the river.

The results of the interviews showed that all of the participants’ identities have been affected in some way through their whitewater kayaking experiences. The unique challenges in the context of a beautiful yet inherently dangerous environment provided opportunities for them to improve self-confidence, self-efficacy beliefs, develop ways of managing stress,

encourage new character traits within themselves such as decisiveness, humility, and a deep appreciation for life.

Commonalities

The interview participants' motivators for the sport of kayaking resemble my own, at least at various stages in my kayaking journey. I was not surprised to find almost all of them describe the skill mastery process as rewarding and motivating. While I am no longer chiefly motivated to go kayaking by it, skill mastery served as a powerful motivator early on and throughout much of my kayaking career; it provided me with opportunities to gain a sense of accomplishment and build positive self-efficacy beliefs. Now, my main motivation for whitewater kayaking is community. I am interested in the time spent with good friends. This theme also reflects an area of strong commonality with the research participants.

I found some parallels within the research group, to my own early experience of coming to the realization that I was more decisive and confident on the river. Molly realized that she was more decisive on the river and while she felt this had in some capacity transferred into other aspects of her life, she recognized that she could still develop this character trait more.

Almost all research participants experienced a change in their risk tolerance and the way they made decisions. This also represents an area of commonality with my own experience. My own views regarding risk were changing also, when I was graduating from the Adventure Guide Diploma. The experience of managing risks for others as a professional guide, the training I received at TRU, and the realization that even minor injuries put my livelihood at risk, all contributed to a profound change.

Divergence

While many of the effects on the research participants' identities were congruent with my own experience, I see the main aspect of divergence in the way these changes had occurred. For many of the research participants' it seemed the conversation during our interview was perhaps the first time they thought deeply about how kayaking might have changed them. When I asked them to reflect on how they had changed as people and identify what aspect of this change could be attributed to kayaking, many of them identified themes I could relate to in terms of my own experience. For me the process had been one of conscious reflection throughout, along with conversations with teachers and friends. It seems then, that perhaps changes in identity are at least in part inherent in certain aspects of whitewater kayaking. In learning to whitewater kayak, one will almost certainly develop determination, overcome frustration, and experience a sense of accomplishment. The extent to which these experiences become permanent constructs of an individual's identity is perhaps determined by how conscious the individual is of these processes.

Limitations & Challenges

The research participants represent a very specific sample that may not be representative of all kayakers. The students I interviewed have undoubtedly been influenced by my own views and philosophies of kayaking, whereas others who learn how to kayak from their friends may be exposed to different views of their kayaking community. The benefit of qualitative interviews is that as a research method, it allows for a wide range of experiences and phenomena to emerge. It is difficult to make conclusive statements, or definitively prove concepts or rules that can be applied to a wider population, and in fact this was not my goal. I

wanted to show that whitewater kayaking can affect identity development and explore the ways in which this has occurred for me and other kayakers. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) provide the broad definition of qualitative research as a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible...” (p. 3). The limitation of this research project is that it shows but one representation of a specific subculture of kayaking. The context of a professional guide-training program, challenged the research participants to think about various aspects of the sport such as risk management and decision-making. Despite the limitations I feel that the themes that have arisen through this research process, may serve as a starting point to deepen the dialogue around white water kayaking and perhaps other adventure sports. At this point, such dialogue is generally missing or strangely silent.

Conclusion

I have explored how my own journey with whitewater kayaking has changed my identity. Through experiences in whitewater kayaking I have become a more decisive, confident, and determined person. My experiences as a kayak instructor have taught me lessons in empathy and vulnerability. Through the words of a kayak instructor I became aware of the opportunity to practice being kind of person through kayaking fairly early in my kayaking career. With a series of qualitative interviews I have been able to explore some of the experiences of other young kayakers, and find out how kayaking has shaped them.

All six research participants felt that kayaking has had an impact on their identities. The ways in which kayaking has shaped them were highly individual, however many described changes in their self-efficacy beliefs through various experiences that ultimately led to

feeling a sense of accomplishment following a period requiring perseverance. Managing stress, anxiety, and changes in their decision-making processes were other emergent themes.

