"IT'S OKAY TO ASK FOR HELP": OUTWARD BOUND CO-INSTRUCTORS' EXPERIENCE OF STRESS ON COURSE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Outward Bound (OB) provides experiential outdoor learning programs where youth grow through overcoming challenges. Pairs of instructors leading these wilderness courses face numerous demands and situational conditions which may create stress. This study sought to describe instructors' experience of stress on OB courses and to identify the processes by which Co-instructors support each other to manage stress. In this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 31 OB instructors from two sites. Instructors provided in-depth guided narratives of stressful course situations, which were analyzed using grounded theory methods. I found that instructors were stressed by unsafe and unpredictable situations (i.e., adverse weather, dangerous terrain, medical concerns) and student behavior, thoughts, and feelings (i.e., conflict, oppositional behavior, distress). Analysis suggested, however, that role demands—for student safety, student learning, and control—were an underlying cause of stress. Incongruence between instructors' expectations of themselves in the role and their performance led to stress. I also found that stress affected instructors' functioning and their interactions with students. Instructors reported that Co-instructors were a source of support during stress. Relationship factors, including holistic relationships, open and honest communication, and felt commitment, influenced whether instructors felt comfortable accessing support from their Co-instructor. Co-instructors offered support by providing time and space for instructors to cope, co-regulating emotions with the instructor, or helping to solve problems. This study suggests several recommendations for youth-serving organizations to adopt aspects of the OB model. These include pairing instructors to lead groups of students and support each other's development and providing organizational supports that encourage reliance on skilled peers. By focusing on the well-being of the adults who work with youth, we can create better experiences for the youth they serve.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Ariel[1] was an experienced Outward Bound (OB) instructor who, with her Co-instructor, led a backpacking course with seven male students for 20 days. The three younger boys, who struggled with physical and interpersonal challenges of being on course, had "some kind of temper outburst pretty much once a day," which built resentment among the rest of the group and slowed their progress. Ariel described the stress she experienced as a result, "We just didn't have enough time to get enough sleep and travel those miles and deal with these emotional outbursts every day. It was this cycle of just being physically and emotionally exhausted."

Stress, like that Ariel experienced on her job, is not uncommon in OB and other mission-driven youth programs. All jobs have some degree of stress (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). However, OB programs are designed to expose students to challenge; OB founder Kurt Hahn believed that it is through experiencing and overcoming challenge that students develop their character, intellect, leadership, and service (Outward Bound, Inc., 2018). These learning experiences are led by pairs of trained and committed Co-instructors who support students to learn technical skills and strengthen their character. On courses that range in length from five to 60 days, OB instructors have around-the-clock responsibility for the physical safety of students (most of whom are inexperienced with the outdoors); they participate daily in physically demanding activities like hiking, rowing, skiing, and rock climbing; they are exposed to the elements including extreme weather conditions, insects, intense heat and cold. Instructors are also responsible for creating a positive learning experience for students, and for cultivating and maintaining a supportive interpersonal dynamic among course participants, who are typically strangers at the start of a course (Crane et al., 2008). It is precisely these physical, emotional, and social challenges that Outward Bound instructors leverage to create growth and learning experiences for student participants (Walsh & Golins, 1976).

Research suggests that youth can learn powerful social and emotional skills from grappling with challenges in real world settings, but that this learning can be messy, visceral, and complex (Halpern, 2009; Larson, 2011; Smith, McGovern, Larson, Hillaker, & Peck, 2016). Several studies set in youth programs revealed that as they work through the challenges of project-based work, youth may experience setbacks and disruptions in motivation that threaten

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[1] All names of people are pseudonyms.

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their success and evoke powerful emotions (Larson, McGovern, & Orson, 2019). Further, this research suggests that leaders play a key role in helping youth who have experienced downturns in motivation to re-engage in the work (Orson, 2018). But does this work take its toll on leaders? How are leaders affected by youth's emotional distress? How do leaders maintain the positive outlook and creativity needed for keeping students motivated and productive?

Outward Bound instructors are subject to some of the same demands as leaders of other more traditional project-based programs for youth—providing a physically and emotionally safe space, harnessing youth's attention and interest, finding ways to engage youth's voice—but the context of OB courses is considerably different. The wilderness presents a novel and unfamiliar environment for many OB students. While instructors have, as a rule, a great love for the outdoors, being subject to the environment day and night for days, weeks, or months means that they are likely to encounter harsh conditions. In addition, the crew of students and instructors are constantly in close contact with each other, which means that instructors are "on duty" 24 hours a day for the entire time they are on course. These conditions are the backdrop for youth's experiences of challenge, and through challenge, learning. Do instructors experience these conditions and responsibilities as stressful? How does stress impact instructors' professional role to support youth's learning and development? The first goal of this dissertation is to explore the causes and effects of OB instructors' experience of stress on course. This exploration can help us to understand whether and how instructors' experiences of stress affect and are affected by youth's experiences on course.

There is a consensus among researchers that job stress negatively affects job performance (Bliese, Edwards, & Sonnentag, 2017). In human service professions, research has shown that job stress is a widespread phenomenon (Dollard & McTernan, 2011; Zapf, 2002). Workers experiencing stress are more prone to burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001), turnover (Kim & Stoner, 2008), depression (LaMontagne, Keegel, Vallance, Ostry, & Wolfe, 2008), and health issues (McEwen, 2012; Sapolsky, 1996, 2015). Left untended, stress can have negative consequences for individuals and organizations. The great love that most OB instructors have of both the outdoors and changing peoples' lives may go a long way in inspiring their work. However, as in any profession, OB instructors are susceptible to experiencing stress on course, and to that stress affecting their job performance.

Research demonstrates that social support can reduce stress and support well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Gerin, Pieper, Levy, & Pickering, 1992). Thoits (1995) defines social support as "a social 'fund' from which people may draw when handling stressors" and refers to functions performed for an individual by a significant other, such as family members, friends, or coworkers (p.64). However, for OB instructors, their social support network is inaccessible for the days, weeks, or months they are on course. Instructors' major source of social support while on course is their Co-instructor.

How do Co-instructors support each other to manage stress on course? What considerations do instructors weigh in deciding to rely on their Co-instructor for support? Instructors may be sensitive to the interactions between students, students' progression towards mastering skills, the location of the group geographically and temporally (i.e., how close to the end of the course they are), or the nature of the stressor and how controllable and imminent it is. Complex situational and relationship dynamics may also affect whether and how an instructor draws on support from their Co-instructor. Do power dynamics and role expectations have a part in this decision? The second goal of this dissertation is to examine the processes by which Co-instructors support each other to manage stress, including the considerations they weigh in making coping decisions and how situational and environmental factors affect the ways they ask for help. By understanding the ways instructors support each other to manage stress, we may be able to help organizations better prepare instructors for this role in their work. Additionally, this study may have implications for other youth-serving organizations who do not yet tap into the powerful potential of a model of Co-instructors who partner in their work, rather than single instructors working in isolation.

This grounded theory study will examine instructors' accounts of their experience of stress on OB expeditionary learning courses and identify processes by which Co-instructors support each other to manage stress. In Chapter Two, I provide a description of OB to shed light on the context in which the study is set. In Chapter Three, I present four nested areas of research and theory that have informed my thinking: the individual's stress responses and coping, interpersonal relationships as a context for stress and coping, individuals' roles in organizations, and general systems theory. Chapter Four contains the methodology for the study, detailing the steps for developing a grounded theory based in the data. Chapter Five presents my findings for each research question. Finally, in Chapter Six I discuss the findings in light of the research and

theory presented in Chapter Three. This study will use insights of instructors like Ariel to illuminate the ways instructors manage their stress for the goal of providing youth powerful learning experiences. Because OB is so intentional about students' and instructors' experiences, it serves as an exemplary model. Ultimately, the findings may inform the professional development of youth program leaders in a wide range of settings and structural decisions that can impact the ways leaders work together.

Chapter Two: The Context Provided by Outward Bound

History and Evolution

The Outward Bound learning model is founded on the mission "to change lives through challenge and discovery" (Outward Bound, Inc., 2018). Their motto, "To serve, to strive, and not to yield," has roots in the work of founder Kurt Hahn with young men in the early twentieth century. What began as a training program for young sailors developed to be "less training *for* the sea than *through* the sea" (Outward Bound, Inc., 2018). The sometimes harsh and often breathtakingly beautiful environment of the sea presented natural challenges that lent themselves to life lessons. The founders believed young men in OB learned hard, technical survival skills at the same time as they developed their character and self-worth.

Since 1941, OB has expanded to include women and people of all ages and walks of life, and schools all over the world offer experiences on land, in the water, and on the snow. OB maintains its connection to Kurt Hahn's original concept of surmounting challenges in a natural setting through which the student a) builds skills and confidence by doing things they did not think possible; b) shows compassion for others, recognizing the power of human interdependence; and c) engages in creating a better world.

Courses typically consist of a group of students going into the wilderness guided by two instructors (and occasionally, a chaperone or additional instructors). Course activities differ depending on location, and may include hiking, backpacking, canoeing, rock climbing, dog sledding, skiing, low- and high-ropes courses, and other outdoor activities. Courses range in length from 5 to 60 days.

Instructors' Role and Stress

The OB staff manual describes instructors as "the interpreter[s] of a physical and emotional journey" and names multiple roles in which they serve: "skills trainers, program designers, interpreters (translators), facilitators, teachers, coaches, rapport builders, assessors, site-managers, followers and mentors and trainers of other staff" (Crane et al., 2008, p. 51). The top priority of an instructor's professional role—after ensuring safety—is to ensure they support youth's developmental experience and learning. During the course, students progress through three phases, with instructors gradually stepping back and students' autonomy and responsibility gradually increasing. The phases are Training, Main, and Final (Crane et al., 2008). During Training, instructors teach students expedition and personal skills (e.g., knot-tying, conflict

resolution strategies) and provide opportunities for practice. In the Main phase, instructors supervise while students apply their skills. In Final, students take as much responsibility for the course as they are capable of, and instructors assume the role of coach and safety net, often behaving as silent observers unless students express a need for assistance. Throughout the course, instructors monitor the students' experience of challenge and change the situations or supports to attempt to provide the right level of challenge for each student for them to be able to learn.

The ultimate responsibility that instructors have for students' learning and at the same time controlling, eliminating, and avoiding risks to safety may create feelings of stress. Research on field instructors, experiential educators, and wilderness therapists has begun to describe the stressors. However, there are limited empirical studies on this population. A study of field instructors in outdoor behavioral healthcare programs identified three constructs related to adversities experienced on the job: a) time and schedule constraint; b) emotional anxiety and stress-related issues; and, c) physical and mental challenges (Marchand, Russell, & Cross, 2009). Focus groups with wilderness therapists generated a list of difficulties associated with this work, including intrapersonal factors (e.g., coping with high/low peaks between programs, impermanence of relationships, uncertainty) and interpersonal factors (e.g., dealing with intense experiences, lack of support, lack of time out) (Bunce, 1997). Additional research is needed to understand the types of situations and interpersonal dynamics that create feelings of stress for instructors on course and how that stress affects instructors' ability to support students' learning and growth.

Instructor stress off-course. In addition to stressors experienced on course, research suggests that outdoor educators also experience stressors in trying to maintain their relationships outside of work and create a balance between their work and personal life. A study that conducted interviews with five outdoor education leaders (ages 22-32, in British Colombia, Canada or Washington State, United States) reported these leaders felt misunderstood by those who do not have experience in the field and were overwhelmed by the transition of returning home from being in the field (Field, Lauzon, & Meldrum, 2016). Another study, which surveyed 129 field instructors from North American wilderness therapy programs about their challenges and benefits experienced inside and outside the work setting, reported that 55% of the respondents indicated that they "always" or "often" felt disconnected from home, and 51%

reported feeling as if they were missing out on time with friends and family (Marchand et al., 2009). These findings suggest that Co-instructors may play an important role of social support for each other on course, which can otherwise be a potentially isolating and stressful experience.

Threat of burnout. Left unaddressed, these stressors could lead to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). In his handbook on leadership in adventure programming, Gass (1993; Priest & Gass, 2018) named characteristics common to outdoor educators that could be considered as both strengths and weaknesses, and that leave instructors vulnerable to burnout. These include commitment (altruism); independence (self-sufficiency); lifestyle (combination of avocation and vocation); experience base (blurring of lines between work and personal); and hopes and dreams (desire to make a difference). A satirical job announcement in a 1998 journal article by Edwards and Gray poked fun at the reality of the high expectations of outdoor education instructors (see Figure 1). They further suggest that outdoor educators tend to over-focus on their professional lives, neglecting their interpersonal and personal needs, which over time can cause imbalance in their lives (Edwards & Gray, 1998). Understanding the causes and effects of instructors' stress can inform directed supports that may prevent burnout.

Figure 1. The multi-skilled outdoor educator (Edwards & Gray, 1998, p. 37)

POSITION VACANT - OUTDOOR EDUCATION INSTRUCTOR

Applications are invited for the position of outdoor education instructor. The successful applicant will be required to perform and coordinate the following functions:

Educator, Nurse, Counsellor, Driver, Police Officer, Expedition Manager, Financial Manager, Team Development Officer, Buying/Purchasing Officer, Technical Wizard, Weatherman/woman, Legal Advisor and Administration Officer.

Qualifications:
Applicants must have unlimited drive and the strongest sense of responsibility if they are to succeed in this job. They must be autonomous and self-motivated, be able to work in physically grueling environments, in isolation and without supervision. They must be skilled in the management of people of all ages and adept at working under physical and emotional stress for long periods of time if necessary. They must have the flexibility to perform multiple tasks at one time without tiring. Similarly, they must be willing to manage their family commitments within the confines and demands of the job.

It is essential that applicants have the adaptability to handle new developments in the life of the team, including medical emergencies and critical incidents. They must be able to communicate on a range of issues with people of all ages, including teenagers, business people, teachers, public servants, delinquents, terminally ill and long term unemployed.

They must be competent in a range of outdoor pursuits (preferably at Olympic standard). They must be physically healthy, creative, active and able to foster social and personal growth within the group and team members. They must be loving, supportive, encouraging, imaginative, sensitive, and understanding since they are responsible for the mental and emotional well-being of those in their care. Lastly, they must be up to date with the latest legal implications of work in the field.

Hours of work:
On call all waking hours and a 24 hour shift when necessary.

Pay:
Minimal pay. Allowances by arrangement, from time to time. The successful applicant may be required to hold a second job in addition to the one advertised here.

Benefits:
No guaranteed sick leave, maternity leave or long service leave. No worker's compensation or superannuation. No guaranteed life or accident cover. No guaranteed holidays.

Adapted from the NSW Women's Advisory Council Pamphlet (1984)

This study will explore the situations and experiences that result in instructor stress. As instructors facilitate powerful learning experiences of "challenge and discovery" for youth while managing the logistical time and schedule constraints of the course and the interpersonal dynamics between youth and with their Co-instructor, they are likely to experience physical and psychological stress. A deeper understanding of the potential sources of stress can inform organizational responses to minimize stress among instructors, which may decrease burnout and contribute to sustaining instructors' tenure in the field.

The Co-Instructor Relationship

Each OB course is led by at least two Co-instructors, who ultimately share the duties, joys, and burdens of the role. To analyze instructors' experience of stress, we must understand the Co-instructor relationship central to the OB model. OB has adopted policies and procedures for Co-instructors that recognize instructors' susceptibility to stress and burnout and provide organizational supports.

Training and preparation. The use of Co-instructors has its roots in risk management; in the case of an emergency, one instructor can go for help while the other maintains responsibility for the group. But having more than one instructor also allows for on-the-job mentoring. Similar to the way students progress through Training, Main, and Final on a course, instructors develop their expertise in a supported mentoring structure that scaffolds learning. Individuals interested in becoming an instructor will usually participate on an OB course or serve as an intern or apprentice on one or several courses. Then, as an Assistant Instructor, they are paired with a more experienced Lead Instructor who guides the Assistant in setting and achieving professional goals. Over several courses, Assistants gradually take on additional course responsibilities. For instance, they may start out leading technical skills trainings, but may progress to making decisions about student interactions. When an Assistant has demonstrated their competence on several courses, they are given the role of Lead Instructor, and take on full responsibility for the course, including students' safety and learning experience, as well as the training of Assistant Instructors they are paired with. This apprenticeship model fosters a dynamic wherein instructors are motivated to support each other to learn and grow from their course experiences. Instructor pairings are shuffled for each course, providing both Assistant and Lead Instructors the potential to benefit from exposure to multiple models and experiences with a

variety of leadership types. It may also lead to Assistant and Lead Instructors having different stressors based on their experience, exposure, and expectations.

Instructor pairs discuss their leadership styles and preferences in a pairing meeting that occurs prior to each course. In this meeting, the Co-instructors are expected to discuss "consistencies" so that they can mitigate any mismatch in expectations and present a singular message to students. Instructors discuss a range of topics, including coming to agreement on how the instructor pair will handle safety, daily routines, camp set up, behavior management, rules, pack distribution, etc. (Crane et al., 2008, p. 79). Other questions discussed during the pairing meeting include "How do you handle stress? What do you need in times of stress? What causes your sense of urgency to rise? What type of communicator are you?" (Crane et al., 2008, p. 79). For some instructor pairs, the pairing meeting might be their first interaction, and so they may spend substantial time getting to know one another. For others, they may have an established friendship or working relationship with their Co-instructor. In either situation, talking through these relevant topics prior to and during a course may help instructors to be better prepared to handle challenges on course. In asking these questions of each other, they might learn how best to support their Co-instructor when a demanding situation arises.

The reality of course experiences. Given this preparation, once on course and faced with a stressful situation, what are the ways that Co-instructors support each other? The multiple moving parts of a course experience may not only create stress for instructors but may also influence instructors' decision to rely on their Co-instructor to help manage their stress. Situations that arise and interpersonal dynamics may affect an instructor's willingness to draw on support from their Co-instructor. The nature of the dyadic Co-instructor relationship is that they will navigate stressful situations together, but how? This study will explore the situations and experiences instructors find stressful and the process that instructors engage in to make decisions about how to manage their stress on course, especially whether and how they rely on their Co-instructor for support. By understanding the ways instructors support each other to manage stress, we may be able to help organizations better prepare and support instructors to do this well.
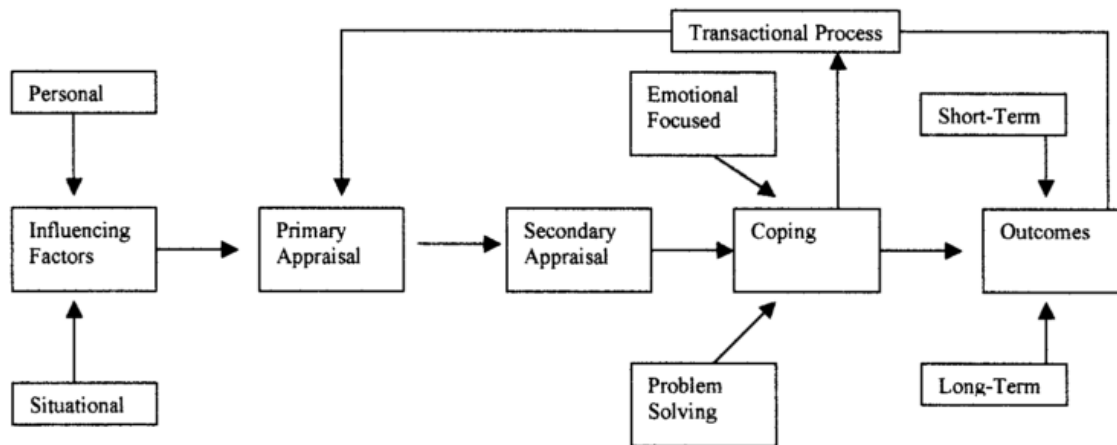
Chapter Three: Literature Review

Stress has been studied from the perspective of multiple disciplines, including biology, psychology, and sociology, and within various contexts, such as work and family. For the purpose of this study of instructors' stressors and reliance on Co-instructors for support with coping, I reviewed empirical and theoretical research in four main areas. I present these four areas as a somewhat nested structure, evoking the interconnected nature of human development proposed in Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological framework, though I do not directly apply Bronfenbrenner's theories to this study. The first area is research on individuals' internal (physiological and emotional) responses to stressors in their environment. This includes the transactional stress and coping processes that Lazarus and Folkman (1966; 1984) theorize individuals engage in as they experience and respond to stressors in their environment, as well as research on the polyvagal stress response. The second area is research on how interpersonal relationships can be utilized as a coping mechanism through social support. This is further specified by organizational psychology research which examines the role of coworkers in alleviating work-related stress and family stress research which studies how married partners cope with stress in their relationships. Third, I introduce organizational role theory to help to explain the ways employees make commitments to their job roles and identify with the mission of their employer organization. The fourth area is general systems theory, which provides a perspective of interdependence and multiple levels of interaction between individuals within the context of their environment. Each of these are detailed below. As this was a grounded theory study, these theories informed but did not direct the data analysis process.

