ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF MOTIVATION, PARTICIPATION AND COMMITMENT AT ADVENTURE CENTRAL, A 4-H AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore adolescents’ membership experiences at Adventure Central, a 4-H after-school program. Adolescents’ reasons for joining the program, continuing to participate, and the extent of their commitment to the program were examined. In addition, the youths’ perceptions of possible barriers to attending the program and ideal after-school program characteristics were explored.

The participants’ perceptions were fundamental to answering the research questions, therefore, a descriptive approach was designed. In addition to a portion of a quantitative survey, qualitative interviews and focus groups were utilized. The convergence of these three methods added strength to the study by providing a multiple method triangulation. As well, two peer reviewers reviewed the data analysis for reliability.

Seven youth, all members of the same group, qualified as participants in the study. There were five girls and two boys ranging in age from 11 to 13 years old. Each participant had been attending Adventure Central for at least one year.

Several themes emerged pertaining to why adolescents joined and continued to participate at Adventure Central. Adult encouragement and
program opportunities (specific activities and homework assistance) were the two main themes that emerged for joining Adventure Central. For continued participation, these themes were expanded to include a caring relationship with an adult, academic assistance, the environment of the program (physical and psychosocial), additional program opportunities, fun, friends, learning, and character development. In relation to characteristics of an ideal after-school program the environment, academic assistance, fun, and life skills emerged as themes. Examining crosscutting themes related to joining, continued participation, and an ideal program, academic support emerged as a theme in all three questions. Other themes including the environment, adult support, fun, and program opportunities, cut across two of the three research questions.

In addition, barriers to participation were identified. The themes that emerged included individuals’ perceptions of the program, other activities outside of the program, and personal responsibilities outside of the program. Adolescents indicated a high sense of commitment to the program. They conceived of commitment as a promise, spending time, belonging, attending, and staying dedicated to the program.

Specific activities and experiences were cited as reasons youth established and maintained their membership at Adventure Central. Aspects of these same activities and experiences may also lead to potential barriers to participation in the future. Exploring and utilizing the youths’ interests in
programming may be a way to address these barriers and to further increase the adolescents' sense of commitment to Adventure Central. Implications for practice and future research are also offered.
Dedicated to my parents for without their love and support all my life I would not be where I am.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2002 4-H Youth Development’s 100\textsuperscript{th} birthday was celebrated. 4-H has maintained its vibrancy all of these years through the adaptability of the program. From corn clubs to Victory Gardens, community clubs to 4-H in the classroom, the program has strived to meet the needs of youth and their positive development (Van Horn, Flanagan, & Thomson, 1998). Today 4-H is continuing the tradition of adapting to support youth needs via partnerships with other organizations in order to expand programming. In Ohio, and around the country, 4-H after-school programs are being established. One such program is Adventure Central in Dayton, Ohio. Its conception was an attempt to meet the needs of the community’s youth.

One major audience of youth development programming is adolescents. To develop successful programming for adolescents, their needs must be understood. Adolescents are often portrayed in a negative light and stereotyped by the media. Understanding where adolescents are coming from and what they want is the first step in designing, implementing, and evaluating youth development programs.
The “storm and stress” years of adolescence are a common way teenagers are portrayed in American society. Hormones raging, reckless behavior, and self-imposed isolation from adults are stereotypes associated with adolescents. Despite this portrayal, most adolescents navigate the “storm” of adolescence with little trouble (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

Beyond the stereotypes and misconceptions, adolescence is a time of change: physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and psychological. Young bodies rapidly changing and growing, the desire to develop intimate relationships with peers, and experimentation and a search for identity are all characteristics of adolescent development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Family, peers, school, and community all provide supports for adolescents during this period of change. Community-based youth organizations are one kind of these supports.