Further Research

The field of research investigating the experience of taking part in extreme or adventure sports is still relatively small. While some researchers have done important work in establishing an understanding of these sports that is much more comprehensive than their popular image (Brymer & Oades, 2009) (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2012) (Brymer, Downey, & Gray, 2009) (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993) (Le Breton, 2000) (Willig, 2008) (Wheaton, 2000), there is still a need for further research into the mechanisms by which identity creation occurs in these sports. There is also a need to research and develop pedagogical practices that encourage mindfulness in adventure sports. Exploring the efficacy of various pedagogical practices would aid educators in engaging students in meaningful ways of deepening their relationship with these sports.

Developing Conscious Pedagogical Practices

Outdoor skills instructors have an opportunity to explore and develop pedagogical practices that encourage students to become more mindful as paddlers. Paddlers are increasingly rushing their kayaking progression and as a result often end up on Class V whitewater taking considerable risks without having asked themselves any of the important, deeper questions that a mindful approach would have encouraged. Currently there is no pedagogical framework specific to whitewater kayak instruction to guide instructors in developing teaching progressions that encourage personal growth and meaningful reflection. The fields of Outdoor, Adventure, and experiential Education can offer inspiration with regard to

programming activities and incorporating reflection. For kayak instructors, a good place to start would be by reflecting on their own relationships with kayaking and exploring the ways in which they have grown through kayaking. Perhaps, as kayak instructors we need to be observant of more than just body mechanics, boat, and paddle placements.

A Challenge for Kayakers

I am not the first to challenge whitewater kayakers to think more deeply about the sport and their relationship with it. Doug Ammon's book *Whitewater Philosophy* provides kayakers with both a start and a direction for a dialogue about whitewater kayaking that stands in stark contrast to the pervasive talk about 'gnar'. I hope to have added my voice to this dialogue here, and hope that others will begin to think more deeply about whitewater kayaking. While professional kayakers will continue to push the physical boundaries of the sport, there are no limits to what each of us can explore in our minds. I challenge the whitewater kayaking community to move beyond the rhetoric around adrenaline, risk-taking, and ego that is so pervasive in social media and movies.

I had an opportunity to reflect on my kayaking experiences relatively early in my kayaking journey and I believe had I not been aware I would have missed many of the lessons I learned. Through the interviews it is clear that kayaking can have an impact on identity development even without a reflective process, however, reflection may provide an opportunity for purposeful identity creation and a more conscious process of identity discovery. I reason that conscious, meaningful reflection can help kayakers take advantage of the lessons and opportunities for identity development inherent in kayaking, and transfer these into their lives. Perhaps the single most important question kayakers should ask

themselves is “What kind of person do I want to be?” – and then look for opportunities both on and off the river to practice being that person.

Paddling can be a great sport and recreation, but it can also deepen the best qualities you have as a person. Know thyself, a great philosopher once said. The river is that philosopher’s equal, and more, if we only listen. (Ammons, 2008)

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Appendix A – Ethics Approval



April 08, 2014

Mr. Florian Scharlock
School of Tourism\Adventure Guide
Thompson Rivers University

File Number: 100605
Approval Date: April 08, 2014
Expiry Date: April 07, 2015

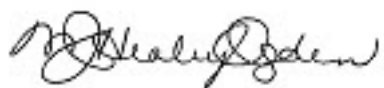
Dear Mr. Florian Scharlock,

The Research Ethics Board has reviewed your application titled 'The Influence of White Water Kayaking on Identity Development.'. Your application has been approved. You may begin the proposed research. This REB approval, dated April 08, 2014, is valid for one year less a day: April 07, 2015.

Throughout the duration of this REB approval, all requests for modifications, renewals and serious adverse event reports are submitted via the Research Portal. To continue your proposed research beyond April 07, 2015, you must submit a Renewal Form before April 07, 2015. If your research ends before April 07, 2015, please submit a Final Report Form to close out REB approval monitoring efforts.

If you have any questions about the REB review & approval process, please contact the Research Ethics Office via [250.852.7122](tel:250.852.7122). If you encounter any issues when working in the Research Portal, please contact the Research Office at [250.371.5586](tel:250.371.5586).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Roden". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" and last name "Roden" clearly distinguishable.

Chair, Research Ethics Board