The Individual's Response to Stressors in the Environment

Much of the psychological stress research has been focused on the powerful influence of cognitive processes on the stress response. Lazarus and Folkman (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) describe a two-part cognitive appraisal process in which individuals assess and respond to threats in their environment (see Figure 2). As individuals go about their daily lives, they are constantly engaging in a cognitive process of scanning the environment and making meaning of the environment and what they encounter as presenting a threat of harm or not (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus and Folkman termed this primary appraisal. According to their theory, the primary appraisal process is cognitive, though not necessarily conscious.

Figure 2. Transactional stress/coping theory developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984)

Evolutionary research suggests that the brain's more vestigial elements are responsible for stress appraisal. According to polyvagal theory, mammals have developed autonomic nervous system responses to stimuli in the environment that are reflected in our social behavior (Porges, 2001). Polyvagal stress theory proposes that humans move through three distinct, staged, and hierarchical subsystems in reaction to danger or threats. First, the system responsible for motion, emotion, and communication is triggered and the autonomic nervous system is activated, sending neural commands that spur the facial muscles to express emotion, cue the ears for listening, and enable vocalization. This is also reflective of an active feedback process; additional signals received within the body are processed through neuroception, a mechanism that triggers or inhibits defense strategies that may not enter an individual's conscious perception (Porges, 2007). If the next subsystem is activated by the stressor, the sympathetic nervous system mobilizes behaviors of fight or flight. In extreme stress, the third subsystem is activated, which Porges calls "a vestigial immobilization system" (2001, p. 130). It cues behavioral shutdown, feigning death, or fainting. In sum, polyvagal theory regards the nervous system as an evolved system which enables bi-directional regulation of an individual's bodily and behavioral state in response to threats.

According to Lazarus (1966), during the primary appraisal process, three factors contribute to appraising a stimulus as a threat. First, if the balance of power favors the harm-producing stimulus, threat increases. Consider spotting a bear on the trail along which you are hiking–the bear is certainly larger than you and has large claws. Second, temporal closeness of confrontation increases the threat. If the bear is walking towards you at a quick pace, you will be

more nervous than if it is walking away from you. Third, as the certainty of the anticipated harm increases, threat increases. If the bear has its claws unfurled, you would be more threatened than if it is eating berries.

If no threat is appraised, no response occurs, and the limbic system that cues fight or flight urges is suppressed (Porges, 2007). However, when an individual feels a threat to their well-being, or feels their resources are being taxed or exceeded, they experience a stress response in the brain and body. Physiological symptoms of the stress response include a racing heart, shortening of breath, and heightened emotions, especially fear or anger (Sapolsky, 2004). This is commonly known as the flight, fight, or freeze (and sometimes fright or faint) response. A full review of the physiological responses (including pituitary and adrenal gland activity, hormones, and cortisol release) is outside the scope of this dissertation. This involuntary response can affect how we process thought and emotion. It can lead to a state of being flooded with emotion, which restricts the brain's ability to deal with a situation (Beilock & DeCaro, 2007; Qin, Hermans, Van Marle, Luo, & Fernández, 2009). This study will identify what situations or encounters instructors perceive as stressful; that is, what they perceive as threatening or harmful. This study will also examine ways that the stress response interferes with instructors' ability to function in their role, particularly how it affects their support for students' learning and growth.

It is important to note that though the stress response can arise as a result of immediate threats in the environment, it is also possible to evoke a stress response through thought alone (Sapolsky, 2004). Anticipation, worry, and rumination can create a physiological and emotional stress response whether or not there is a physical threat. As OB instructors are constantly assessing the risks and challenges students are exposed to, and as they have bottom-line responsibility for the safety and learning of students, I expected to see examples of perceived stress due to OB instructors' thoughts in addition to the more physical and interpersonal stimuli they experience on course.

Once an individual appraises a threat in an environment or encounter, a secondary appraisal takes place in which the individual weighs the pros and cons of the responses they have at their disposal and decides what action to take (if any). Again, this might happen subconsciously, or the individual may be aware of it. However, Lazarus (1966) stresses the importance of meaning-making during this appraisal:

For threat to occur, an evaluation must be made of the situation, to the effect that

a harm is signified. The individual's knowledge and beliefs contribute to this. The

appraisal of threat is not a simple perception of the elements of the situation, but a

judgment, an inference in which the data are assimilated to a constellation of ideas

and expectations (p. 44).

Therefore, what any individual feels is harmful may be different from another individual in the

same situation. Through the two-part cognitive appraisal, an individual's body and brain are

activated to respond. They might feel emotions, experience bodily changes (increased heartrate,

shortness of breath, etc.), and activate cognitively to find potential ways to cope. This study

examines the decision-making process instructors engage in before asking a Co-instructor for

help, the considerations they weight in making coping decisions, and what dynamics of the

environment and relationships play into their coping response.

Sustained stress. In addition, sustained states of feeling stressed can have a detrimental

effect on brain functioning for learning and memory (McEwen, 2012; McEwen & Sapolsky,

1995). These findings present negative possibilities for instructors who "push through" the stress

until the end of a course or whose stress accumulates over time, unaddressed. Research on

human service professionals has demonstrated the dangers of burnout from accumulated stress.

Effects have been reported on the mental health of workers in nursing and residential care

facilities (Dollard & McTernan, 2011), extreme job stress for teachers (Chaplain, 2008; Fullick,

Smith-Jentsch, Yarbrough, & Scielzo, 2012; Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998; Kyriacou, 2001), and

possible consequences of burnout and vicarious trauma for social workers and therapists who

work with troubled clients (Bliese et al., 2017). This study will be sensitive to the effects of

instructors' repeated or prolonged experiences of stress.

Coping. The transactional process at the heart of stress and coping for Lazarus and

Folkman (1984) is between the person and the environment. Individuals are active agents of

change on the environment as well as responsive to it. The relationship between the individual

and the environment is dynamic; people and situations change over time. When stress occurs,

coping responses typically fall into two types – either the person adjusts as their emotions ebb

and flow, or the environment must change to create a reduction in stress. Emotion-focused

coping strategies are targeted at regulating the emotional response to the problem. Problem-

focused coping strategies are those that manage or alter the environment causing distress. These

two forms of coping influence each other throughout a stressful encounter; they can both facilitate and impede each other (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this study, I focused on the emotion-focused coping that instructors engaged in by involving their Co-instructor in their experience. I included problem-focused coping to the extent that it was a response the Co-instructors used together to reduce the feelings of stress for one or both Co-instructors. I also explored how instructors navigated competing considerations and demands as they made coping decisions.

Positive effects of stress. Stress responses can spur adaptation in positive ways, a concept termed *eustress* by Selyé (1975) in opposition to *distress*. However, research on eustress is limited. In a thorough review of the concept, Kupriyanov and Zhdanov (2014) assert that the stress response in the body and brain can be constructive and positive in that its purpose is to spur the organism to overcome an adversity in the environment. As with distress, a eustress response depends largely on the perception of the individual confronted with a stressor.

Interpersonal Relationships as a Context for Stress and Coping

Humans are social creatures, and their experiences are situated within their relationships with other people. In this section, I explore research on the role of interpersonal relationships on stress and coping. Much of this research has studied the context of families. Although families differ in distinct ways from an OB course—most significantly in the length of time the members will be together and the ongoing commitment to maintaining the relationships—they also have compelling similarities. Family systems researcher Pauline Boss (2002) describes the family system as a "living organism" with structure and boundaries. For the duration of the course, group members are constantly in contact with each other and begin to depend on each other for survival and success. Through shared experiences, they develop norms for interaction and behavioral expectations, much like a family. Here I examine how social support, dyadic coping, and relationship-focused coping might help to explain the ways Co-instructors support instructors to manage stress.

Social support. Thoits (1995) defines social support as "a social 'fund' from which people may draw when handling stressors" and refers to functions performed for an individual by a significant other, such as family members, friends, or coworkers (p. 64). Researchers have found that social support can act as an immediate buffer to stress and can help prevent stress by reducing the perception of threat or harm (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Social support may consist of emotional concern (e.g., empathy), instrumental aid (e.g., services), information (e.g., about the situation), or appraisal (e.g., information useful in self-evaluation) (House, 1981). Empirical studies have demonstrated the positive effects of social support on stress reduction (Lepore, Allen, & Evans, 1993). However, while on course, instructors are not in frequent or direct contact with their personal social support network and may need to reconceive their Co-instructor as their available social support network.

The perception or belief that support is available appears to be more influential than the actual receipt of social support (Dunkel-Schetter & Bennett, 1990). Perceived social support is the degree to which an individual evaluates someone as being able and available to provide support. Co-instructors may be sources of social support for each other on course, but the reliance of one Co-instructor on another during a stressful experience may be due to several factors, including situational and relationship dynamics. This study will seek to understand how these dynamics come into play in how instructors view their Co-instructor as capable of and willing to provide social support.

Dyadic coping. Research on dyadic coping in romantic relationships experiencing stress may be informative for how Co-instructors cope together as a unit (Bodenmann, 1997b; Bodenmann, Meuwly, & Kayser, 2011). In this reciprocal and interactive process, the stress signals of one partner are taken into consideration along with the coping reactions of the other partner to the first partner's signals. Dyadic coping has been shown to moderate the damaging consequences of stress in couples (Bodenmann, Meuwly, Bradbury, Gmelch, & Ledermann, 2010) and can result in fewer psychological problems and more social competence for children (Zemp, Bodenmann, Backes, Sutter-Stickel, & Revenson, 2016). Is there a relationship between Co-instructors who are tuned in to each other's stressors and coping reactions and their ability to navigate stressful situations? Do Co-instructors who are successful at dyadic coping perceive an improved ability to relate to and support students' learning? This study will explore these questions.

Relationship-focused coping. Researchers have identified modes of coping aimed at managing, regulating, or preserving relationships during stressful periods as *relationship-focused coping* (O'Brien & Delongis, 1996). Coyne and Smith (1991) defined two classes of relationship-focused coping: "*Active engagement* is a matter of involving the partner in discussions, inquiring how the partner feels, and other constructive problem solving. *Protective*

buffering is a matter of hiding concerns, denying worries, and yielding to the partner to avoid disagreements" (p. 405). In relationship-focused coping, the partner experiencing stress faces a dilemma of whether to prioritize reducing their own or their partners' distress. They must consider how to balance their own needs with those of their partner. O'Brien and Delongis (1996) further identified one form of relationship-focused coping that has been strongly associated with stressful interpersonal situations, which they have named *empathic responding*. Empathic responding demonstrates concern for the partner, and involves four dimensions:

> (a) efforts to engage in perspective taking or to take the role of the other by attempting to view the world as the other sees it; (b) efforts to vicariously experience the involved other's feelings and concerns and to evoke one's own affective and cognitive associations to that experience; (c) efforts to interpret the psychological states underlying the other's verbal and nonverbal communication; and (d) efforts to respond sensitively to another person out of a state of concern or to express caring or understanding in an accepting, nonjudgmental, emotionally validating manner (p. 783).

These coping behaviors center the partner and the relationship rather than the individual. Co-instructors may similarly express concern for the instructor, which may affect their willingness to access help when they are experiencing stress.

Individuals' Roles in Organizations

Research exploring individuals' roles in organizations can provide insight into how individuals perceive their relationship to their organization and how they interact with and value their co-workers. While this field of research has not necessarily explored the connection between these relationships and stress, it has identified connections to turnover and commitment. Overall, this research provides a lens for understanding how organizations and specifically co-workers affect employees' feelings of commitment and obligation to their work.

Role theory. Role theory concerns itself with "the study of behaviors that are characteristic of persons within contexts" (Biddle, 1979, p. 56). It has explored various conceptualizations of roles, including their functional purpose, the ways they are shaped by social interaction, how they are organized in society, how organizations use roles to reinforce relationships, and how role expectations lead to behavior (see Biddle, 1986). One branch of role theory relevant to this study is strongly rooted in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Social identity theory purports that people use salient categories to distinguish among and identify with groups, largely through comparison and distinction from other groups. With this perspective, roles are socially constructed; people associate beliefs, values, norms, interaction styles, etc. with a particular role, but also allow for individuals to shape roles based on their own personal qualities that they associate with the role (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Biddle (1979) defined an *expected role* to be "the set of expectations for the behaviors, in context, of an object person (or position) that are held consensually by one or more subject persons (or are attributed by them to others)" (p. 210). Meeting these shared expectations affects the degree to which an individual identifies with the role. Roles and their associated identities may be a source of both motivation and stress for instructors. This study will consider how the role expectations of OB instructors may influence their experiences of stress.

Stress and strain may result from a mismatch between the role expectations and the individual's or others' perception of their ability to fulfill those obligations. This incompatibility has been termed *role conflict* and results from situations in which an individual is confronted with incompatible expectations (Gross, McEachern, & Mason, 1966). Job stress may also result from *role ambiguity*, which are conditions in which the expectations of the position are not clear to the individual, or *role overload*, which occurs when work demands exceed workplace or personal resources (Rahim, 1996). *Role strain* arises from an individual's difficulty in fulfilling role obligations (Goode, 1960). Do instructors experience stress due to conflict, ambiguity, or strain in their role with Outward Bound?

Attachment to the organization. According to social identity theory, individuals tend to identify with groups that are perceived positively by them and others (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Mission-driven service organizations especially rely on employees who share the organization's values and vision. Balfour and Wechsler (1996) refer to the pride employees feel for an organization and its mission as *identification commitment*. In their research, individuals expressed identification commitment based on "membership in an organization that is valued and respected by the public, that makes important contributions to the public good, and that is regarded as capable and effective" (Balfour & Wechsler, 1996, p. 261). Studies have shown that nonprofit employees have attachment to their organization's mission, and that positive attitudes were related to greater employee satisfaction and employees' intention to remain with the organization (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003; Kim & Lee, 2007). These studies did show that pay and

lack of opportunities for career advancement could override mission attachment in employees' intent to remain with the organization but confirm that mission statements are important for attracting and retaining employees. Employees enact the mission and uphold the organization's public image through the programs and services they provide (Jeavons, 1994). Following this logic, identification with the mission of an organization could lead to increased role identification as an employee of the organization. Therefore, instructors' identification with OB's mission to "change lives through challenge and discovery" could influence their identity as an OB instructor.

Organizational support theory also explains employees' attachment to the organization. In this theory, individuals develop perceptions about the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). These perceptions have two effects:

> First, on the basis of the reciprocity norm, perceived organizational support should produce a felt obligation to care about the organization's welfare and to help the organization reach its objectives. Second, the caring, approval, and respect connoted by perceived organizational support should fulfill socioemotional needs, leading workers to incorporate organizational membership and role status into their social identity (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p. 699).

Studies by Marique and colleagues (2012) showed that perceived organizational support increases an individual's identification with the organization, which in turn leads to increased emotional attachment to the organization. This study will attend to the ways Outward Bound's mission and support for staff affect instructors' experience of stress in their role.

Connections with co-workers. Research on roles within organizations is also heavily influenced by social exchange theory, which focuses on the mutually beneficial exchanges between individuals that bring them into relationship with each other. Social exchange theory seeks to explain the motivation behind individuals' and groups' interactions as based on rational transactions in which they seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs (see Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Rather than focus on the transactional nature of individuals' interactions with their coworkers, I chose to focus on the relational nature of these interactions.

Kahn's (1998) relational systems perspective suggests that people's connections with individuals at an organization connects them via a relational web that depends on respect,

warmth, and personal regard. Research has shown that workers' attachment to people and groups at their organization decreases likelihood of turnover (Moynihan & Pandey, 2008). Balfour and Wechsler (1996) found that *affiliation* was an important factor of workers' commitment to the organization and in reducing turnover. They conceived affiliation as "beliefs that other members of the organization care about the individual and his or her well-being and from a feeling of belonging to a close-knit, cohesive group—a family" (Balfour & Wechsler, 1996, p. 263). Do OB instructor pairs develop a close-knit relationship built on respect, warmth, and personal regard? How do relationships like this connect instructors to their work? How do these personal connections translate into instructors feeling support from their Co-instructor?

    Citizenship behaviors. In addition to fulfilling the obligations of their roles within organizations, there is also evidence that employees engage in *organizational citizenship behaviors* which are discretionary, outside of the formal reward system, and that promote the effective functioning of the organization (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). While most research on organizational citizenship is focused on organizational performance and success, we can glean some insights from this research about the ways coworkers willingly support each other. A critical review by Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Paine, and Bachrach (2000) named several helping behaviors found in the organizational citizenship research, including: altruism, courtesy, cheerleading, and interpersonal facilitation. Conceptually, helping behavior involves voluntarily helping others with, or preventing the occurrence of, work-related problems (Podsakoff et al., 2000). This willingness to help has been shown to be an outcome of high quality relationships that promote mutual concern (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002). Settoon and Mossholder (2002) have further specified *person-focused interpersonal citizenship behaviors* to those that boost another's self-esteem and deal with more personal problems. They found that person-focused interpersonal citizenship behaviors were associated with perceived coworker support, trust, perspective-taking, and empathic concern. Moynihan and Pandey's (2008) study of employees at twelve private and public nonprofit organizations confirmed that employees who feel a sense of obligation toward their coworkers and who feel as if they receive significant coworker support are less likely to consider exiting the organization. These findings suggest that employees are not committed to organizations directly, but rather through the people within those organizations to whom they feel connected (Moynihan & Pandey, 2008). Together, research on organizational attachment and citizenship behaviors suggests that Co-instructor

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support may influence an instructors' sense of attachment to Outward Bound, and to the expectations and obligations contained in the role of instructor.

Stress and Dynamic Interpersonal Systems

The previous sections overview literature on stress and coping that focuses on individuals, relationships, and organizations. OB courses, inclusive of instructors and students, form a system with multiple interdependent parts. This study seeks to understand this system as the context in which instructors experience stress. Dynamic systems theorists view development as the continual interaction of the multiple components of an individual and the environment in which it develops (Ford & Lerner, 1992; Thelen & Smith, 1998). In other words, everything in the system is related to, affected by, and acting upon everything else. The complex OB system includes interpersonal relationships between instructors and students, between students, and between instructors; the weather; the course activities and the challenge level of the activities for students; the pressure of timelines, milestones, and meet-ups; outside-of-course demands, resources, and supports that instructors carry; the family, school, and community dynamics and relationships that students carry; and likely additional factors not mentioned here. To add complexity, these dynamics change over time.