Adolescence is also a time of choices for teenagers. Adolescents are allowed more freedom in their daily activities. With freedom, adolescents have a richer selection of choices to make; this differs from the simple days of childhood. One of the choices adolescents make is what to do with their out-of-school time. Extracurricular activities, sports, clubs, recreational facilities, non-supervised activities, being alone, and community-based youth organizations are just some of the possibilities a youth may choose to do in after-school hours. What youths choose to do with their free time, in part, is a question of motivation, access, and availability.

There are 17,000 of these community-based youth organizations and programs in the United States as recorded in 1990 (Quinn, 1999). Each
organization has its own mission and philosophy for reaching its youth
development goals. Educating about a specific issue, providing a safe place,
and teaching life skills are examples of different goals of organizations serving
adolescents. No matter what the method of the organization, a common goal
exists: producing healthy, happy adults for the future. For any of the
organizations to be even somewhat successful in reaching their desired program
outputs, at least two things must happen: (a) youth must come to the program
and (b) they must keep coming back. In order for organizations to do this, the
leadership must understand what youth want and need. Youth organizations
have a trend of losing adolescent membership (Quinn, 1999). Because
participation in such organizations is voluntary, if they are not satisfied, “Youth
vote with their feet,” reports Quinn (1999). Youth programs that do not meet
adolescents’ needs and interests will not maintain the adolescents’ participation
in the program.

While it is important to know why adolescents drop out of youth
organizations, it is also important to know why the youth who stay do so. What
kind of relationships do these youth have in the program? Do the communities in
which youth live affect their choices? What kind of programming is being done
that draws the youth back? What can program leaders do to ensure the retention
of organization membership?

In their Safe Havens report, Gambone and Arbreton (1997) examined
three questions about the participation of youth in after-school programs
sponsored by the Boys and Girls Clubs, Girls Incorporated, and the YMCA. The
authors summarized whether “developmental” settings attracted a diverse group of youth, whether youth spend enough time in these programs to contribute positively to their development, and what types of positive structure and unstructured activities draw youth to the program. The researchers found that participating youth were receiving benefits from the programming. Leadership opportunities, social support from adults, challenging and interesting activities, belonging, input and decision-making, and safety all were highly represented in why youth were participating in the different programs. They contended that it was a crucial to determine a way for youth development organizations to document the extent to which they were effective in achieving their goals of positive youth development (Gambone & Arbreton, 1997).

4-H after-school programs like Adventure Central have yet to explore why children and adolescents are joining and staying in the program. It is important to understand why children and adolescents are joining, staying, committing to after-school programs, or why some youth are not. It is also necessary to investigate potential barriers to attending a program that might exist for an adolescent. Now, and in the future, this information will form foundations for programming and assist programmers in maintaining the youth they have in the program. Documenting the implementation of the program is a necessary step to enable an understanding of factors that influence program outcomes (King, Morris, & Fitz-Gibbon, 1987).
Problem Statement

With all programming, there is a need to measure and evaluate what the programming is accomplishing. Blyth (2000) challenged Extension to ground programming in real practices that can contribute to a research base for future work. Quinn (1995) also discussed the lack of structured research in positive youth development. While this has changed for some organizations, the 4-H Youth Development research base still needs to be strengthened. In addition to a national study (National 4-H Impact Study, 2001), large statewide investigations have been conducted on the effects of 4-H participation in Montana (Astroth & Haynes, 2001) and New York (Rodriquez, Hirschl, Mead, & Goggin, 1999). These studies show that youth participating in 4-H are having positive outcomes. More needs to be done, however, especially on new programs reaching expanded audiences.