As in Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional processes, systems theory acknowledges an openness between the individual and the environment: "In this coaction of system and environment, there are reciprocal effects on the system itself (change of organization) and on the environment (transformed environment)" (Overton, 2010, p. 20). This study will explore how various course elements interact to create a context which impacts instructors' experience of stress and their response to it. Instructors might use their previous experience as part of their meaning-making and learning as they develop in their role. They may get better at responding to certain situations, about managing their emotions, and identifying which coping strategies work for them. They may also reach out to their Co-instructors to ask for support so that the pair of Co-instructors can approach the situation together. All of this occurs within the complex interactions between dynamic course components. This study will explore how instructors on OB courses both are transformed by and actively transform the environment, situation, or relationships that causes them stress.

Current Study

The goal of this study is to describe instructors' experience of stress on OB courses and to identify the processes by which Co-instructors support each other to manage stress. Findings from this research can benefit the professional development and training of OB staff and may inform practices and strategies that may be applicable in youth programs more generally. Two main questions and several sub-questions guide this study:

1. What is instructors' experience of stress on course?
    a. What situations do instructors find stressful? Why are these situations stressful?
    b. How does feeling stressed affect instructors' functioning on course, especially how they interact with students?
2. What is the process by which Co-instructors support each other to manage stress?
    a. How do relationship dynamics affect whether and how instructors access help?
    b. What are the strategies Co-instructors use to support instructors to manage their stress?

Rationale. This study seeks to understand OB instructors' stress and coping processes within the context of OB courses from instructors' own accounts. Interviews with instructors can provide rich descriptions of stressful situations and instructors' responses, which can reveal information about the nuances and complexities of these processes as they unfold over time. The choice of methods in this study is intentional. Interviews can provide details about contributing factors, build up, follow through, and learning from stressful situations. This level of detail can contribute to our understanding of the complex processes at play in the intricate system of an OB course. Further, collecting narrative descriptions through interviews allows for instructors to draw on a wide set of experiences.

In this study, I collected and analyzed descriptions of stressful situations from Outward Bound instructors, each with an in-depth guided narrative of the instructor's experience of the situation. Using the situations as the unit of analysis allowed ample attention to be given to the contextual factors (e.g., student interpersonal dynamics, weather, course goals, Co-instructor relationships, location in time and space) as influences on the instructor's experience of stress.

Grounded theory methods are useful for capturing the social processes from rich qualitative data (Charmaz, 2014). My methods will rely on abductive reasoning (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007)—a combination of inductive consideration of the data and deductive

consideration of existing literature and theories—to develop a grounded theory of the processes instructors use to access support from their Co-instructor to manage stress.

This study contributes to our understanding of how OB instructors experience and respond to stress on course, including how Co-instructors support each other to manage stress. OB programs, with their rich, practiced history in training instructors for the challenges of leading expeditions, serves as an exemplary model for this study.

Chapter Four: Methods

This qualitative study examined semi-structured interview data from OB instructors. Because I was interested in understanding instructors' experiences of stress in context, I accessed instructors' narrative descriptions of stressful situations on OB courses as the main unit of analysis. This study was a component of the larger Youth Character Development in Outward Bound Study, which examined how OB instructors shape youth experiences of positive development, and specifically how they facilitate youth's translation of setbacks into learning experiences. In analysis of data collected in the first year of the study, I observed that instructors experienced stress during challenging situations with students. The current study explored this phenomenon directly in the second year of the larger project.

Participants

This study contained two participant sites. Voyageur Outward Bound School (VOBS) employs approximately 150 instructors and operates from two Minnesota locations, one in the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis and one in the northern Minnesota wilderness that accesses the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. We did not collect data from VOBS' third location, operating out of Texas. VOBS courses range from five to 60 days and include activities such as backpacking, hiking, canoeing, skiing, and dog-sledding. Philadelphia Outward Bound School (POBS) employs approximately 25-30 instructors and typically leads five to 20-day courses. Activities include backpacking, hiking, rock climbing, high- and low-ropes courses, and canoeing in the Philadelphia metropolitan area, along the Appalachian Trail, and on the Delaware Water Gap.

Given the larger number of instructors employed by VOBS, we recruited a larger sample of instructors from this site. The final sample had 21 instructors from VOBS and 10 from POBS. Including POBS instructors provided diversity in terms of instructor experience as well as differences in contextual factors like organizational supports and infrastructure that enriched the analyses.

Recruitment and sample selection. The research team[2] made a substantial investment in the development of relationships with POBS and VOBS prior to beginning the study. POBS had

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[2] The research team consisted of myself, another Ph.D. student in the department, our advisor (and the PI on the project), and one undergraduate research assistant.

participated in year one of the study, and we leveraged our strong existing relationship with administrators and instructors for implementation of this study. Two members of the research team had also worked closely with one of the VOBS administrators on a previous project, and this relationship provided a basis of trust to begin work on this study. We visited each site to introduce ourselves and hold an informal meet-and-greet session with administrators and instructors including a shared meal. We met with OB administrators at each site to discuss their interest in the study goals and overview our research and interview questions. We collaborated with administrators to develop data collection procedures that were the least burdensome to instructors and the site's operations. We also met with instructors to share informational fliers and invite them to participate in the study.

The research team asked OB managerial staff at each site to conduct recruitment and assist in scheduling interviews. The research team specified that recruitment should target instructors who had served as a Lead or Assistant Instructor on an expedition course with adolescents (ages 14-19) in the last four months. The administrators were asked to recruit relatively equal numbers of male and female instructors and approximately two Lead Instructors for each Assistant Instructor recruited. Administrators shared fliers about the study with instructors at the annual spring training and individually approached instructors that met the recruitment criteria.

Table 1 contains demographic characteristics for the final sample. Though the sample was not randomly selected, we did gather a sample that was generally representative of the OB instructor demographics of the participating sites. Our final sample was mostly White, roughly equally distributed by gender, and included Leads and Assistants in a ratio of 2:1. Most of the instructors were in their mid- to late twenties, and the median years of experience of the sample was 8 years.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Number
Lead (Assistant)	24 (7)
Female (Male)	17 (14)
Median years of experience (Range)	8 (1-50)
Median age (Range)	27 (23-74)
Race	
Asian (Indian)	1
Black/African American	1
White (Not Hispanic)	29
TOTAL	31

Note: There was one outlier case, a 74 year-old instructor with 50 years of experience.

Procedures and Measures

In Spring 2018, OB administrators recruited participants as described above and provided instructors' contact information to the research team. A member of the research team then emailed each interested instructor to personally provide additional information and invite them to participate in the study. This email included a link to a website which provided additional details of the study, collected the instructor's active consent, and inquired about available dates and times to schedule an interview. Once an instructor consented to participate, they completed a demographic questionnaire using Qualtrics online software or pencil and paper.

Nine instructors were interviewed during site visits to VOBS during Summer 2018. The remaining participants were interviewed either face-to-face or over the phone/video conference between September 2018 and January 2019 by a member of the research team. Each instructor was interviewed once. Interviews consisted of standardized, open-ended questions with structured follow-ups. Due to time constraints, some instructors were not asked every sub-question. Interviewers were trained to elicit detailed accounts from instructors. Researchers audiotaped the interviews, which were transcribed verbatim by a third party transcription company and then checked by the original interviewer for accuracy and completeness. The research team selected pseudonyms for each instructor and all data were de-identified for analysis. All procedures were approved by the relevant institutional review boards.

Semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol was informed by a focus group with four POBS instructors in May 2018. The primary purpose of the focus group was to explore whether the topic of stress was one that was salient to instructors, and to get input on different lines of questioning for interviews. The participants were three Lead Instructors and one

Assistant Instructor, and there were two male and two female instructors. Each had been interviewed in the first year of the study. The focus group confirmed that the topic of instructor stress was relevant for OB and helped to identify important issues that could be targeted in the interviews for the current study.

The interview protocol for this study was designed to encourage instructors to share their personal stories about stress and emotion. The full protocol is provided in Appendix A. At the start of the interview, the researcher leading the interview explained again that participation was voluntary, assured instructors that their accounts would be reported anonymously, answered any questions the instructor had, and collected the instructor's verbal consent to be recorded. This process of attending to the protections we provided helped to build trust. Next, the interviewer established rapport with the instructor by talking with them briefly about their favorite aspects of their job. This warm-up was designed to relax the instructor and build a basis for trust and rapport before beginning to ask about stress directly. In the initial part of the interview, instructors were asked to brainstorm types of stressful situations that they experienced on course. These questions collected information about the range of potentially stressful situations that could impact instructors and the reasons why these situations led to stress. These questions collected data corresponding to Research Question 1: What is instructors' experience of stress?

The main portion of the interview asked instructors to share in-depth guided narratives of a single stressful situation where (a) the stress was enough that it became difficult to function and (b) their Co-instructor helped in some way to manage their feelings of stress. I designed the interviews to collect extreme cases for their examples of stress; by examining these examples, I gained insight into the most stressful situations and the most effective ways that Co-instructors support instructors to manage stress on course. Using structured and open-ended follow-up questions, interviewers probed instructors to provide a detailed account of the stressful situation, including why the situation was stressful, what emotions the instructor was feeling, and what additional factors contributed to their stress. Interviewers further asked instructors how feeling stressed affected their functioning in the situation, and especially how that affected their ability to relate to youth and support their learning. Responses provided nuanced contextual details that were essential to understanding instructors' individual experiences of stress.

The interviewer then collected data that focused on the interpersonal relationship between the instructor and their Co-instructor. This data was the target of Research Question 2: What is

the process by which Co-instructors support each other to manage stress? Interviewers asked instructors to expand their narrative to explain the ways their Co helped them to manage their stress, including how their Co knew they were experiencing stress, what made it harder or easier to get help, and what was effective about the Co's response. The interpersonal relationship dynamics explored in this section of the interview were anchored in the situational details collected earlier. Ultimately, each interview provided a contextualized, in-depth narrative of an impactful stressful experience in which the Co-instructor provided support. These holistic situational narratives were the unit of analysis for this study.

Questionnaires. Instructors completed a 10-item questionnaire prior to the interview which collected demographic information: number of years working with youth, number of years at OB, gender, age, race/ethnicity, highest level of education completed, formal training or degree, other areas of training or experience, country of birth, and language proficiency.

Data Analysis

The goal of the analyses was to understand OB instructors' experience of stress on courses and the processes for how Co-instructors support instructors to manage feelings of stress. Contemporary qualitative researchers recommend a blending of methods for phenomenological and grounded theory studies (Annells, 2006; Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). For Research Question 1, constant comparative methods (Charmaz, 2014) were used to conduct an interpretive phenomenological analysis focused on describing the lived stressful experiences of instructors. For Research Question 2, constructivist grounded theory methods (e.g., initial and focused coding, memo-writing, and categorizing; Charmaz, 2014) were used to develop a middle-level theory explaining the social processes of how Co-instructors support instructors through stress. Each step of the analytic process is outlined below. Please note, though presented linearly, coding and analysis occurred in multiple, iterative stages.

Step 1: Initial coding. As the research team completed interviews, two coders (the lead author and an undergraduate research assistant) became familiar with each instructor's account by reading the full transcripts. Then, we created datasets which each included a subset of interview questions that pertained to each research question (see Appendix A for full questions). For Research Question 1, we analyzed data regarding instructors' experiences of stress, both their short descriptions of sources of stress in interview questions 1 and 1a, and their detailed narratives of stressful situations in interview questions 3, 3a, 3b, 3c, 4, and 4a. For Research

Question 2, we analyzed data regarding the interactions with their Co-instructor during the stressful situations, which was found in interview questions 3d, 6, 6a, 6b, 6c, and 7.

We conducted line-by-line coding within these datasets. This entailed each coder going through the relevant data from three to five interviews quickly and using gerunds to capture the actions and behaviors present in the data, one line at a time. At this stage, we stayed "close" to the data, and avoided making theoretical leaps. Our reflective memos at this stage captured ideas that reoccurred in the data and that sparked interest. The two coders came together to discuss the ideas that arose from the initial coding, and then re-examine those ideas as we conducted line-by-line coding on another set of three to five interviews. Through several rounds of initial coding on multiple interviews, and frequent conversations, we developed a set of initial codes to apply more broadly in the next step of analysis. Constant comparison started at this early stage; new data being analyzed was compared with data already analyzed to form working definitions for our initial codes (as we identified similarities across instructors) or to create new codes for new ideas.

Step 2: Focused coding. From the initial codes, we decided upon the most salient codes to develop into a working codebook. The codebook contained a label, working definition, and one to two examples from the data for each code. We then used the codebooks to code all 31 instructors' holistic narratives of stressful situations. Coding was recorded using NVivo 11, a qualitative data management program. The two coders independently applied the codes to the transcripts, then met to discuss discrepancies. NVivo 11 data sorts of each code were reviewed by the two coders to ensure that the data supported the code and its conceptual definition. This process was repeated for each dataset. At regular intervals, we presented the preliminary findings for discussion with the other research team members working on the larger project.

In this way, we engaged in an iterative process of constant comparison which included coding, discussion, creating and revising operational definitions, and recoding the data. Our memos captured the reasoning for major decisions and helped us to process analytical explorations of the codes. As a part of these analyses, we also drew on sensitizing concepts, or "background ideas that inform the overall research problem" (Charmaz, 2003, p. 259) to guide our inquiry of the data. For example, the concept of social support was a point of departure for examining the relational processes between instructors and their Co.

Step 3: Categorizing. The goal of this step was to move from identifying and describing meaningful elements to interpretation and understanding how the elements interact through a process. I integrated thinking from across memos written throughout data analysis, moving from codes and categories to theoretical concepts. At this stage, writing became the primary method of analysis, and I, as the lead author, took on a more solitary analysis and writing process, though conversations with the research team continued to shape my thinking. Through diagrams and discussions, I arranged and combined several codes into categories that captured interpretations of experience (Research Question 1) and more abstract social processes (Research Question 2). I used narrative memos to define each category, explicate its conceptual properties, specify conditions and consequences of the category, and show relationships with other categories (Charmaz, 2014, p. 190).

I continued to analyze all available data until I reached "theoretical saturation," that is, when I determined that the identified categories and their relationships with one another were satisfactorily explained (Charmaz, 2014, p. 213). Until that time, I continued to code, theorize, memo, and diagram until I had a satisfactory explanation for all the identified categories of the grounded theory. I returned to the transcripts several times with new perspectives and new codes and categories until I was confident that the theory represented the processes by which Co-instructors support instructors to manage their stress. As a final step, I drafted and revised narrative descriptions of the findings that integrated the data as evidence for my theoretical propositions. I also returned to and situated the findings within the literature.

A note on terminology. For clarity, throughout this manuscript I use *instructor* to refer to the individuals telling their stories from their own perspective in the interviews, and *Co-instructor* (also shortened to Co) to refer to their counterpart(s) in the instructor pair (or trio). Also, Outward Bound distinguishes between the role of Assistant and Lead Instructor, and we collected instructors' role at the time of the interview. However, we did not inquire whether instructors were serving as Lead or Assistant during the specific situations they shared in their narratives. Therefore, I do not include these distinctions in my analysis, though I recognize that these distinctions may have shaped instructors' experiences.

Trustworthiness

My epistemological beliefs are social constructivist in nature; I believe that researchers co-create meaning with participants through the data collection and analysis process. Therefore,

the researcher is a subjective force on the data and the "researcher's position, privileges, perspective, and interactions" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13) are constructions deserving of reflexive inspection. It is important, therefore, to discuss the ways I established trustworthiness of my findings.

Trustworthiness and reliability begin with developing strong relationships with the participating organizations and individuals whom we studied. Investing time and energy into these relationships resulted in instructors feeling comfortable sharing their personal accounts with the researchers. Second, our findings are trustworthy because of the research team's careful data processing and management. I or a member of the research team reviewed each transcript against the audio to check for errors. Raw and cleaned data files were archived, and a copy of the files were loaded into NVivo for coding and analysis. During the coding process, credibility was established through a detailed research diary in which I used descriptive and theoretical memoing to track decisions about initial, focused, and theoretical codes, their definitions, and modifications. This diary created an audit trail which can be subject to external review (Charmaz, 2014; Yin, 2009).

I cross-checked my codes with members of the research team to ensure they were reliable (Creswell, 2014). I used a process for inter-rater reliability with my second coder, wherein both coders coded the same interviews and then met to compare codes and discuss discrepancies. This process continued until we agreed that all data coded for each code represented the concept in the code's definition by checking NVivo data sorts for consistency. Decisions to change, collapse, or eliminate codes were captured in the research diary.

In addition to these specific strategies, the process of constant comparison that is central to grounded theory methods also contributed to the trustworthiness of the findings. By cycling back to the data as the analysis became more abstract, I continually "grounded" the findings in the data. A further strength is that the analysis is attentive to the situational context of instructors' experiences. Focusing on holistic narratives of stressful events allowed for contextual nuances to inform the analysis. Finally, rich descriptions in the form of quotes from participants accompany the final presentation of the findings. This narrative detail demonstrates for the reader how the findings are supported by the data.

Finally, my findings were subject to independent review. This study was completed with the guidance of an experienced qualitative researcher with expertise in how youth program

leaders respond to dilemmas in their work with youth. The results of this study will also be shared with the participating OB sites as well as the funder.

Researcher Positionality

It is important to consider the ways my background and characteristics may have influenced my coding and meaning-making. I do not believe that absolute objectivity is possible in qualitative research, and so I acknowledge the limitations of viewing the data through the lens of my own experiences. Here, I transparently disclose the elements of my perspective that are most likely to have shaped my analysis. I have had a career focused on positive youth development, having served as a middle school math teacher as well as an afterschool program leader, and having worked at a non-profit that supported the professional development of adults who work with youth in afterschool programs. In each of these roles, I personally experienced stress, and to varying degrees, was able to rely on my coworkers for support. My familiarity with the mission-driven work of teaching, youth development, and non-profits may have influenced my interpretation of the data and my perspective was surely shaped by my compassion for the instructors and their experiences.

I have not participated on an OB course, but I have participated in several day-long leadership training courses throughout my life, offered by various organizations, including high ropes courses and trust exercises like those used in Outward Bound. I believe this history helped me to be able to relate to instructors' goals and to imagine the situations they described.

As a White cisgender woman, I had a shared racial identity with most of the instructors interviewed, and a shared gender identity with about half of the participants. I am older than the average participant. We did not ask directly about the ways that race, gender, age, and socio-economic status factor into instructors' experience of stress, though one interview question broadly asked instructors about how "power dynamics" shaped their willingness to ask for help from their Co. These data were not analyzed for the current study, but I am curious to examine how these characteristics shape the context of Outward Bound in a future study.

Chapter Five: Findings

My analysis of instructors' narrative descriptions of stressful experiences on course was guided by two research questions. First, I sought to describe instructors' experience of stress on course, including how stress affected their ability to support youth's learning. Second, I examined the process by which Co-instructors help instructors to manage stress on course. This chapter details the findings from these analyses.

Research Question 1: What is instructors' experience of stress on course?

This first research question is concerned with describing the stress that instructors experience on course. I first present descriptions of the types of situations that create stress for instructors. In these descriptions, I use instructors' own words to help readers imagine being on a course in the wilderness leading a group of students. This is followed by findings from my analysis of the underlying causes of instructor stress. In this analysis, I identified three central demands of the instructor role that fuel thoughts and emotions that can lead to stress. Finally, I present findings on the ways stress affected instructors' ability to perform their job, especially how they interact with students. Through these three sections I provide an immersive portrayal of instructors' stress experience.

Descriptions of Stressful Situations

We asked instructors *What situations on course create the most stress for you (and why was that stressful)?* and to *Share an example where stress was enough that it became difficult for you to function and your co helped you in some way. Tell me about the situation (what was stressful about it?)*. In their narratives, instructors reported a wide range of stressful situations. These fell into two main categories: unsafe and unpredictable situations and student behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. When instructors experienced multiple stressors at once, or they accumulated over time, I referred to this as stress pileup.

Unsafe and unpredictable situations. The most commonly named situations were those that presented immediate physical danger or that were unpredictable and therefore risky. Weather, terrain, and health concerns all fell into this category.

Adverse weather. Instructors most frequently (14 of 31) named adverse weather as a primary stressor. On OB courses, students and instructors are subjected to the weather day and night, their only shelter often being the tarps or tents that they carry with them. Therefore, unpredictable weather, especially lightning or windstorms, were a major source of stress.

Michael described feeling anxious in the time leading up to the storm, "Is it coming? It's not coming. Is it coming?" Tim called wind "super unpredictable" and admitted it "terrifies" him. When a storm hits, instructors go into a drill where they seek shelter-in-place. Michael described these drills as "sitting out in the middle of the woods waiting for it to pass." Robin shared a time when a middle-of-the-night lightning drill meant "we just had to sit in the rain all fifty feet apart from each other for five hours just getting wet and it was terrible…having to keep everybody safe throughout that and okay and not hypothermic." Jari recalled one particularly scary storm:

> We're sitting on a ridge in a little gully kind of where we weren't at the highest
> point, but there were a lot of trees around us…. branches were dropping
> everywhere. One was like—if this was the student's mat, it was just like boom!
> [*clapped hand hard on table*] I was like, 'this is really serious.'

OB has specific protocols to follow to keep students safe during thunderstorms, windstorms, and other conditions, and these need to happen quickly, day or night and be enforced until the threat passes. Even though instructors are trained in these procedures, the unpredictability of extreme weather brings a threat of harm that creates stress.

Dangerous physical environment. Responses (11 of 31) also included situations where the terrain or physical environment presented a risk. Instructors continually assess students' interactions with the physical conditions to identify potentially dangerous situations. Often, instructors could not completely avoid dangerous physical environments (nor did they want to— the experience of challenge is a key to learning experiences on course; see Orson, McGovern, & Larson, under review). For example, on canoe trips, students must portage – a physically demanding task where students carry their canoes and equipment overhead and walk across "wet, slippery terrain, rocks, and roots" to access the interconnecting lakes and rivers of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. Tim faced a situation in which, due to multiple factors, his crew ended up canoeing and portaging in the dark: "Night paddling stresses me out, because it looks like if you tip over, it's a lot sketchier … it's cold water." Hank described a wintertime dog-sledding and skiing course where the terrain was treacherous:

> We approached the portage to go around some open water and it was up steep down, up.
> There were some non-level sections where it'd be easy to tip a sled, and then the trees,
> and then it finished with a sharp downhill corner, back out onto the ice. Far out to the left
> was the outflow of that open water, so we had to stay right.

Margaret remembered a time where they had to bivouac, which she defined as:

> When you're just gonna camp somewhere that seems flat, somewhere that seems okay
> but it's not like a nice, big open campsite. It doesn't have a drop toilet. It doesn't have a
> fire ring. It's probably gonna be buggier, marshier, all that stuff. We also knew we
> couldn't bivy until it got dark because you're really not supposed to.

In these examples, instructors were forced to choose between multiple potentially dangerous
choices. It could also mean, in Margaret's case, that instructors chose to go against established
protocol or guidelines to avoid a situation that may be even more harmful or risky.

Medical and health concerns. Being subject to extreme physical conditions and adverse
weather can have the potential to lead to medical or health issues for students or instructors.
Other times, preexisting issues (e.g., asthma, allergies) surface while on course. Nine instructors
listed a medical or health concern as a source of stress. Jacob described some of the
physiological sources of stress, "The fact that you're not getting very much sleep, you can even
maybe get dehydrated in certain situations, or you're just physically exhausted, or you're
carrying a lot of weight." The fatigue from continued exposure can lead to medical issues for
students or instructors. Freda shared a course where the weather conditions led to the potential
for harm:

> It was 40 degrees and raining for two weeks straight. And it was really cold. And it was
> June. It's not like they had like a lot of warm layers. We had stuff, and they were warm
> and you're able to manage it. But the weather conditions were prime for hypothermia.

When medical issues do strike, instructors are the primary caretaker. Eden described a case of a
student with "an unknown disease— 'unknown sickness' is what it's called in our medical
book—where he had a fever of over 102 degrees, and we didn't know what was going on. So,
we're non-stop taking vitals for him."

Student behavior, thoughts, and feelings. In addition to students' physical safety,
instructors also reported that students' behavior, especially that which is oppositional to the
instructors, the group, or the goal at hand, created stress for the instructor.

Student conflict. Seven instructors named student conflict as a source of stress. For Eden,
"really tense group conflict" that is "nonstop" put her in an "elevated level of stress;" on a recent
course, she "had just nonstop verbal threats and getting physically in between students to prevent
them from hitting each other." Not all conflicts are physical; when students are being

scapegoated or bullied by the group or are cruel to each other, this can affect instructors personally. Chloe did not like to deal with situations when "one student is left out, because that's an ongoing thing." Emily was stressed by having to figure out how to get a "single person who isn't really jiving with the rest of the group… into the fold of the group in a way that seems natural." Jacob was stressed by "really hard students, students that require a ton of management, students who are really cruel and manipulative." He not only found their cruelty "hard to witness," but he also found it challenging to relate to these students, "If you have students that just can't empathize or don't empathize, or choose not to empathize,… it makes it really challenging for you to move forward to the interpersonal side of things."

It is also the responsibility of instructors to productively resolve student conflict so that the group can work together effectively and meet the goals of the course. Tyler was stressed by feeling that he needed to "facilitate the experience to draw out and have a productive conversation about what the conflict is, and how to move forward with it." Rupert recognized how detrimental it can be to not effectively deal with conflict, something he saw as "a significant component of being an instructor." If he didn't "deal with it," then "it could lead to really difficult things to deal with during the day."

Student oppositional behavior. Instructors (16 of 31) also experienced stress when students got in their own way or when they did not meet the goals of the course due to their behavior. Freda, who was leading a course in weather that was "prime for hypothermia," had an experience with "seven pretty angsty, angry, teenage boys" who were refusing instructors' efforts to provide them ways to stay warm. "You try to get them to do stuff, like, 'Okay, we're going to try to get warm right now,' and they'd be like, 'I don't want to.'" Others were stressed when they were "getting more pushback, getting more questions" from students, or "having to repeatedly ask students about a certain behavior issue that has a negative impact on the group." In extreme cases, instructors experienced students "throwing a tantrum" or "directing anger at me, screaming at me, cursing at me."

Students who outright refused to listen to the instructor or who seemed unreachable were problematic. Sometimes this was reflected in students' lack of buy-in or openness to the course experience. Tim explained this frustration, "we can ask [students] and tell them to follow our rules and our protocols but if they think it's dumb, and they don't or won't, then it's like, well, then what do I do?" Lucas described the stress of having a student who:

you just clearly have no rapport with or do not feel like you have the ability to work with. … It doesn't happen very often, but when you know a student is just not going to listen to you, it's hard…. When I'm worried about walking on eggshells around students, that makes me more stressed out."

Student distress. Sometimes a student's behavior reflected emotional and motivational challenges that the student was facing, or mental health issues that impeded their success. Fifteen instructors named students distress as a source of their own stress. Instructors provided several explanations for why these situations could be stressful. Robin felt unprepared to deal with "students with mental health flare ups" and said, "I don't feel like a professional in handling those kinds of situations so that's stressful." Freda was stressed by situations "when students feel so out of control that they vocalize wanting to hurt themselves." Eden felt that "constant panic attacks and emotional outbursts" require "constantly working with those students" which can be "extremely draining." Mai provided an example of when her students' emotional needs fed into their oppositional behaviors. She was stressed by trying to balance the conflicting goals of meeting their needs and meeting the demands of the course:

> One person needed freedom and they needed to feel in control. Then another person needed to feel like they were in the group and belonging. To manage all of these, they all needed different things at the exact same time. For me it was really hard to meet every single person's need and still get them through the day. Get the things done that needed to get done - the logistical things like breaking down camp. Because they had such low buy-in, they didn't want to do a lot of the things that we needed to do, and trying to find ways to one, meet their need, but also explain and give them the information that they were craving of, "Why are we doing this? Why are we here?"

Pileup: Multiple stressors at once. While any of these individual situations could lead to stress, often instructors faced multiple stressful situations at once, which compounds the effects. Half of the (15 of 31) instructors described situations where rather than a single identifiable stressor, multiple stressors were happening concurrently or consequentially that intensified their feelings of stress. Margaret called it a "domino of anxiety and stress." Robin recalled "all of these little things come together, and I just froze and was like I don't know what to address first, there's so much going on." For Eden, who was on the course with a student

suffering from "unknown sickness," there were also interpersonal conflicts between students that necessitated a large group discussion. Her stress came from, "when you're balancing as an instructor monitoring multiple situations…. and you're just adrenaline-pumping." Ariel shared one instance where multiple scenarios piled up to create a moment of intense stress:

> Usually solo[3] is a time of rest for us, at least a little bit, you kind of look forward
> to solo as, "Oh thank God we have a few moments without students." And then
> we were late getting into it, we had a storm roll in, just all these things, so that
> basically solo was not restful at all, and our stove didn't work so we weren't able
> to cook food and it was just every-possible-thing-that-could've-gone-wrong kind
> of day and we circled around the whole time doing paperwork and check ins and
> had maybe one hour to ourselves.

Erika also described a situation of stress pileup, when the group was canoeing on a river as it got dark and they needed to find a campsite. At that time, she was:

> feeling pretty overwhelmed from that day, cause it had been pretty emotional and pretty
> draining, and there were a lot of things that we had to manage that day. And, this was just
> another thing on top of that to manage and do in the dark when people were tired. So,
> they were more likely to injure themselves, and hungry, and we needed to get them food.
> I was feeling very exhausted and very overwhelmed.

These descriptions of stressful situations demonstrate the daily demands of leading an Outward Bound course. From the unpredictable weather to volatile student behavior and the need to coordinate multiple moving parts over the several days, weeks, or months of a course, instructors face numerous situations on course that can cause them stress.

Instructor Role Demands

My analysis suggests the conditions described above that create instructor stress—unsafe and unpredictable situations, student behavior, and job role expectations—were tied to underlying institutional demands and moral obligations that instructors face in their role. The findings in this section are from my phenomenological analysis of instructors' explanations of *why* the situations were stressful. I found that instructors internalized their role to keep students

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[3] Solo is a period of hours where students are on their own, within sound but out of sight of instructors and other students. It is encouraged to be a period of quiet reflection where students might write, draw, sleep, or meditate. Instructors might also use it as an opportunity to check in with each student one-on-one.

safe and provide them with opportunities to learn. These two goals – to reduce risk and provide meaningful experiences for students – created a tension for instructors that caused them stress as they made decisions on course. A third contributor to instructor stress was the demands of the role; instructors perceived expectations that they should maintain control over the situation and the group. The obligation they felt to live up to the ideal of an OB instructor who can address any challenge could feel impossible.

R**esponsibility for student safety weighs on instructor decision-making.** Instructors (12 of 31) expressed a strong sense of responsibility for student safety and care, which embodied an obligation to keep students from harm, and an assumption of the liability for students' health and safety. Michael was conscious that "people's safety, bottom line, depends on your judgment." Instructors were acutely aware that students' parents and caregivers entrusted their child to the instructors' care for the length of the course. Rebecca commented, "There's a lot of pressure to keep people's children safe. I hope every instructor goes in with that awareness that you have someone's little baby with you." Emily believed, "myself and a lot of the people I work with really truly care about our students." Instructors experienced stress when unsafe or unpredictable situations amplified their sense of responsibility to keep students safe. This manifested in anticipatory worry or vigilance preceding a dangerous situation, or as self-doubt and guilt once a decision had been made.

Vigilance in anticipation of potential danger. Instructors (11 of 31) conveyed that they continually assessed the environment and the group's interactions to identify and mitigate potential risks to students and instructors. This constant vigilance allowed them to quickly assess and address concerns before they became major issues. Eden described being on course as being "in a mode where you don't shut off." Instructors used propositional reasoning to reveal latent concerns. Hank shared his thought process for "any situation that is moving towards an unsafe situation." Hank thought through, "If this and this were to happen, this would not be good. Somebody could get hurt or the equipment could get broken…. or it becomes an emotionally unsafe environment for the students." Anticipatory problem-solving reduced the potential for harm, but also meant that instructors were always poised for action. This was the case for Andrew, whose "ultimate stress creator" was "an environment that I won't be able to gather control of." He said, "If the group is just so all over the place that they can't reel it in to that point, or I can't get them to reel it in to that point either, that's very stressful." Therefore, he tried

to remain aware of the group to be able to "in 20 seconds get these people rallied" so that he could "maintain baseline safety."

Harmful situations often arose quickly or without warning. For example, Michael described what it was like for a storm to approach in the middle of the night, "You'll wake up and you'll see some flashes and hear some rumble starting and then you're like, 'Is it coming our way?'" Hank described the swift ascension of his stress when he came around the bend of a portage trail to find his students stopped with the canoe on the ground. He immediately began identifying the possible threats to students:

> I don't know what happened, exactly. I come into that situation and I wonder, "Okay, did somebody fall, did they hit their head? Are they okay? Are they emotionally okay? Are they going to be able to continue doing this?"

His concern preceded the existence of tangible harm. Stress was also spurred by instructors worrying about potential harm resulting from student conflict. Erika asked herself, "Is something unsafe going to happen between two students or multiple students?" when there was tension among students on her course. Beth found the "unknown" elements of interpersonal conflict created the most stress, "I think with physical safety, I can see it, and so I can know. But the inside of a person's brain is something that I don't know, and that not knowing brings me stress." When instructors could not clearly identify—and therefore, address—a source of harm, they became stressed imagining potential dangers that might materialize.

Instructors invested a lot of time and energy early in the course in preparing students to be able to safely complete course tasks. These efforts ideally preempted dangerous situations by giving students the knowledge and skills to keep themselves safe in the wilderness. But while students were learning and practicing these skills, instructors were on high alert. Tim explained that during the "Training phase," instructors were "assessing what [students are] learning, trying to keep four eyes on six or seven bodies and making sure they're lifting things up right and walking carefully so that they're not injuring themselves." Margaret described being "very vigilant" during this time, when students were learning "how to brush their teeth, how to use the restroom, how to set up tarps or tents." She said instructors were "using all your brain power to teach," and supervising and reinforcing structures that students and instructors came to rely on as the course progressed. Tim explained this investment was critical to "teach students new ways to do everything so that they'll do it safely."

Self-doubt and guilt about decisions. Once they identified a threat, instructors sometimes experienced stress from self-doubt in deciding how to respond, or from feeling like they did not know how to address the situation (11 of 31). The burden of keeping students safe weighed on their decision-making. Rebecca found that when there's "some type of incident and I don't have an immediate gut reaction of how to react," that she started "processing all the different options. What is the right one and is there a right one? What is best for the emotional and physical safety of the student or the group as a whole?" Rebecca's goal was to make sure that the "little unknown gray areas" did not become "blind spots" that put students or instructors in danger.

Instructors did not want to make choices that put students in danger, and sometimes they were faced with tough decisions between two dangerous options. For example, several instructors described decisions about whether to navigate on the water to a campsite after dark because their planned site was occupied when they arrived or push forward to find a location that provided adequate shelter during an oncoming storm. Justin described the stress he felt during this decision, "I just couldn't make a decision because I didn't want to make a decision that would have a better reward but was, in some sense, higher risk, or could put the students in a more uncomfortable situation if we had to do lightning drill."

While OB has detailed protocols designed to avert risks, instructors still experienced self-doubt in their decision-making, due to the unpredictability of adverse weather or their lack of experience with a particular situation. For instance, Jari experienced an intense thunder and lightning storm that approached while hiking on a ridge. He recognized the severity of the situation, which made him nervous despite having followed protocol:

> I just kept scanning the group, making sure everyone was okay, and looking up to make sure… Knowing that I had done the right thing, like with our procedures, spreading them out, having them far enough away, but at like the same time just being like, "Maybe they should be a little further from this tree?"… So, just like nervous and the fact that anything can go wrong in those situations.

In another example, Sage experienced feelings of stress due to her lack of familiarity and unpreparedness for the situation she was faced with. Two students had runaway at the same time on Sage's course and she revealed, "It's my second or third week and I had never had an actual runaway. The fact that we had two at the same moment and I couldn't, we didn't make a plan. It happened too fast." When Freda faced a student who vocalized wanting to hurt herself, her

internal response was "Cool, you're out of control, but I'm also out of control because I can't just like lock you up. We're out in the middle of the woods." Freda's stress was rooted in not only the student's distress but also the lack of options she saw for dealing with the situation. Not knowing what to do made her feel out of control.

Five instructors expressed feeling guilt due to the choices they made. For example, Lucas felt he had put a student in danger by deciding to have students start a canoe expedition despite high water levels. He confessed it was "ultimately the wrong decision" because one of the canoes capsized and one of the students was shaken up and scared by the event. Lucas said:

> I felt pretty guilty that I put us in a position where we weren't actually prepared for how high the water levels were, despite having done our training. Everybody was okay at the end of the day, but I still carried around a lot of guilt about how I put my group in an unsafe situation and felt really bad about it.

Another instructor, Tyler, felt that he had not done enough to build a positive group dynamic between students. After he had a few days to regroup mid-course while the students were being trained in first aid by another instructor, he said "It was hard for me to want to go back with the group because I had feelings of 'I've done some things wrong. I've let this group down.'"

Instructors took to heart their role of protecting students from harm and keeping them safe on course. This responsibility weighed on their decision-making. Ultimately, instructor's judgment calls either mitigated or increased the risks that they exposed students to. Emily described the potential for her to be stressed by her negative thoughts as she focused on her decision-making:

> I tend to withdraw and get into my own thoughts. It could spiral into thinking about everything you've done wrong, and being really overwhelmed, and getting caught up in, "This was a personal failure." Or disappointment in either others or in myself.

Instructors felt pressure to maximize opportunities for students' growth and learning. I found that instructors felt an underlying pressure as curators of students' experiences on course. In making decisions, instructors actively balanced the degree of challenge they exposed students to with significant opportunities for learning and growth. Instructors were expected to make the course "meaningful for everybody" and as they made decisions about how to spend their time and energy, they considered the impact of their decisions on students' experiences, both for individuals and the group. Rebecca found stress in "wanting to protect

students, but also wanting them to learn from challenge and finding that line and making sure that that line is appropriate for those students." Several instructors described the "balancing act" of wanting to push students but not, as Hank put it, "past the point of learning and growing as a person." He said it can "swing a little bit far and then I stress out a little bit and bring it back in." On the other hand, learning comes from experiencing and overcoming challenge, so if things don't go as planned, that could be just as much of a learning opportunity as if they had. Rupert recognized that a "really great learning experience" can make up for a string of setbacks, "You want things to go smooth, but at the end of the day, it's okay if they don't go smooth." Instructors' determination to create meaningful experiences for youth weighed on their decision-making as they considered how their choices would impact youth's learning.