This study was proposed as a step in meeting this need. Youth were questioned in quantitative surveys, qualitative individual open-ended interviews, and a focus group. Several topics were addressed, including: motivational reasons for joining, why they continue to participate at the program and what is involved in committing to Adventure Central. The potential barriers to participating in the program were explored in addition to identifying what youth want in general in after-school programming. By talking to the youth, I hoped to discover common themes in their answers and identify the basic reasons why adolescents are motivated to join and commit to youth-serving organizations.
Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to answer the following questions:

1. What motivation factors contribute to adolescents joining the 4-H Adventure Central program?
2. What factors contribute to continued participation in the Adventure Central program?
3. What kind of program do adolescents at Adventure Central want to participate in?
4. What participation barriers are present at Adventure Central?
5. What contributes to or detracts from adolescent' extent of commitment towards Adventure Central?

Definitions

The following terms used in this study were defined as follows:

1. **Youth development** is “the ongoing growth process in which all youth are engaged in attempting to (a) to meet their basic personal and social needs to be safe, feel cared for, be valued, be useful, and be spiritually grounded, and (b) to build skills and competencies that allow them to function and contribute in their daily lives” (Pittman, O'Brien, & Kimball, 1993, p. 8).
2. **Positive youth development** is when adolescent needs are met in a socially acceptable way in which youth receive healthy supports from family, peers, school, and community (Pittman, O'Brien, & Kimball, 1993).
3. **Youth development organization** is an organization that meets the needs of young people by offering programs with a variety of active program options,
emphasizing social group experiences, and providing individual attention and counsel (Walker, Dunham, & Snyder, 1998).

4. **Motivation** is the driving force in making a decision to do something (Lechner, 1992).

5. **Participation** is being involved in an activity (Lechner, 1992).

6. **Program commitment** is “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular program” (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979, p. 226).

6. **Belonging** is the need humans have to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

7. **Mattering** is “the opportunity to be efficacious and to make a difference in their social worlds” (Eccles & Gootman, 2002, p.103).

8. **A caring relationship with an adult** is the youth/adult interactions at Adventure Central.

9. **Magnets** are the program’s recruitment resources and dynamics, including incentives and perceived rewards, that attract children and youth (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, Fallara, & Furano, 2002).

10. **Hooks** are the program resources (e.g., a caring youth leader and advocate) and dynamics (e.g., having fun), that serve as incentives and rewards and are responsible for retention (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, Fallara, & Furano, 2002).

11. **Glue** is the social bonding mechanisms provided by the program and the organizational setting (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, Fallara, & Furano, 2002).
12. **Barrier** is a deterrent to participation. Barriers may be structural or psychosocial.

13. **4-H** is a nonformal youth development program of the Cooperative Extension Service that reaches youth in a variety of venues including project clubs, after-school programs, and classroom programs (Van Horn, Flanagan, & Thomson, 1998; Snider & Miller, 1993).

14. **Adventure Central** is a 4-H based after-school and summer program serving inner-city youth in Dayton, Ohio.

15. **Club** is generally a small, flexible group of young people formed within the framework of larger sponsoring organizations (Walker, Dunham, & Snyder, 1998).

**Assumptions**

The following assumptions were identified at the onset of the Adventure Central study.

1. Participants will share true thoughts and feelings about the questions asked in the different data collection methods.

2. Multiple methods of data collection will contribute to the study’s credibility.

3. The developmental properties of participation as experienced by youth in youth development activities can be measured (Gambone & Arbreton, 1997, p. 5).
Limitations

The following were identified as possible limitations in the study:

1. The number of participants is small; therefore, an appropriate data collection method or methods must be selected.

2. The study is limited to Adventure Central adolescents; generalizations from this study cannot be applied to other youth development organizations.

3. There is a possibility of subject mortality, that is, some participants will leave the program between data collection points.

4. There is a potential for maturation between the two data collection points that might be responsible for producing the responses.

5. There is a potential for history (experiences) between the two data collection points that might be responsible for producing different responses between the collection points.

6. An instrumentation limitation is that some measures were designed for the study; therefore their psychometric properties are not established.