Instructors sometimes felt powerless to make the course meaningful. Instructors (10 of 31) expressed periodically feeling powerless in making the course meaningful for students. This stemmed from their recognition that change and growth happens from within the individual. As an experienced instructor, Cameron had witnessed OB courses being "super impactful" and he wanted students to be "able to say you did something that you didn't think you could do." He knew, though, that ultimately it was up to the student to decide for themselves to persevere through course challenges and learn from that experience. He was affected by his inability to change a student's mind:

> It's heartbreaking in a way that you want to show them, but you can't show them. They
> have to show themselves, and they have to do it for themselves.… It's like, "Cool.
> There's nothing I can really do about this at this moment," and that's what's stressful.

For Freda, the stress lied in "not being able to control their actions and their ability to help themselves." In another example, James felt helpless to create a conducive environment for learning. For two nights in a row at the start of a course, his group had to re-route to find an available campsite, which prevented the group from creating evening routines. He wanted to "be able to provide them with that support, that caring, that safety, that basic need of knowing that things were going to be okay." He felt he had "no power in" the situation and that he could not "provide them with that basic need, that structure." Not being able to provide students with a meaningful experience had direct consequences for instructors' stress.

Instructors were disappointed when students missed opportunities for learning. Several instructors (9 of 31) were stressed by the feeling that students missed opportunities for the course

to impact them in powerful ways. Sometimes this was due to the student's own choices. Some instructors foresaw negative consequences of students' behavior but wished to respect students' independence, so did not interfere. Sage wanted students to take advantage of the "incredible work and opportunities that can be had out there in the field," and not misspend their energy on disruptive behaviors. Emily felt terrible when four of her students were evacuated for breaking clear OB rules. While the students were clearly to blame for their disregard of established policies, she felt strong feelings due to their lack of success:

> [I felt] disappointed that the course would be kind of a failure. Powerless to a degree, dealing with the students that just couldn't care less about authority or the course. Disappointment in not being able to serve those students.

Other times, constrained by resources of time and energy, instructors felt forced to move the course forward despite the potential for deeper learning. Brynn's stress came from "wanting the group to function autonomously" combined with "the route stress and time stress of having to be a certain place at a certain time." She wanted them "to do it on their own. But if they're not demonstrating the ability to do it, you have to step in. That isn't as great." Jacob lamented how he sometimes wanted to do more than was possible given course constraints:

> You really want to be able to address every conflict. You want to be able to extract the meaning out of every situation that happens on course, but all of that stuff takes time. And you only have a certain amount of time, and any time that you use over your allotted amount is gonna go into the amount of time that you sleep, and then that just makes the next day harder. You're just battling time.

Students could also have their learning opportunities limited by the weather. Jari expressed that when students got wet and cold it could create a spiral that detracted from the course's potential for learning about self and others, "They're not sleeping well, they're not sleeping warm…. It turns into an expedition more about keeping them warm and happy and getting them home more than we're out here to really dive into these certain topics." While instructors had no control over the weather, they still felt pressure to provide a meaningful experience for all students on course. They experienced disappointment if students were not able to capitalize on learning opportunities afforded by the course.

Instructors felt an obligation to maintain control of the course. I found that a third major demand impacting instructors' stress was to maintain control—their ability to influence or

direct people's behavior or the course of events. This demand materialized in two ways. First, instructors experienced *route stress* associated with their duty to guide the course through multiple elements and transitions. Second, maintaining the appearance of control could make it difficult for instructors to acknowledge their stress.

      Route stress. Instructors plan their courses from start to finish, including where they will camp, how far they will hike each day, what meals they will eat, and what equipment is needed. The conditions of the course often shaped necessary changes to instructors' well-laid plans, but there were typically critical points in the course where the group needed to arrive at a certain location by a certain time to resupply materials, or to participate in a planned activity (e.g., a rock-climbing expedition). Michael referred to it as the stress of "knowing I got to get this train somewhere." When weather, student behaviors, or other factors forced alterations in the route, instructors experienced "route stress." Eighteen instructors described being affected by route stress. Robin recalled that after having to lead students through a five-hour lightning drill in the early morning hours, "you just want to go back to bed but of course the students do, too." Instead, she had to motivate herself and the students to "stay on route and accomplish tasks." Jacob captured how multiple course elements collided in creating route stress,

> Knowing that you have a lot of miles to travel but feeling like it's impossible to
> make those miles based on where your students are at in terms of their behavior,
> and their physical ability, and everything else. So, the stress of trying to balance
> this expedition thing that you're doing, where you're trying to get from A to B
> with this curriculum that you're trying to put forth.

This passage from Jacob captures his feeling a lack of control—over distance to travel as well as student behavior and ability—in meeting the course's goals.

      Most OB courses involve multiple elements—such as backpacking, canoeing, and rock-climbing—and each requires separate gear and preparation. Evelyn reflected on how the transitions between these elements have "a lot of moving parts" and are "just more complicated." They required instructors to "keep everything organized and not lost," especially when necessary equipment was being supplied or replaced. For Tyler, transitions were stressful in and of themselves. During semester-long courses, instructors will often transition on or off the course half-way through. Tyler found stress in "any of those times of change… when you are used to a

routine, and then that routine has changed." These transitions can disrupt instructors' sense of power over the situation.

Additionally, sharing the publicly accessible land and campsites during high tourist season can put constraints on available options during a course. Justin experienced the stress of having to re-route due to a campsite being occupied, especially when students were still relying on instructors to lead the group, "If we hike five extra miles because of another group, and ownership hasn't been transferred onto the students, all of a sudden, it's the instructors who have to do the motivating to push through those challenges." In cases like Justin's, when instructors are impacted by forces outside of their control (e.g., campers at public-use sites), they might experience increased stress as they are forced to find alternatives.

Maintaining the appearance of control made it difficult to acknowledge stress. Instructors have the responsibility to keep the "whole train moving". As a result, some instructors (9 of 31) felt guilty to take time or attention away from the students or to make a request of their Co to address feelings of stress, so they put their "needs on the back burner." Jacob described how he felt like he needed to suppress his feelings of stress:

> There's always some element of not wanting to be stressed out, or not feeling like it's allowed or okay. It's hard to express that to [your Co] because they're already working really hard, and there's already a lot to be done, and there's sometimes this need to feel invincible.

Brynne echoed this: "you need to be demonstrating a higher level of confidence and competence regardless of what you actually feel." She continued, "you have to be intentional with how much you're saying because you still have to maintain confidence to support a successful course. If you're totally breaking down, it's not good."

Several instructors did not want to show their weaknesses or vulnerability to students or their Co-instructors. Margaret described it as a "dynamic of feeling the need to prove yourself and feeling the need to be the authority, be in control." For Will, it was partly because he had built up a reputation for "I can do anything at any point" and it was "hard to be vulnerable and be like, 'Hey, I can't do this anymore.'" Mai reflected on having a "fear of looking like I don't know what I'm doing or not being knowledgeable enough… feeling embarrassed." Emily also shared her hesitation to ask for help: "I didn't want to be looked down on as stupid or

inexperienced." The pressure of always knowing the answer or being able to do anything contributed to instructors' experience of stress.

Instructors wished to be effective in their work and expressed being stressed by courses where they felt unsuccessful. For Robin, when the group was struggling with a task that she expected them to be able to tackle, she blamed herself for not adequately preparing students, "It's stressful for the instructor because you're always like, 'Maybe it's my fault. How have I failed these students?' Such that I haven't maybe give them another tool to be successful." Will also questioned his effectiveness on course:

> I've got 12 lives plus my Co-instructor and it was, "Am I doing well with teaching them? Getting them enough fun? Having the Outward Bound moment?" ... I think it just has to do with wanting to succeed and knowing you did a good job.

From these examples, it is clear how deeply instructors internalized their work. Psychological stress of anticipation, self-doubt, powerlessness, and disappointment affected instructors' decision-making. The responsibility they felt for students' safety and learning on course impacted the decisions that they made and the feelings of stress they experienced. They were deeply committed to youth learning from being on course and took it personally when this was not realized. The combination of emotional strain and cognitive demand had detrimental effects on instructors' ability to meet the demands of their role.

The Effects of Stress on Instructors

The role of Outward Bound instructor differs from most other youth-serving roles because instructors are "on" for 24 hours a day for the duration of the course, are subject to the unpredictability of the wilderness, and have only their Co-instructor(s) and a satellite phone to rely on for assistance. Knowing these conditions, I wanted to understand how stress could interfere with instructors' ability to perform their job duties. This analysis examined instructors' narratives of a single situation that was stressful enough that it became difficult to function and where their Co helped them to manage their feelings of stress, especially the interview questions *How did feeling stressed affect your functioning on course?* And *How did feeling stressed affect your ability to relate to youth and support their learning?* Overall, I found that stress negatively influenced instructors' course experience and could create unfavorable conditions for student learning. However, some instructors also described being stimulated by stress in positive ways.

Finally, I found that many instructors concealed their feelings of stress on course, usually to prioritize students' needs.

Stress affected instructors' mental and emotional functioning. My analysis of instructor narratives confirmed that their experiences of stress on course resulted in mental and emotional strain. A common response was for instructors to feel overwhelmed to the point where they "had a hard time moving," were "frozen," "shell-shocked," or "paralyzed." For these instructors, the stress created a mental overload that prevented them from being able to think clearly or act. Mai recalled, "just shutting down and being like, 'I don't know how to do anything,'" and Michael described feeling "confused and unsure of myself."

Instructors (10 of 31) frequently named anxiety as an emotional response to stress, which Mai characterized as feeling "frenzied," and having "a lot of racing thoughts, but not really about anything. Just feeling like I can't breathe," and Beth described as having a "super zoomed-in feeling" of "tunnel vision, visual and auditory," To bring the reader into the mind of one instructor, I present a descriptive example from Margaret, who was coming into a rough camping site after dark with a group of hungry girls during a season where the bugs were at a high activity level:

> I was starting to get really worked up. I was just hyper-focused on getting dinner, hyper-focused on knowing the bugs were gonna come out. It was hard to function. I remember trying to find my headlamp out of my bag and just really struggling to focus. Having to tell myself to breathe deeply… Throwing all my stuff out of the bag, like feeling a panic, and not putting my stuff back in which is something I always do. You don't just leave your stuff out. Not being able to put it back in and zip it. Just going, "Okay I have to go to the next thing." … Just my skin was crawling… I felt really flustered. I felt overwhelmed. I didn't feel like myself. I have never gotten that stressed where I felt like I couldn't function. I felt ineffective for sure.

Another prevalent emotional response instructors (10 of 31) named was frustration—at the situation, the students, or themselves. Justin said, "[I felt] anger towards myself for not being able to think clearly." Instructors also commonly felt "exhausted," especially when faced with persistent or unrelenting stressors. Genevieve said, "constant put down[s] of the experience and the place …wears on my soul more than anything." On one of her most stressful courses, Beth remembered thinking, "I'm ready for this trip to be done. I'm not proud of that feeling." Several

instructors described that in moments of stress, they faced extreme self-doubt and posed questions to themselves such as "Why am I doing this again?," "Why did I choose this job?," "I've chosen to do *this* with my life?" The emotional and mental anguish instructors experienced because of stress affected their ability to effectively lead the course, and as we will see, also had negative effect on their interactions with youth.

Stress made it difficult for instructors to problem-solve and make decisions. Instructors (7 of 31) conveyed how stress impacted their ability to think through and settle on a plan of action when they were faced with a choice. It took them longer to make decisions, or they used poor judgment that led to inefficiencies, short-sighted solutions, or setbacks. Instructors attributed this to "fatigue and tiredness" and having "less head space [due to] the number of things that I was managing." Hank shared how stress impaired his thought process:

> I was less focused and able to clearly see the steps needed to take the path forward in a safe and effective manner. I was seeing the big picture, but I wasn't able to break it down into the steps, because I was stressed and overwhelmed a little bit by that big picture.

Rebecca recalled the stress causing her to "spiral down all these what-ifs instead of being able to just be like, 'Okay. Here's the two responses we can narrow it down to and what their possible outcomes are.'" Lucas' stress made him want to "make decisions quickly and move on," but he saw the danger of this way of thinking, and the importance of slowing down, "Sometimes when I'm in a stressed place I feel a sense of urgency that we need to keep things moving, but there's time to make a plan that feels right for everybody." Andrew also felt a sense of urgency to solve problems, but saw how stress could undermine his ability to be nimble-minded and understand underlying issues:

> I'm trying to fix things instead of listening. You end up butting your head against the wall. The very first thing my job is to be creative and think on my toes and you can't do that if you're so imbalanced that you're stressed to a point that I was. Felt like I was just putting out fires. I wasn't actually getting anything done, educationally. I'm just like managing one thing at a time instead of realizing the root cause of all of the stress.

Instructors sometimes used stress in positive ways. Nearly all instructors described being affected negatively by stress in the moment. Not all instructors found stress debilitating, however. Six instructors discussed how experiencing some stress could be motivating, despite it also making things difficult. It pushed them into "driver mode," where they felt "pushed to keep

going," or it spurred them to "mak[e] a plan." Erika found that stress helped her to "make more conservative decisions. [If] something is worrying me, I'll be a little more careful." Jari voiced how he used stress "as fuel" to do whatever was necessary for students:

> I deal with stress very differently at home than on a course. I feel like at home I'm like horrible with it, but on course, I use it well in terms of my facilitation or getting the students what they need…. Really like stepping up and going above and beyond for them.

Five instructors chronicled the ways that feeling overwhelmed or overtaxed helped them to be more empathic or emotionally sensitive with students. They conveyed that stress could give "some insight into what students are feeling," "allow us to be in their shoes a little bit," and could serve as a "constant reminder that the things that we put our students through… really impact them." Jordan was reminded that "being really scared in a controlled environment is a really powerful and useful thing." Mai appreciated that stress was an opportunity to "remind myself that maybe the level at which I'm challenged is much higher, but it still exists. To just remember what that feels like."

Some instructors suppressed their feelings of stress. Sometimes, even when instructors experienced the sorts of negative thoughts and feelings due to stress described above, they concealed it from students and sometimes their Co. Earlier I shared how instructors are sometimes hesitant to reveal their stress because of the pressure to appear in control and knowledgeable. I also found that some instructors (8 of 31) felt pressured to not acknowledge their feelings of stress to keep it from impacting the course, as Jacob described:

> Situations that would stress me out in any other context is less stressful out there just because of the necessity and responsibility that you have. I just don't feel as much stress because I can't, and I don't feel like I'm allowed to. I'm more needed. And in being reminded of the fact that I'm needed, I have to move on, and I have to take care of all these people. I just don't feel as much stress because I don't feel like I can.

Instructors were careful not to expose their feelings of stress to students, at the risk of stressing the students out. Ariel said, "I'd rather push it aside and not have it color my encounters with the students. It's never gonna be a productive thing to bring into your relationship with your students." Will said it was better that students "were not quite aware of it and therefore they're not getting stressed about it as well."

Instructors used a number of strategies to put the stress out of mind. They "push[ed] it aside," or "power[ed] through." Evelyn found the fast pace of the days helped her because she "kept busy, kept things rolling, was pretty involved, invested in what was going on all the time." Will distracted himself from his stress by putting energy into teaching students, but he said it felt like he "put on that mask of 'everything's okay.'" Freda found her training as an Emergency Medical Technician helped her to "put all of that aside and focus on what's going on, and kind of triage things, and deal with things."

In sum, I found that stress hindered instructors' ability to function. Feelings of overwhelm, anxiety, and frustration hijacked instructors' mental functioning and impinged on their ability to make sound decisions. While these feelings occasionally urged them into action or inspired empathy, most instructors felt impeded by stress. Also, pressure to remain in control and convey confidence sometimes discouraged instructors from acknowledging or revealing their stress. Importantly, instructors' stress affected their interactions with students, as the next section explores.

The Effects of Instructor Stress on Students

When asked how stress affected their ability to relate to youth and support their learning, instructors[4] detailed feeling the absence of positive encounters that typically distinguish OB courses. Instructors were less inclined to connect with youth on a personal level, felt that they inadequately supported youth's learning, were impatient with students, and were unable to enjoy students' company and have fun on course.

Fewer interpersonal connections. Instructors (3 of 21) observed that they devoted less time and energy to developing personal relationships with students when they were stressed. Sage felt like she "didn't really develop much time to [have] one-on-ones," and Chloe noted that stress made her less available to students and limited the time she spent talking to them: "I think I probably maximized my personal time a little bit, paddling around, just a little bit quieter." Erika lamented:

> I think we could have done more for [students], talked more with them, talked about
> more personal stuff more often or checked in with the students more often if we weren't

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[4] Only 21 instructors were asked this question.

stressed. There were definitely opportunities where if we weren't using our efforts to resolve other situations, we could have dedicated it to them.

Less focus on student learning. Feeling stressed also meant instructors (3 of 21) did not devote as much attention to students and their learning. Genevieve was "less able to focus on the present and put in all my energy there and probably teach lessons or coach or check-in with students that probably needed it." Tim expounded on how stress takes over your brain and prevents you from noticing what students need:

> If you're stressed out about something, your brain doesn't have the time to stop and think about, "Okay, what was that lesson I wanted to do today?" Or, "What does the group need right now?" It's just whatever, we gotta go, or whatever's coming, stressing and manage that first and that impacts what you notice about the group.

Instructors were sensitive to the impact that this could have on students. Lucas said,

> When working with youth, you need to be ready to give all your attention to whatever it is you're engaging in with them…. I think students know when you're distracted and when you're not devoting your full energy to what's going on with them.

Lack of patience with students. Stress tended to shorten instructors' fuses in their dealings with students. Five instructors described having "less patience," and feeling "more easily frustrated or annoyed," or "irritable." For example, Freda shared how she might respond to a student's request for technical support, "When I'm stressed and they're like, 'I don't remember how to tie the trucker's hitch.' And it's like the 30th time, I'm like, 'I can't do this right now. You need to ask someone else.'" Michael explained how stress made him less willing to tolerate the timely process of natural learning that can happen on course:

> At our best we are patient and understanding and unjudgmental about their choices. When I become stressed, I have less patience for the natural experience of learning that can happen with time that is sometimes hilarious or brutal—depending on where your head is at—to watch happen slowly.

> Less patience sometimes translated into instructors being more directive with students. They found themselves telling students what to do rather than letting them experience a process of discovery and reflection that could lead to powerful learning. Jari said:

> Sometimes I'm really stressed out, because we have to get going or it's late and I forget that they're going through a process, and that me doing things for them is actually not

helping them or benefiting them. …Because I'm doing all these things for them when

they can be learning moments or teachable moments.

Hank said in stressful situations, his "focus on teaching and allowing students to move at their pace would fall by the wayside." He continued, "My instinct is to do for somebody and just make things happen, when I'm stressed. The difficult part for me can be stepping back and saying, "Try this.'" When Beth had to "get a little matter-of-fact," with a student, she did not like the way it made her feel. She said, "That's not a way that I typically like to relate with youth."

Instructors were no fun. OB courses are meant to be fun and enjoyable experiences for students, and instructors (4 of 21) were cognizant of the ways stress could erode feelings of positivity and lightheartedness among students. Ariel confessed, "I think if we had had less stress and more sleep, we probably could've done more to bring more joy to that group." On one course, Jacob felt that he was "not able to give as much positivity, and encouragement, and be as big of a voice in raising morale." Stress transformed Robin's on-course persona: "I wasn't as much a fun, jokey, instructor and [was] more a down-to-business kind of instructor, which is a bummer for me."

In sum, when instructors experienced stress on course, it could translate to undesirable, unfriendly, or counterproductive interactions with youth. Instructors were sensitive to the influence they had on youth's experience experiences on course and felt remorseful when they recognized that they were a dark cloud over the course.

Research Question 2: What is the process by which Co-instructors support instructors to manage their feelings of stress?

The second research question focuses on Co-instructors as a source of support to instructors struggling with stress. As described earlier, Outward Bound programs assign a minimum of two Co-instructors to lead each course. This policy is based in risk management so that in the case of an emergency, one instructor can stay with the group while the other goes for help. However, my analysis revealed that Co-instructors also play a powerful role in supporting instructors to manage the stress of leading a course.

I explored the process by which instructors access the support of their Co-instructor. My findings are presented in three parts. First, I present relationship factors that created positive conditions for instructors to perceive that support was available from their Co-instructor. Second, I briefly outline three mechanisms instructors used to access their Co-instructors' support.

Finally, I present three categories of support that Cos offered to instructors experiencing stress and explain why each strategy was effective.

Co-Instructor Relationship Factors

The relationship factors described in this section are those considered by instructors as they determined whether and how to ask for help from their Co. We asked instructors: *What made it harder or easier for you to get help from your Co-instructor?* and *How can Co-instructors best communicate and help each other with feelings of stress?* We found that instructors were more likely to access help from their Co when they had a close relationship that went beyond working together, had developed patterns of open and honest communication especially about their emotions, and when the instructor perceived that the Co was committed to them and was worthy of trust.

Holistic relationships: "Being humans together." The most commonly named thing (14 of 31) that made it easier for instructors to ask for help was the presence of a trusting relationship or friendship with their Co. These relationships were characterized by mutuality and a holistic knowledge of each other's work and personal lives. In addition to being familiar with their Co's sensibilities for their work with youth, instructors found it made a difference to them to know about their Co's life outside of OB, and for their Co to know things about their personal life and background. Lucas said it was important to him to have a relationship where his Co was his "friend, co-worker, and collaborator."

Knowing each other on a personal level made Cos more comfortable approaching their Co to ask for help managing their feelings of stress. In many cases, a trusting friendship allowed instructors to be more willing to be vulnerable sharing their feelings with their Co. Jacob explained how the friendship made it easier to ask for things he needed: "Having that baseline understanding of each other goes a long way [in] not needing to justify needing help or being able to ask for it." Familiarity also made it easier for Cos to recognize that the instructor was stressed. Evelyn felt that "I didn't really need to say too much because we were already kind of close." Her Co understood where she was coming from because they "were more comfortable with each other and also were friends." Another advantage was that instructors who knew each other did not have to acquaint themselves with each other in addition to the students and the course elements. Justin explained:

It made it easier that I had a working relationship, or a friendship, with my Co-instructor outside of the course. We weren't figuring out how each other was [going to] act or respond or learning someone else's personality while figuring out the course as well.

Instructors built their relationships primarily through conversations where they talked "about personal issues," "what was going on with their life," "things that weren't all work-related." They had "heart-to-heart" or "really authentic, genuine conversation." Beth called it "being humans together." Lucas likened the efforts of his instructor trio to get to know each other to "almost like we're having our own Outward Bound expedition just as a group of three, learning how to work together and problem-solving together."

Spending time together off-course also contributed to strong instructor relationships. Margaret spoke of her effort to get to know her Co during course planning, "getting away from that work environment and going on a walk, floating in a canoe when you do the Consistencies. Try to make it casual, enjoyable. That physicalness helps people express emotions and vulnerability. It loosens the brain up." In addition, during their time off between courses, instructors at both sites were likely to spend time with other instructors.

The lack of a pre-existing relationship between Co-instructors made it more difficult for them to ask for help. Chloe reported that it "took a lot of explaining about each other's lives to even know where we're coming from, what we got going on outside of Outward Bound." Rebecca explained that it can be hard work to build a partnership and form trust, and that sometimes you do not realize that you have not "totally felt each other out" until you're faced with a situation where you need to rely on each other. James shared an example of how he was affected by a Co who did not engage in personal conversations. James described his Co as having "a hard time talking about herself. She would only want to talk about work." This led to James feeling like he "couldn't talk about something that was stressing me out" because he "didn't feel like I was going to get the support I needed from her." From James' story, we can see the importance of building a sense of connection with a Co to create a safe space for conversations about stress.

Patterns of open and honest communication: "The more you talk, the more comfortable you are with talking." Having established patterns of open and honest communication contributed to (14 of 31) instructors feeling comfortable asking for help.

Instructors characterized open and honest communication as being sincere and direct, including instructors and Cos sharing how they were feeling; being forthright in giving and receiving feedback; and creating opportunities for candid discussion. Establishing patterns of open and honest communication created a culture of emotional transparency where discussing feelings of stress was welcome and natural. Mai expressed how open and honest communication with her Co made a difference for her:

> Being able to really rely on one another, being able to talk out our feelings, all of
> our fears, all of the things that we are doing well even though it felt like maybe
> we weren't doing anything well at the time. Being able to be there for one another
> and to be accountable for one another, our emotions as well as our development
> and progress to be active mirrors or sounding boards, whether that's emotionally
> or technically or educationally.

An instructor's Co is often the only other adult that an instructor will interact with for the majority of the course. As each other's support system, instructors found it important to establish a space to "vocalize all of our thoughts and feelings with each other." Cameron described his relationship with his Co as "a trusting and nurturing environment." Open communication led instructors to feel supported and not isolated; Sage described the power of sharing her feelings with her Co:

> I think just having someone that is honest and that you feel like you can be honest
> with was the most important and most helpful thing. Just that you can voice the
> concerning emotions and/or thoughts with at least one person out there with you.

Instructors appreciated being able to approach their Co whenever something important came up or to share information. Frequent communication created norms between instructors that encouraged sharing. For Jari, knowing that he and his Co would have a nightly check-in allowed him to push through the stress of the day: "Just knowing that that was coming, that we were about to talk about the way that it made us feel, made it a lot easier to get through it."

Instructor pairs established patterns for communication even before the courses began. As mentioned in Chapter Two, instructor pairs met during the week before the course to have a structured conversation, sometimes facilitated by the Course Director. In these meetings, the instructor pair discussed their leadership styles, their visions for the course, how they would make decisions, and other topics to preempt issues that might arise on course. One topic they

discussed was stress – what creates stress, what they look like when they're stressed, and what the Co can do if they noticed the instructor is stressed. These pre-course meetings provided a solid foundation for later proactive communication; Brynn found it helpful to "have a language that we already discussed using." Andrew said that "Front-loading is helpful, having those Consistencies and telling you that I'm going to tell you that I'm stressed so that way you know." During pre-course planning, instructors often discussed how they would check in with each other during the course. Chloe recommended "it is a good idea to structure it into your day," and she emphasized that instructors should go beyond structuring in time for feedback about the course to include "time to talk about your well-being… Because you can't do anything if you're not aware of what the other person's dealing with."

Once on course, many instructors worked to establish patterns of proactive communication by checking in frequently throughout the day and during scheduled nightly check-ins. Instructors described their communication with their Co as "constant," and that they were "always checking in." These check-ins helped to establish a "general foundation of trust and open communication" between the instructor pair. Jacob explained how daily check-ins made him confident that his Co would be available for discussions of stress:

> You and your instructor are in your tent every night having a conversation about how the day went and sharing feedback. And that practice of doing that over and over again builds a relationship that makes it easier for you to have conversations when you are really stressed out.

Cameron echoed this: "the more you talk, the more comfortable you are with talking and bringing stuff up." He spoke of the goodwill that is built by reciprocal check-ins with your Co:

> That helps me, that just having that vocalized like, "I'm here for you." I don't know what I'll need or when I'll need something, but constantly having that back and forth like, "Hey, do you need anything? Can I help you with anything? Do you want me to alleviate anything?" Just constantly giving that, and then it usually creates a feedback that's like, "Cool. I'll do the same for you." Just knowing that somebody else is there is a really good thing to have.

Establishing the expectation of check-ins created a dynamic between instructors that helped them to feel supported on course, especially in times of stress.

If the instructor pair did not fall into a habit of regularly talking honestly with each other, it could be detrimental to their course experience. Margaret cautioned that "it becomes really hard throughout the course to find those times, because you're both into giving to the young people so much" but that, "Almost like parenting, if you don't take the time together to get on the same page and help each other out, then you can very much be working separately, and as I call it the two-headed-staff-monster." Beth recognized that on one course, which "started off on a pretty rough foot" that she and her Co did not "establish that space for us to 'Phew!' together, to decompress, and give feedback and talk through events." She said this led to the absence of a "safe learning environment for ourselves as instructors." Jacob commented, "I think the relationships that I have seen where people don't necessarily have a great relationship, and can't deal with stress, is when they haven't practiced that openness with one another." Evelyn noticed that when she let concerns with her co "bottle up rather than expressing it to them initially" that emotions would build up and might build resentment. Aware of this pattern, Evelyn had "been really intentional about being very transparent."

Felt Co-instructor commitment: "It feels tough to drown on your own." Many instructors (11 of 31) reported that it was easier to ask for help when their Co assured them they were committed to the success of the course and to supporting the instructor. Instructors who perceived a mutual obligation from their Co to share the burdens of the course were more willing to access help from their Co. Margaret said, "It feels tough to drown on your own so just constantly knowing you have a teammate right by your side is the big thing."

Several instructors described their Co's commitment as reciprocal and almost compulsory and absolute, due in part to lack of access to possible other sources of support while on course. Jacob explained:

> One of the most meaningful things about the Co-instructor relationship is just knowing that this other person unconditionally has your back. And knowing that they're gonna support you even if you're not at your best, and even if conditions are tough because they have to. It's not only their job and their role, but you need each other. You have to support one another because you're the only adults out there. You're the only people that can support one another in a meaningful way. …There's never a question of whether or not this person is gonna be there if you need them.

The undeniability of being able to rely on their Co helped instructors to feel supported and that they were not bearing the challenges of the course on their own. Eden benefitted when she and her Co were "able to rally together." She described feeling reassured "That we're in the same boat and we're gonna get through it and be here for each other." Lucas said, "that spirit of collaboration that you get with your Co-instructor, that helps my stress, when I don't feel like I have this problem alone." Knowing that their Co was dedicated and loyal made instructors feel more comfortable asking for help.

Cos demonstrated their commitment through words and actions that reinforced a spirit of collaboration and reciprocity. For example, Cameron sent a strong message to his Co at the start of the course by communicating, "Your problems will be my problems, and my problems will be your problems." For James, it was about both he and his Co being "in it together," and a big part of his confidence in his Co came from their discussions about "how much we love our jobs, how much we love this line of work, and knowing that she was committed and I was committed." Many instructors felt their Co's commitment to them when they "asked what I needed," which communicated that they were "there and willing to help you out."

Co-instructors who possessed relevant experience and expressed their excitement for the work also bolstered feelings of commitment between the pair. For example, Tyler was joined mid-course by a Co-instructor who had experience with conflict resolution, which he welcomed because he felt his group of students had struggled to establish a positive group culture. He expressed relief, "It felt very good to have her expertise in the interpersonal stuff, and for me to not feel like that was all on my shoulders." She also brought excitement about leading the group in a sea kayaking expedition, which she had trained for under Tyler, but was leading for the first time. Tyler remembered feeling, "It felt really good to be like, we're kayaking. I love this! I love teaching this! And so, we were able to share in that excitement. And get the group excited." Their shared commitment to the student experience and enjoying the adventure of being on course diffused the burden Tyler was feeling, and he felt comfortable leaning on her for support.

Given the way the instructors above spoke about their reliance on their Co, it was striking to hear situations where instructors were let down by their Co on course. In one situation, both of Sage's two Cos had voiced wanting to leave the field early, and one did leave mid-course for personal reasons. Sage felt that she needed to take on the leadership of the course on her own, and said, "I didn't feel supported anymore. The trust and the expectation that your Co is going to

be there for you always was broken and I didn't feel like it was worth it to seek out support through them." In another example, Beth felt that her relationship with her co "faltered" when she was directing the students to prep their camp for an impending storm. She described what she felt in the moment:

> I'm really frustrated, and I just started seeing my co-leader moving around the campsite and starting to do the work *for* this group. I felt like he was undermining me and not being a united front with me, and that made me more stressed out.

Without being able to rely on her Co as a "united front" with students, Beth doubted his commitment to be her source of support on course. This underscores the importance of instructors' perceptions of the availability of support from their Co.

Lack of agreement or synergy between Co-instructors could create barriers to seeking help or worse, be a source of stress for instructors. There were eight instructors who mentioned conflict with their Co when they were asked *What situations create the most stress for you?* Conflicts were usually around the "vision" of the course, or about "being on the same page." For Lucas, the stress came from knowing that the issue needed to be confronted but that it may lead to a "difficult conversation." Jessica shared what it was like to be in a situation and "trying to figure out what your co is thinking" about, for instance, the level of challenge to expose students to. Mai experienced stress when there was "miscommunication or disconnect" between her and her Co. She explained:

> If there's tension between us—whether that's interpersonal, or whether that's stylistic, or whether that's because we're in a stressful situation and there's a lack of communication—if I don't feel like I'm on the same page as my Co-instructor, I feel very stressed out. I feel like that's when I start to experience self-doubt or a little bit frenzied or anxiety.

In these ways, conflict between Co-instructors could be a direct source of stress in addition to creating an environment where instructors are not comfortable approaching their Co for support.

Together, these relationship factors—getting to know each other holistically, building patterns of open and honest communication, and conveying commitment to the course and each other—led instructors to feel trust, safety, and support from their Co. These factors enabled instructors to rely on their Co for support in times of stress, as captured by Robin in her advice

for having a successful course: "Not just viewing your co instructor as your co-worker but viewing them with compassion, 'This is a person I am out here with. They are my support system.'"

Mechanisms for Accessing Help

The relationship factors described above provide insight to the conditions that make it easier for instructors to access help. It is helpful to also understand the mechanisms by which instructors accessed help. Did instructors always ask for support directly? Or were there more subtle or indirect ways that they were able to access the support they needed? We asked instructors *How did your Co-instructor know that you were experiencing stress?* If they responded that they told him/her, we asked *How did that conversation go?* For all other responses, we asked *Did your Co-instructor offer help? If so, how did that go?* I found that instructors accessed help from their Co in one of three ways, described below.

The first, and most common (15 of 31), was that the instructor told their Co that they were feeling stressed, often very directly. This could occur in the moment of stress or after a stressful situation during a scheduled check-in. Sometimes, instructors made a specific request for help, as when Brynn told her Co, "Hey, I'm stressed about planning this, this and this right now. It's going to be helpful for me if you can take over planning the equipment pack out," or when Justin told his Co, "Here's all the facts that I can think of. Help me with this. I can't think right now," or when Jacob approached his Co to say, ""Hey, I'm not feeling good, and this is what I need from you."

The second way instructors accessed help was when a Co noticed subtle cues and more obvious changes in the instructor's behavior or demeanor and approached the instructor to express their concern. Six instructors of the 31 said that they accessed help in this way, but many more instructors (16 of 31) found their Co expressed concern about them on course when they were experiencing stress. Sometimes Cos were tuned in to these changes based on what had been shared by instructors during the pre-course planning meeting, or because they had an established relationship. Jacob reported about his Co:

> I think she was clued into it to some extent because she knew me and she knew
> my personality, and we've had these Consistency conversations, but [I was] also
> just open and honest about it.

Many instructors described their Co being intuitive and sensitive to their emotions and needs. Beth said "being able to pick up on people's emotions and state of mind is kind of part of the job description," and others described their Cos "could sense it," were "pretty intuitive and had a pretty good feel for how I was doing," "saw some physical indicators or non-verbals that there may be stress present," "could just tell that maybe I was overwhelmed or stressed out," or "just knew." Mai had an instance where she was stressed, and her Co recognized it before she did:

> At that moment I think she just knew, and it was unprompted. She was just like, "Hey, do you need to take five minutes?" I was like, "No, I'm okay." She's like, "Are you sure?" I was like, actually, I don't even think I knew how stressed I was until she had said that.

The third way instructors accessed help was when they experienced a stressful situation in the presence of their Co, and either the Co was also experiencing stress, or was empathic to the experience of the instructor (7 of 31). Jari said he felt understood because his Co "experienced it [the stressful situation] with me. They had the same feelings." Rebecca recalled connecting with her Co at the end of a particularly stressful day managing their group's response to a threat a student had made:

> I think we both, after we put the students to bed, checked in with each other as we typically do and we're just like, "Oh, my gosh!" and had a moment of sharing where we were emotionally in that moment.

After Erika and her Co arrived at camp late at night following a long day on the water, she found it helpful that her Co, "Underst[ood] what happened that day. It had been a stressful day, and we were both feeling it from that experience." Cos also made use of patterns of regular check-ins, which routinely provided space for conversations and sharing about emotional responses to stress.

Instructors could access support from their Co through any of three mechanisms: by directly expressing to their Co that they needed support, by being approached by their Co with an offer of support, or by sharing stressful experiences as they occurred. The mechanism used might depend on the source of the stress, the instructors' perception of the situation, the relationship with the Co, and other contextual factors.

Co-Instructors' Helping Responses

The findings in this section describe the ways Cos responded to instructors' stress and offered support. In this study, we asked instructors *How did your Co help you to manage your feelings of stress, not just solve the problem? What was effective about what they did? Why was it helpful?* As a reminder, we had prompted instructors to share narratives of situations in which they felt a high degree of stress and were assisted by their Co-instructor. We found that most often, Cos stepped up to lead the group so that instructors could step back to manage their stress. Cos also provided support to instructors through co-regulation of emotions; they engaged instructors in conversation or activities that supported them to express, process, or diffuse their emotions. A third category was when Cos engaged in problem-focused support, including taking decisive action or engaging in joint problem-solving.

Providing time and space for instructors to cope. The most frequently cited helping response (17 of 31) was for Cos to offer to or voluntarily take leadership over the situation or group, allowing the instructor to step away and address their stress. In this way, Cos supported instructors' emotion coping by helping them to remove themselves temporarily from the situation. They allowed the instructor mental space to do their own emotion-focused coping. Remember, the nature of OB courses is that instructors are on duty 24 hours a day for the duration of the course, some of which last up to 60 days. They are subject to unpredictable and sometimes dangerous conditions in which they have the bottom-line responsibility for student safety. Their decisions affect the impact the course has on student learning. Therefore, the chance for even a few minutes to themselves could bring major relief to instructors.

Instructors whose Cos were able to provide them a moment away from the group used the time to "decompress from the day," "take the time to not think about students," "take care of personal things," or "do whatever [I] needed to do to feel human." The impact of having the time to regroup was felt by Mai, when her Co encouraged her to take a break:

> It was very helpful.… I remember taking the five minutes, and I had a small breakdown. Then I was like, "Okay, cool. I can do this." I just needed to take that time away because I was just too far in it trying to do so much.

Having a few minutes to herself to express her emotions allowed Mai to move forward and into a more productive mental space.

Instructors recognized that they needed to be proactive in building in ways to create "time and space" for each other to step away during course. Jacob described how Cos could step into a more vocal role to offer instructors time away from the group.

> I think that one of the easiest ways for a Co-instructor to support you is you just
> intentionally make the space for them to be the main voice of motivation [for
> students], and the main voice of management, so that you could take a moment to
> go in the tent or whatever it is that you need to do to just recharge.