Significance of the Study

The interest in out-of-school programs is at an all time high (Ferrari, 2002). Beyond parental concern, there has been growing interest in after-school programs by schools; youth development professionals (both private and public sectors), the general public; and local, state, and federal government (Miller, 2001). Factors affecting this swell of attention to programs are in part due to the alterations taking place in the field of after-school programs. There is a greater
awareness of need from the public for after-school programs to provide a safe environment for youth. In addition to a recognized need, the potential benefits of after-school programs have been examined such as preventing youth from getting in trouble and providing opportunities for positive youth development. Also, there has been an increase in public support, an increase in funding for programs, and an increase in the number of programs nationwide. After-school program research is also becoming more in depth by focusing on outcomes rather than descriptive research questions (Ferrari, 2002). In the competition for funding, identifying what outcomes are occurring because of a program is becoming more important. In addition, the experiences leading to these outcomes must be understood.

This study is significant because it attempts to examine Adventure Central’s adolescents in an in-depth manner to provide information that will be beneficial to that organization now. Data on why the youth joined the program, why they continued to participate, the extent of their sense of commitment to the program, and possible barriers to participation will provide direction to the leadership of the organization as to what kind of programming is needed for the future. In addition to the direct benefits to Adventure Central, this study will be one more piece to the jigsaw puzzle of understanding what motivates adolescents’ participation in youth development programs. While the information cannot be generalized directly to other youth development programs, the data revealed may support current models, and provide future researchers with other concepts to further investigate.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter contains a discussion of the literature relevant to adolescent developmental needs. The role of positive youth development and the environment in which it occurs will be examined. The importance that positive social contexts in youth development organizations can have in development will be discussed. The role youth organizations, especially after-school programs, can perform in positive youth development will be reviewed. 4-H Youth Development will be discussed in its relation to meeting youth needs through after-school programs. The theory of belonging will be investigated in its relation to youth participation. The concepts of caring relationships with adults and mattering will also be examined. Ideas and theories of youth participation, motivation, and commitment to an organization will be explored. Finally, Adventure Central, a relatively new facility-based 4-H after-school program, will be examined as the context of the study.

Adolescent Developmental Needs

All people have basic needs. Pittman (1991) lists the following as basic needs for youth: the need to feel safe and have structure, the need to belong or have group measure, the need to have a sense of self-worth and control over
one's life, the need to have relationships or a sense of closeness with others, and
the need to have a sense of competence or mastery of skills and self-awareness
finish the list of basic needs.

Youth will search for ways to meet their basic needs any way they can, although some ways may be less socially acceptable than others. The availability of sufficient positive supports (e.g., family, school, peers, and community) will, in part, determine if positive or negative development will occur (Pittman, O’Brien, & Kimball, 1993). In addition to the basic needs that Pittman identified, other researchers have suggested different domains or competencies that assist in youth development. Developing initiative, leadership, and citizenship; exhibiting compassion and character; exploring possible vocations; developing a connection or belonging with others; and forming of positive identity are all considered important to positive youth development (Benson & Saito, 2000; Larson, 2000; Pittman, 1991; Roth, 2000).

Youth development continues from childhood through adolescence. Pittman, O’Brien, and Kimball (1993) define youth development as the continuous growth process in which all youth are engaged in attempting to (a) meet their basic personal and social needs to be safe, feel cared for, be valued, be useful, and be spiritually grounded, and (b) build skills and competencies that allow them to function and contribute in their daily lives.

While still having basic needs that must be met, adolescence is a time of developmental transitions, or the critical junctures in a youth’s life between childhood and adulthood (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). For the first time,
adolescents are faced with learning to cope with sexual maturity, gaining new independence from parents, forming a personal identity, shaping values, and dealing with the pulls of experimentation (Konopka, 1973). These challenges often occur simultaneously. Eccles & Gootman (2002) identified additional adolescent challenges that include the development of intimate relationships with peers, adaptations to different educational environments, and possible first jobs. In addition to the trials commonly associated with adolescence, youth today also have a difficult world to live in. Peer pressure, drug and alcohol pressures, crime, work, getting into college, and the tumultuous state of the world are just a few of the stressors adolescents face every day. While each one of these issues can be challenging individually, adolescents are often accosted by all of these variables at the same time. This is not to suggest that the stereotypes of adolescents as hormone-driven heathens are true. Rather, during this time of change, providing additional supports to adolescents can be helpful to their successful development.