Other instructors built it into a schedule; Genevieve set a standard to "switch off nights" where one instructor was "more off" and the other was "more on." Ariel realized partway through a course with her Co that "we could've done more to stop and support one another." They began to be "very intentional about it after that. We gave each other thirty minutes in the tent either in the morning or at night and respected that space." Ariel was adamant about "creating intentional time to give your Co-instructor and yourself a break because twenty two days with no break is not gonna be healthy for anyone." As students progress through the formal phases of Training, Main, and Final, they are expected to rely on the instructors less and their fellow students more, which may create more flexibility for instructors to tag in and out of leading the group. Robin said, "We'd usually wait until it was a more calm time, if the students were journaling or if I had a game to play with them or something to keep them entertained" and at these times, a quick conversation with her Co would grant her the opportunity for a break. Instructors often created reciprocal agreements with their Co, what Robin called "ebbing and flowing… When you need some time, you go take it, I'll take care of things. When I need some time, you take care of things."

Instructors' confidence in their Co to be able to take over the group temporarily was a major factor in their being able to step away to address their own needs. They trusted that their Co possessed the knowledge, experience, competence, and dedication to lead the group. Genevieve shared how her Co's conviction quelled any fears that she had in the situation:

> I think the way that she expressed it, just being like, "I got this. You're good. Do
> what you need to do." Her total confidence in her abilities in the situation. It was
> like, "Okay, cool, I can turn off my brain from instructor mode for a minute
> because she has this."

Many of the instructors expressed certainty in their Co's abilities. Co instructors had "a level of preparedness," were "just good at his job," and were "well versed in what to do." Instructors voiced: "knowing that she was able to take care of that," "I knew that she could handle everything," "[I had] trust in her to take over for 5 to 10 minutes," "I really trusted him and his judgment." These feelings of trust let instructors step away without guilt or hesitation.

Co-regulation of emotion. A second category of helping responses that I identified are what I refer to as *co-regulation of emotion*. Co-regulation has been defined as a "bidirectional linkage of oscillating emotional channels between partners, which contributes to emotional and physiological stability for both partners in a close relationship" (Butler & Randall, 2013, p. 203). The strategies for co-regulation presented here are those used by Co-instructors to help instructors to stabilize their emotions. Mostly experienced through interactive conversation, these strategies offered the instructor an avenue to express, release, or diffuse their emotions, and a means to process their emotions and resume a stable and moderated state. Below, I share five strategies for co-regulation of emotion used by Co-instructors.

Cos validated instructors' emotions and stress response. Instructors (12 of 31) appreciated when their Co listened to them as they talked through their emotions and reassured them that their feelings were valid. Lucas said, "Just listening, really, is huge. Listening to me process some things and listening in a nonjudgmental way." Mai said, "By being an active listener, it allowed for feeling supported and feeling valued and heard." Jari's Co was "a great listener and [was] able to talk that whole experience out and understand."

Cos also affirmed instructors' experience as stressful, often in an expression of compassion and empathy for what the instructor was feeling. Chloe said her Co was "very respectful of my experience, even though it was really different from his at the time. Just like, 'Oh, okay. That's real.' … I think he modeled a lot of compassion." When Jordan approached his Co about feeling tired, he said his Co "completely understood that and there wasn't any judgment." After James faced a situation where two students who were refusing to move began yelling at him, his Co helped to relieve his stress by saying, "That looks really hard, you didn't deserve that." Michael had a similar response from his Co after a particularly stressful incident. One student on the course, who had threatened self-harm earlier, walked away from the group near a cliff and a water's edge. His Co was not with the group at that moment, having gone ahead to scout out a trail. Michael had to leave the group on their own temporarily while he went

after the rogue student. After the situation was managed and the group and instructors were back together, Michael filled his Co in on what happened. His Co responded with validation, "That's intense. That stinks… This situation is stressful, and I could have done some things differently."

Instructors described feeling heard, seen, and supported when their Co was receptive to the instructor's feelings. Mai explained how a validating response from her Co helped her:

I want to just feel okay, what I'm doing is okay. Maybe I'm making mistakes but it's still okay. I'm supported and I'm heard. I tend when I'm stressed to be down on myself. To feel like I'm heard and supported is really critical and really helpful.

Cos provided a grounding perspective. Instructors (11 of 31) reported that Cos would sometimes help them to counter their emotional response by pointing out that the situation was not as bad as it seemed. In some instances, Cos reassured the instructor that they and the students were safe: "You're doing fine, we're still fine, they're still fine," or that "I'm a part of this too, and we're going to be okay. Everybody's all right," or "We're all safe, and we're still going to be able to make a good experience out of this." Other times, Cos helped instructors to see the situation in a new light or with fresh perspective. Paul's Co was able to find the humor in a potentially dangerous encounter. A black bear had visited half a dozen students' solo campsites before any of the students blew their whistles to notify the instructors. Paul said his Co helped him:

to go from, 'Oh my God half my group was almost just devoured by a bear,' to really seeing the sort of fun aspect of this thing. Because that's hilarious and the kids loved it. They were super-stoked about it and they were all fine.

His Co's approach helped him to "step out of the whole situation, and remember that it's all kind of wildly funny, how crazy it gets out there sometimes." In a lighter example, Justin admitted to having a skewed perception of the urgency of the situation. A storm was approaching while the crew was still on the water, looking for an acceptable campsite, and Justin was nervous that they would have to seek shelter in an unsafe place. "My Co-instructor said, 'Take your sunglasses off.' When I took my sunglasses off, the storm did not look as bad as I thought."

Cos were also effective at counteracting instructors' tunnel vision or insular perspectives that accompanied their stress response. When Erika's Co asked her, "What do you need help with right now?" she found it effective because it "allowed an open question … I had to think

about what I'm doing, like, how am I right now?" Michael shared how his Co helped him to consider his feelings in the moment. When he checked in with his Co:

> It gets me out of the situation. It gets me like a step back from the problem and by separating from it I can then be more present and more in tune with, "Okay now what's actually happening? Is there actually anything to be worried about? Okay probably not," and I can calm down and breathe.

Mai appreciated her Co's willingness to practice breathing techniques when they noticed one of them were stressed out. This helped her in the moment:

> My Co-instructor also was always, we both would be like, "Okay, let's take deep breaths." And just calm each other down. Just let go of all of the craziness and maintain presence to whatever moment we were actually in. That kind of experience was really grounding.

Cos distracted instructors from negative emotions. Cos sometimes (9 of 31) provided a welcome distraction for instructors experiencing stress. In these cases, the Co diverted the instructor's attention from their negative thoughts or emotions to something more enjoyable or light-hearted. For example, Evelyn and her Co would share a set of headphones and listen to audiobooks at night. She said this helped her "take my mind off the day and de-stress and not necessarily use that time to process everything because that can be a lot." Brynn commented that having a Co who could redirect made it so that she did not have to "always focus on work and the task at hand."

Humor was frequently mentioned as a distraction strategy. When Rebecca's Co used humor to "lighten the situation a little bit and help put things in perspective" even though "the situation might not seem like it called for it," she said, "his easy going lightheartedness was what I needed to lift some of the weight I was feeling." Similarly, Jacob said "we knew each other well enough that she knew what would make me laugh, and she knew that that was an effective way to make me feel better. So just referencing previous experience that we had together and using that to put me in a better mood." Paul shared that "humor—and being able to laugh at whatever it is that's happening—is a hugely important coping mechanism for me." He attributed this to the "mental, and physiological, and soulful benefits" of laughter.

Cos demonstrated acts of care for the instructor. Ariel asserted that it was "important to just feel cared for because a lot of times you're just trying so hard to care for everybody else."

Cos sometimes (9 of 31) demonstrated their care in very direct ways, by meeting the needs of instructors or using physical touch. Evelyn appreciated receiving hugs from her Co, which she saw as meeting one of her "higher basic emotion needs." Ariel was under such stress on one course that she began to get nightmares. She recalled:

> My Co-instructor would have to calm me down and he did this thing where I was in this dream, but I was sort of half awake, and he would calm me down by asking me totally a random different question to take my mind somewhere else. Like, "You look like you might need some foot powder. I have some here." And I'd be like, "No, I'm fine." And he'd be like, "Yeah, you are fine, we're good." Just talk me down.

Sometimes, when stress was all-consuming, it was helpful for Cos to directly give permission or order the instructor to take care of themselves. Margaret recalled a time where her Co tapped her out of a situation in a kind way:

> [She] recogniz[ed] I was stressed and in a caring way but a very direct way, looking me in the eye, touching me on the shoulder and saying, "Hey take a moment, step back, I got this." So, caring and engaging but firm like, "You gotta go." Pushing me out of the situation in a caring, firm way.

For Ariel, she remembered less serious but no less effective approaches by her Co who said "You take five more minutes at foot party. Sit there." And she recalled reciprocating, "We had to stop each other and be like, 'Sit there and eat your snickers.' Or, 'Sit there and dry your feet.' Or, 'Go take a look at that waterfall, I'm gonna have a snack, go do that.'" Food was a currency of care, too. James' Co saved him a snack to enjoy after a break, and Eden's Co shared "so many snacks. Our kids flew through their hot sauce, so we kept a secret instructor bottle of hot sauce. Having hot sauce to just put on your meal was just so good. Such a touch of home." In these ways, instructors demonstrated how much they cared for each other and provided comfort for each other amidst the harsh wilderness environment.

Cos modeled effective stress management. Instructors (8 of 31) recounted several examples of their Co approaching a stressful situation with a calm, level head, modeling a manner that reflected skillful regulation of their emotions. Seeing their Co have a more serene outlook often helped the instructor to quell their own emotional stress response. Justin was "very jumpy and jittery" and his Co "responded in a way that did not reflect any of my demeanor. She

was very calm, and it was very grounding for me." Rupert's Co "role-modeled a really effective, calming presence. Although he was probably feeling some of the stress from the situation, he didn't let that show." And Emily's Co was "very much a cool cucumber, was concise, level-headed, very thoughtful." Instructors appreciated the effect their Co's calming presence had on them. Lucas said:

> They were calm, they weren't reacting in a stressed-out way. That helped bring me down, seeing that they weren't also feeling this way, that they were feeling positive and they had a positive mental attitude, which helped me make a switch.

Andrew commented: "It's powerful to see people who are in charge of you be stressed and that they're aware of it and that they're proactive and managing it."

In employing any of the five strategies—validation, grounding, distraction, care, and calm—Cos provided instructors support to return their emotions to a place of stability that harmonized with those of their Co. These strategies highlight the important role Co-instructors play in helping to co-regulate instructors' emotions in times of stress. This also suggests that in the complex system of an OB course, the emotional connection between Cos and instructors can shape and be shaped by course experiences.

Problem-focused support. The third category of helping behavior was problem-focused support. To the extent that they could, Co-instructors worked to remove the burden of the situation that was causing stress or lessened the mental load of having to come up with a solution. When instructors' stress was overwhelming and encroached on their cognitive capacity, Cos provided immediate relief by tackling the problem on their own or alongside the instructor.

Cos took decisive action. When instructors were overwhelmed with a stressful circumstance, their Cos sometimes (9 of 31) provided relief by taking command of the situation and directing students and instructors in what needed to happen. This was especially effective when the instructor was feeling powerless or out of control or if the group was headed towards a dangerous scenario. When Margaret and her crew arrived late to an extra-buggy campsite and things were spiraling toward complete disorder, her Co was direct with the students:

> She was like a drill sergeant but in a nice way and she kept to that structure. She tried to normalize the situation and let them know that they are not just gonna go into a vortex of chaos. We are still gonna eat dinner tonight. We are still gonna have an evening meeting, [She] just had a strong, firm voice.

Margaret said that her Co was "so well versed in what to do and very directive that I could sit back and be the second in command."

Other times, Cos responded quickly and resolutely, with no room for discussion or debate. In response to the time-sensitive situation of seeking shelter from a storm, Jari's Co "knew that she needed to act." She immediately implemented the necessary precautions: "It wasn't like, 'Hey can you help me with this?' or 'I need you to do this.' It was like, 'We're getting into lightning drill. We know what we have to do. Let's do it. Let's do it now.'" When Freda's misplaced knife meant that students' bags had to be searched, she was devastated, believing students would think she didn't trust them. Her Co validated her emotional response but communicated very directly to her that "We just have to do it. It's going to be okay, but we have to do it." His matter-of-fact approach helped her to realize that "This is a situation that happened, and this is what we're dealing with now. It's not useful to dwell on the past or what the possible outcomes could be. We're just going to deal with this right now." For Freda, her Co's action-oriented approach jarred her out of the emotional dilemma she was struggling through.

Cos engaged in joint problem-solving with instructors. As described earlier, instructors could find decision-making stressful as they faced the responsibility for students' safety and care as well as their learning. When instructors (12 of 31) were able to share problem-solving with their Co, it could reduce some of the burden of this responsibility. Instructors "came together" and "talked through the plan," went "back and forth making decisions and how we were going to work through problems," and "br[ought] ideas together." Occasionally, a Co suggested that the instructors involve students in decision-making rather than make a call on their own. Justin's Co included students in solving the problem of where to camp, saying, "They can make that decision, fully knowing the consequences of if we had to do lightning drills in a less than ideal spot."

Having a Co to share ideas with, to check their thinking, or to generate new solutions made instructors feel less like the accountability was theirs alone. Cameron had the benefit of two Co-instructors on one of his courses. He said:

> Having the support of two other instructors is very helpful because you're not the
> only person who's dealing with it. It doesn't feel like you have the burden of all
> this pressure and all these things that are happening on your shoulders. It feels

like, "Cool. We have an issue and we're a team. We're gonna problem-solve the issue."

Likewise, Emily appreciated "never being expected to have all the answers just on your own. That is definitely what quells my stress."

These findings suggest that the process for Co-instructors supporting instructors to manage their stress included pre-conditions, access mechanisms, and response strategies. The process started with building holistic relationships, establishing patterns for open and honest communication, and communicating commitment to the instructor, the course, and Outward Bound. These relationship factors created favorable conditions that allow multiple mechanisms for instructors to access support from their Co. Supportive responses from Co-instructors usually took the form of providing time and space for the instructor to cope away from the group. Other helping responses included the co-regulation of emotions toward the Co-instructor returning to a stable emotional state, and problem-focused coping where the Co took control of the situation or worked together with the instructor to solve a pressing issue.

Chapter Six: Discussion

OB courses leverage physical and social challenges for youth's growth and learning (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Orson et al., under review; Walsh & Golins, 1976). Instructors play a critical role in facilitating this learning, but little research has examined what course experiences are like for instructors. I sought first to understand, from instructors' own perspectives, the ways that they are affected by stressful situations on course. Second, research has neglected to inquire about instructors' access to social support while on course. I wanted to understand how instructors come to rely on their Co-instructor for support during experiences of stress. To achieve these goals, I designed an interview to obtain in-depth guided narratives of stressful course situations in which instructors relied on their Co for support and analyzed the narrative data from 31 instructors using grounded theory methods.

This dissertation began with a vignette from Ariel who described the physical and emotional exhaustion she faced on course. Throughout Chapter Four, I contextualized Ariel's and other instructors' experiences of stress on course. I found new understanding about the situations and underlying role demands that create stress for instructors; the effects of stress on instructors' interactions with youth; relationship factors that contribute to instructors feeling comfortable accessing help from their Co-instructor; and the ways that Co-instructors provide support to instructors for managing stress. I have introduced the ways that instructors interact with the complex, interrelated, and dynamic components of the interpersonal system of a course as they experience and manage their stress. This chapter extends these findings by relating them to one another and to the research to describe the underlying sources of stress for instructors and explain how Co-instructors can serve as a major source of support. I conclude with recommendations for the important role that organizations can play in preparing instructors for their role and providing Co-instructors support in mitigating the stress of their paired instructor.

Sources of Stress

This study indicates that instructors' stress develops from a combination of the situational conditions and role demands that they face on OB courses. I found that instructors encountered numerous stressful situations on course, and often multiple at the same time. The categories of stressful situations that I identified—unsafe and unpredictable weather and terrain; student behavior, thoughts, and feelings; and stress pileup—were closely tied to students' experiences on course. For example, Tim was "terrified" by the harm unpredictable windstorms might create for

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students, and Freda was worried that she wouldn't be able to convince the resistant boys on her course to take measures to get warm when conditions were "prime for hypothermia." The centrality of students to instructors' named stressors suggests that instructors' perception of stress was influenced by their internalization of the OB mission and the demands of the role. In the sections below, I first take account of how instructors internalized the mission of OB and their role in enacting that mission. Then, building on this premise, I demonstrate how incongruence between instructors' expectations of their role and their performance lead to stress. Throughout, I consider the tension between the positive, motivational forces of organizational and role identification and their potential to lead to stress.

Instructors internalized the OB mission and their role. This study indicated that OB instructors deeply identified with the organizational mission of OB and their role in enacting it. I extend these findings to suggest that instructors' internalized commitment to the work led them to fully engage in their role. The engagement of their whole self in their work, combined with the 24-hour nature of the job, created conditions that could amplify stressful encounters on course.

First, instructors' explanations for why they experienced stress on course suggested that instructors internalized the mission of OB ("to change lives through challenge and discovery"). This parallels with Balfour and Wechsler's (1996) concept of identification commitment and helps us understand how connection to the OB mission resulted in instructors taking their role very seriously. Their accounts emphasized how deeply they cared about the students, the program, and each other. Most instructors (25 of 31), when asked *What do you most enjoy in your experience as an instructor?* named things centered in student's learning and growth, such as "seeing students changed," "tangible growth," "seeing a spark that comes alive," or the way courses "profoundly re-shape the way that [students] think about themselves, and about each other, and how they can relate to each other." Research suggests that nonprofit employees appreciate opportunities their organizations provide for them to realize their personal altruistic values (Akingbola & van den Berg, 2019; Brown & Yoshioka, 2003). Instructors reported enjoying being able to share in students' growth and learning on course. At the same time, I argue that instructors' commitment to OB's mission of changing students' lives influenced their perception of the importance of their role and added pressures that could lead to stress. Ultimately, instructors were aware of the potential impact OB courses could have on students' lives and recognized that they played a large part in whether that potential was actualized.

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Instructors viewed themselves as directly enacting OB's mission, evident in the centering of students' experiences in their descriptions of stressful situations.

Second, findings indicated that instructors' stress appeared to be associated with their commitment to the obligations associated with the role of OB instructor, namely, to keep students safe, provide them with opportunities to learn, and to maintain control of the course. Taking a group of students into the wilderness for any number of days is inherently risky, and instructors hold the bottom line responsibility for student safety and care while on course. They continually assess the environment for potential harm that can come to students, including dangers in the environment and those created by students. The mitigation of risks to student safety, however, is juxtaposed with the potential for student learning and growth through the experience of challenge on course. Instructors strive to make the course meaningful for students, which often stems from students overcoming some degree of discomfort or struggle to achieve their "Outward Bound Moment" where they realize they can do more than they imagined they could. My analysis of instructors' descriptions of stressful situations suggested that they understood the expectations of their role, which had been established over the almost 70 years of OB programming. I contend that this acceptance is akin to processes described in role theory, (Biddle, 1979; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), in which individuals assume the socially constructed expectations for behaviors within the context of a role. Individuals who identify strongly with a role may incorporate core features of the role into their global identity or self-concept (Ashforth, 2001).

A final explanation for instructors' experiences of stress suggested by the data is that instructors' identification with the OB mission and the associated expectations of their role led them to fully engage with situations they encounter in their work. Kahn (1990) defined engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). Akin to feelings of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh, & Nakamura, 2014) and intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1975), engagement captures a person's full expression of themselves through enacting a role. Engagement is generally understood to be a positive condition, and it has been linked to productivity and job satisfaction (Akingbola & van den Berg, 2019; Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010; Saks, 2006). However, my findings suggest that OB instructors—who, due to the nature of

OB courses, are not able to take a break from their role for the duration of the course—may experience stress from sustained engagement. Instructors described feeling overwhelm, anxiety, frustration, and self-doubt during experiences of stress. During situations where multiple stressors piled up, instructors experienced exhaustion and mental overload. In this way, internalization of the mission and engagement with the role may explain some of the underlying causes of instructors' experiences of stress.

Incongruence with role expectations contributed to instructor stress. The findings suggest that stress often resulted from dissonance between instructors' expectations of themselves in their role and the realities of course experiences. In this section, I explore three ways this imbalance manifested for instructors in this study: role strain, vicious cycles, and protective buffering. These thought and behavior patterns could produce instructor stress.

In my analysis, I showed how the expectations of the role weighed on the minds of instructors as they led their courses, which contributed to their stress and took an emotional toll. I attributed the expectation that instructors will keep students safe to instructors feeling anxiety in anticipation of danger and self-doubt and guilt about decisions they made. Similarly, I found that expectations that youth will learn and grow due to experiences on course led instructors to feel at times powerlessness or disappointment when students missed a chance at a powerful learning opportunity either due to their own actions or a choice of the instructor. For many instructors we interviewed, their inability (real or perceived) to meet these expectations of their role—what Goode (1960) referred to as role strain—was an underlying source of stress. Pearlin (1983) argued that role strain associated with occupational roles could lead to deep concern because we are socialized to invest in these roles. The subjective experience of role strain depends on how dearly the expectations are held, and the value an individual associates with performing the role. I argue that OB instructors who internalize the OB mission and see their role as enacting that mission are more likely to encounter role strain when they feel that they are not meeting those expectations.

I also found that the inverse was true: stress made it difficult for instructors to meet the expectations of their role. Instructors who were stressed described feeling the absence of positive encounters that typically distinguish OB courses. They were less inclined to connect with youth on a personal level, felt that they inadequately supported youth's learning, were impatient with students, or were unable to enjoy students' company and have fun on course. Generally, stress

could translate to unfriendly or unproductive instructor interactions with students. Leaders reported that these clouded interactions could create a vicious cycle; instructors who identified strongly with their role might interpret these adverse experiences as being reflective of their failings as an instructor, which could compound their feelings of stress.

Lastly, some instructors felt they had to suppress or deny their feelings of stress to keep the focus of the course on the student experience, not their own, or to not burden their Co with their needs. They perceived an expectation to maintain control of the course, and when faced with a reality that left them feeling powerless, some instructors opted to conceal their stress. Coyne and Smith (1991) identified behaviors such as hiding concerns, denying worries, and yielding to the partner as *protective buffering*. The participants in their study—couples where one partner was facing severe health issues—used protective buffering to avoid disagreements, and thus not upset the unhealthy partner (Coyne & Smith, 1991). With OB instructors, protective buffering might more commonly be employed to maintain perceptions of the instructor being in control and being knowledgeable, especially to avoid the spread of panic among students. However, instructors' denial of their feelings of stress might lead to deleterious effects for them, their Co, or the students. If the source of the stress is not addressed, it may only intensify, and the impacts could be felt throughout the course system. An instructor worn down by stress might be more prone to lash out at someone else or act in ways that have a negative impact on the group. In this way, protective buffering could be part of a vicious cycle with contagious effects that increases feelings of stress and loss of control rather than reduces them.

In sum, instructors take their work personally and seriously. This commitment and dedication are part of what makes OB courses so powerful for youth, but they can also be an underlying source of instructor stress. The more an individual commits to the organization's mission, and integrates the role into their identity, the more salient the meanings associated with the role become to the individual (Burke, 1991). This could lead them to experience greater distress when they behave in ways incongruent with the role or the mission. These disruptions may lead them to doubt their effectiveness or qualifications for the role. Over time, chronic exposure to stress can result in burnout (Maslach et al., 2001), forcing talented instructors out of the field. Fortunately, OB has established organizational norms, including the pairing of instructors with a Co, that may help to protect instructors from stress overload.

Co-Instructors' Role in Helping Instructors Manage Stress

Scholars contend that the mere perception that support is available can reduce stress in individuals (Dunkel-Schetter & Bennett, 1990). This study indicates that not only the presence of Co-instructors, but their skilled and sensitive responses provided needed support to instructors experiencing stress on course. In this section, I elaborate on two sets of findings. First, instructor pairs relied on relationship factors to establish conditions that were conducive to instructors accessing support from their Co. Second, Cos were sensitive and responsive to instructors' experiences of stress.

Investment in relational factors led Instructors to feel open to support. Instructors' accounts indicated that they worked with their Co to establish conditions where they felt open to seeking or receiving support when they needed it. Analyses identified three relationship factors that were important to establishing an environment conducive to support-seeking. First, instructors invested with their Co in building trusting, holistic relationships, where they learned about each other's lives outside of OB. Second, they established and reinforced open and honest communication patterns, including regular and impromptu check-ins where they were invited to share their emotions and challenges they were facing. Third, Co-instructors voiced and demonstrated their commitment to the instructor, the course, and OB, which helped to reinforce the instructors' own commitment to the same. The presence of these conditions alone could reduce instructor stress, which is supported by long-established research findings that show the buffering effects of perceived social support on stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985). The absence of these relationship factors, however, could contribute to instructor stress and decrease the likelihood that the instructor viewed the Co as a possible source of support.

For simplicity, my analyses have described the support instructors received from Cos as unidirectional. We asked instructors only about the support they have received, not the support they have provided to Cos. But it is important to note that instructors emphasized the reciprocity of both receiving and providing this support to each other within the relationship. Organizational norms at OB (e.g., pre-course planning meetings) support the development of this positive culture between instructors. A future study might explore how instructors view their role as providers of support, and how instructor pairs manage when they are both experiencing stress. This study provided evidence that Cos are mutually able to support each other on course without getting into a quid pro quo.

Co-instructors can be effective at detecting stress and responding to it. The relationship factors described above influenced the ways instructors accessed help from their Co. Some instructors directly and proactively asked their Co for help during a stressful situation or regularly scheduled check-in times. For some instructors, their self-awareness of their feelings of stress or its effects on their behavior could initiate a control system (Burke, 1991): their contrary behaviors with students provided them feedback that spurred them to address their emotional state by reaching out to their Co. Other times, Co-instructors initiated the control system and interrupted instructors' vicious cycles. They used verbal or nonverbal stress signals from instructors to identify when an instructor's stress was affecting their functioning and would step in to disrupt negative patterns of thought or behavior. In instructors' accounts, more than half of the instructors described their Co expressed concern and used intuition and built relationships to identify signals that the instructor was stressed. This sensitivity is similar to what has been identified in research on couples as dyadic coping (Bodenmann, 1997a; Bodenmann et al., 2011) and has been described as a reciprocal and interactive process where each partner takes the other's experiences into account as they react to stress.

Co-instructor support took many forms, and I categorized these actions into three groups: providing time and space for instructors to cope, co-regulation of emotion, and problem-focused support. I found that most often, Cos stepped up to lead the group so that instructors could step back to manage their stress. The momentary relief afforded by Cos allowed instructors to disengage from their role and provided instructors with the space to regroup mentally and emotionally. Removing the burden of leadership for even a short time allowed instructors to engage in coping strategies that relieved their stress. Though this response was indirect, it was effective. Instructors described being able to return to the group after a break with a renewed energy. The benefits were amplified when instructors built time alone into their daily or course routines.

Cos also provided support by co-regulating emotions with the instructor. Researchers define co-regulation as a bi-directional exchange where two people influence and stabilize each other's emotional responses (Butler & Randall, 2013). By inviting instructors to share their emotions and discuss the causes and effects of these emotions, Cos engaged in helping instructors return to a stable and functional place where they were able to better support student development. I identified five strategies for emotional co-regulation by Cos: Cos validated

instructors' emotions and stress responses; provided a grounded perspective; distracted instructors from negative emotions; demonstrated acts of care for instructors; and modeled effective stress management. These co-regulation strategies had parallels to the concept of active engagement introduced by Coyne and Smith (1991), which includes involving the partner in discussions and inquiring about the partner's feelings. O'Brien and Delongis (1996) designated similar behaviors in their concept of empathic responding, which includes taking the partner's perspective, interpreting their feelings, and sensitively responding to the partner's needs. Co-instructors helped to co-regulate emotions by being attuned to instructors' emotions and engaging them in conversation or activities that facilitated expression, diffusion, or processing of their emotions so that they could return to their purposeful work.

The third category of Co-instructor responses was for Cos to confront problems head-on by taking decisive action or engaging in joint problem-solving with the instructor. This problem-focused support has been included in O'Brien and Delongis' (1996) concept of active engagement. OB trains and prepares instructors to assess and respond to a wide range of problems in a variety of ways. By engaging in joint problem solving, they simultaneously respond to the situation, attend to youth's distress, and support each other.

The data suggest that Co-instructors are effective at helping to relieve the stress of instructors on course. They have multiple strategies at their disposal, which they can adapt according to circumstances and the needs or preferences of the instructor. On OB courses, where instructors face relative isolation from their usual systems of social support, Cos become an immediate and relevant potential source of support. Therefore, investment in holistic relationships and communication patterns becomes essential to instructors feeling comfortable to access help from their Co. The findings further demonstrate that Cos were active and responsive partners who reacted sensitively and compassionately to instructors regarding stressful situations on course. The effectiveness of this support may be, in part, because it helped to address instructors' underlying sources of stress. Cos' actions might help an instructor to recalibrate their expectations and thereby reduce role strain; interrupt a vicious cycle by validating the instructors' emotions or grounding the instructor with the reassurance that they and the students will be ok; or break down the walls of protective buffering that prevent the instructor from engaging with their stress.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations for Outward Bound. Outward Bound was selected for this study because of their extensive history and intentionality in their professional development of Instructors. They currently implement practices that encourage Co-Instructors to support each other through stressful experiences on course. These include pre-course pairing meetings, especially discussions of "Consistencies" and approaches to stress management; the experiential, apprenticeship model used to train Instructors; and extensive off-course training in youth development. My recommendations are for OB to enhance these practices based on my findings.

I suggest three ways OB can incorporate the findings into their Instructor training. First, the descriptions of stressful situations could be shared with Assistant Instructors to expose them to a range of possible stressors they may face. This can potentially help to remove some of the stress of not knowing what newer Instructors might feel. Second, Instructor pairs might use these descriptions as scenarios to discuss during their pre-course pairing meetings. Rather than discuss stress abstractly, Instructor pairs could analyze a specific situation and discuss how it might make them feel and what they might do in response. Finally, I recommend that OB integrates the findings on helping response strategies—especially those for helping to regulate emotions—into their Instructor training. These strategies can then be discussed explicitly during pairing meetings, with Instructors sharing their preference for strategies they have found to be effective. However, it is important to recognize that the set of strategies identified in this study are certainly not exhaustive, and Instructors are likely to continue to add effective emotion-focused strategies to their inventory.

I also suggest supplementing pre-course pairing meetings with planning for the provision of personal time and emotional check-ins. The most frequent helping response was for Cos to allow for their Instructor to step back and away from the group for a short amount of time. Instructor pairs can plan for when and how they might build in time apart on their upcoming course. Findings also highlighted the importance of frequent communication that allowed Instructors to share their emotions. They can plan to have daily check-ins that focus not solely on the student experience, but the instructors' experience and associated emotions.

Finally, I recommend that OB engage in a broader, organization-wide discussion about the pressures of the role of Instructor. I suspect that many Instructors are not consciously aware of the ways their investment in their role and with the organization may shape their perceptions

of their performance and be an underlying source of stress. Giving Instructors a platform to discuss their experiences off-course with other Instructors may help them to manage their expectations and minimize role strain.

   Recommendations for other youth-serving organizations. Because OB is a youth program with a unique context, it is useful to consider how the findings of this study may be relevant to instructors in youth programs in more traditional contexts (e.g., afterschool and community programs). First, there may be some limitations on the types of programs to which these findings apply. Very few other programs require instructors to be engaged 24-hours a day or to endure harsh environmental conditions. However, many programs engage youth in challenging, project-based work that can lead to strong emotions for youth and adult program leaders. I would argue that any program where there is potential for strong emotions as youth work through challenges that can lead to their development can find implications from this study.

   This study provides a strong case for the value of pairing instructors to lead a group of students. I have shown the ways the mere presence of a committed Co-instructor can reduce the stress instructors experience on course, and how Cos can be sensitive and empathic to instructors during stressful situations and their fallout. A supportive Co-instructor can also increase an instructor's social ties to the organization, thereby strengthening their commitment and reducing chances of turnover (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

   Other youth-serving organizations could benefit from a model that pairs adults to co-lead groups of youth. A study of eight exemplary youth programs whose missions involved youth's social and emotional development[5] found that each of these programs employed a deliberate and intentional Co-instructor model (Smith et al., 2016). Smith and colleagues (2016) found that the pairing of instructors allowed leaders to be able to share and process the emotions that arose for them as a result of working with youth through challenging situations. Together, these studies make a strong case for pairing instructors for their work with adolescents—difficult and delicate work that requires finesse and bravery. Teachers, youth program leaders, social workers, and others engaging in youth-serving work may benefit from the addition of a cooperative partner. Access to another individual who has intimate knowledge of the burdens and stressors of the role, as well as a personal connection to the individual, could serve as a major source of support.

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[5] One of the programs in this study was Voyageur Outward Bound School.

However, these fields are faced with chronic issues of underfunding and under-professionalization that make it difficult to enact a policy that would increase the size and associated expense of the workforce. Still, I argue that the work program leaders do with youth to help them to learn to process and manage their emotions requires an investment in those leaders' development as well.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

This exploratory project considered a topic that has not been well-researched: the stress experienced by instructors who work with youth, its implications for their effectiveness in that work, and the ways Co-instructors support each other to manage and alleviate that stress. In-depth narratives provided rich first-hand data from instructors to examine these phenomena. I provided descriptions, interpretations, and processes that can serve as the basis for future work. This study also faced limitations.

First, asking for specific examples where instructors had experienced stress and were supported by their Co provided nuanced and complex situations for analysis. However, I did not collect data to be able to assess how often instructors access help versus not when experiencing stress. Second, though this study explored the relationship between Co-instructors, the design did not use Co-instructor dyads as the unit of analysis. A future design could ask Co-instructors to describe experiences from the same course to corroborate or possibly contradict each other's accounts. Third, it relied solely on retrospective self-report, which is an imperfect measure of the stress response. Future studies could collect physiological data on the stress response experienced on course paired with a diary to capture more timely information about the stressors that contributed to the reaction. However, there are trade-offs to this method, and substantial resource demands for implementation.

Finally, this study did not directly examine the power dynamics that may contribute to instructors' experiences of stress, including their role as Assistant or Lead Instructor as well as instructor or student characteristics such as gender, race, and socio-economic status. Preliminary data on these topics were collected during interviews, but not analyzed for this study. Future research should consider the ways power dynamics affect not only instructors' experience of stress, but their willingness to seek support from their Co.

Conclusion

      This dissertation contributes to our understanding of the stress experienced by OB instructors on course. The rich descriptions of the causes and effects of stress emphasize how instructors' dedication to their work might simultaneously motivate them and contribute to their perception of certain situations as stressful. In the stories that instructors shared, they came to rely on their Co-instructor for support through trusting and open relationships that they invested in before and during the course. These relationships resulted in Co-instructors being able to respond with relevant and sensitive support to instructors experiencing stress.

      My qualitative analysis of instructors' experiences of stress and Co-instructors' roles in supporting them is an important addition in the field of adolescent development. By focusing on the well-being of the adults who work with youth, we can create better experiences for the youth they serve. This dissertation provides ideas gleaned from Outward Bound for how organizations can support their most valuable assets to do their best work with youth.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

* Indicates items that can be skipped if time is short.

In this section, I'll ask you about the stress you experience on course as an instructor. We know that stress is a part of <u>all jobs</u>, and that Outward Bound instructors are <u>not immune</u>! But we also suspect <u>you've figured out ways</u> to deal with your stress. Let's start by talking about stressful course experiences you've had.

A. Stressful Situations (5 minutes)

1. What situations on course create the most stress for you?
    a. [*Probe*:] Why was that stressful?
2. [*Ask Lead Instructors only*] Do you find different situations stressful as a Lead Instructor compared to when you were an Assistant Instructor?
    a. What accounts for these differences?

B. Analyzing one Stressful Situation 20 minutes)

SELECT EXAMPLE
Next, I'd like you to pick <u>one example</u>. I have <u>two criteria</u> for choosing this example. I'd like you to share a situation in which (a) the stress was enough that <u>it became difficult for you to function</u>, <u>and</u> (b) your <u>Co-Instructor helped you</u> in some way to manage your <u>feeling of stress</u>.
[Pause for reflection]
[Note: We are looking for examples of emotion-focused coping, not problem-focused coping. If they provide an example that is focused on resolving the situation, probe for one that is more focused on "feelings of stress."]

DESCRIPTION OF SITUATION (7 min)
3. When you're ready, can you tell me about the stressful situation?
[Allow instructor to tell the story, ask clarifying questions only as needed.]
    a. What was stressful about this situation?
    b. What emotions were you feeling in response to the situation?
    c. Were there things aside from the situation that contributed to your stress?
        AW: For example, maybe the weather, your thoughts, or your interactions with your Co-Instructor played a role.
    d. I understand that you do "Consistencies" or pre-course planning meetings with your Co-Instructor. Was there anything you discussed that was helpful in this situation?

EFFECTS ON PERFORMANCE (3 min)
4. How did feeling stressed affect your functioning on course?
    a. [*If not mentioned*] How did feeling stressed affect your ability to relate to youth and support their learning?

COPING (3m)
Next, I'm going to ask you about how you dealt with the feeling of stress – First, how you coped on your own, and second, how you relied on your Co-Instructor. Here I'm <u>not</u> as interested in how you <u>solved the problem</u> or situation causing you stress, I'm more interested in the <u>emotion-focused</u> coping you did.

5. a. How did you cope with your feelings of stress in this situation?
       AW: Is there anything you did <u>in your head</u>, or on your own to calm your mind or address the feeling of stress?
       [Stay focused on emotion-focused coping]
    b. What coping strategies did you draw on from your previous work experience or training to manage your feeling of stress? How well did they work?
    c. * What self-care practices do you typically adopt on course?
       i. Were you doing [things just mentioned] on this course?

RELYING ON CO-INSTRUCTOR (7 min)
We know from previous interviews with OB instructors that the Co-Instructor relationship is central to a positive course experience.
6. In this situation, how did your Co-Instructor help you to manage your feelings of stress, not just solve the problem?
    a. What was effective about what they did? Why was it helpful?

    b. How did your Co-Instructor know that you were experiencing stress?
        i.   [*If instructor responds "I told him/her"*] How did that conversation go?
             OR
        ii. [*For all other responses*] Did your Co-Instructor offer help? If so, how did that go?
        [Probe to understand what led the instructor to seek help in this situation, rather than manage it on their own.]

    c. What made it harder or easier for you to get help from your Co-Instructor in this situation?

        Thinking about your broader experiences,
        i.   How might <u>power dynamics</u>—such as those related to gender or Assistant v. Lead—affect your seeking support?
             1. * [*If not mentioned*] Do you have a brief example?
        [Go with whatever power dynamic they select – don't need to probe for both.]

        ii. Can you give an example of a time where you didn't approach your Co-Instructor for help during a stressful situation?
             1. * [*If not mentioned*] What prevented you from doing so?

TAKE-AWAY

7. * To wrap up this section, what are your thoughts on how Co-Instructors can <u>best communicate</u> and help each other with feelings of stress?

    a. * Are there things that Outward Bound could do to better support Instructors with stress management?