**Models for Understanding Youth Development**

Positive youth development is particularly important to adolescents. Positive youth development is a long-term view of helping youth reach their potential. Unlike common youth-at-risk programs that concentrate on a specific issue or problem, the youth development approach considers the individual and how to establish and maintain life skills (Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992; Gambone & Arbreton, 1997). Gambone & Arbreton (1997) reviewed theories and research to determine that the following developmental experiences are needed for
positive youth development: sense of safety, challenging and interesting activities, sense of belonging, supportive relationships with adults, leadership, input and decision-making and community service. The authors found support in the literature for the idea that adolescents who received these experiences would later develop into mature, responsible, skilled, and competent adults. One way to examine the different aspects of positive youth development is ecological models.

**Ecological Models**

A youth’s environment is an important factor in his or her development. Blyth (2000) paraphrases a remark of Pittman stating, “Youth development is the result of the accumulation of the everyday people, places, and possibilities that youth experience” (p. 6). Pittman’s idea demonstrates Bronfenbrenner and Morris’s (1998) ecology of developmental processes. In Bronfenbrenner and Morris’s (1998) model every part of an adolescent’s environment affects the development of that young person. School, family, friends, neighborhood, and government are all examples of different environments that play a role in the development of an adolescent. The interactions of the different environments and the youth’s interactions with those environments are strong forces affecting the youth’s development. Those environments in which the youth participates directly, what Bronfenbrenner calls *microsystems*, are thought to have a greater impact than those that are more removed. In these microsystems youth participate in different experiences and build relationships that can affect their development.
Stewart (2001, p. 119) suggested that “in order to foster successful development, there must be a good ‘fit’ between the demands and resources of the environment and the needs of the individual.” To help youth find the “good fit,” an understanding of the interaction between the adolescent and the environment must be established. Addressing the situation with an ecological approach is one way to investigate the connection between youth and their environment. The developing youth and his or her environment are intertwined. There is a reciprocal relationship between the person and the environment; that is, the environment affects the youth’s development, while the youth affects the environment he or she is in. This interaction or proximal process may be positive or negative for the youth’s development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

In every situation an adolescent enters, four factors influence how the child will be affected. The process or how the youth and the environment interact, the characteristics of the developing youth, the environmental contexts the youth interacts with, and the time the adolescent spends in the environment are all key in how development will evolve for the youth (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner & Morris (1998) state that the interactions must become more complex in order to be a force for development. Therefore, the environments in which youth spend their after-school hours, what they do during that time, and their interactions with peers and adults within those environments are important for their development.

The concepts in Bronfenbrenner & Morris’s (1998) ecological model are compatible with those of the social development model. Hawkins and Weis
(1985) developed the social development model, using elements from control theory and social learning theory. They proposed that youth’s interactions with family, school, peers, and neighborhood that positively reinforced wanted behaviors would support a positive community for youth.

The elements of control theory -- commitment, attachment, and belief -- play a strong role in the social development model. In addition, social learning theory describes how a youth learns specific behaviors and how these behaviors are maintained. Hawkins and Weis (1985) suggest that if youth are given the opportunities for involvement and interaction in their community, then it is these positive behaviors that will be reinforced. The youth will form a social bond with his or her community and will not commit delinquent acts (Hawkins & Weis, 1985).

The key point of the programs suggested by Hawkins and Weis (1985) revolves around providing a positive environment for youth that assists them in making positive decisions. For such programs to be successful, it is essential that positive communities are cultivated for youth. The people in the adolescent’s life form his or her community. Parents, grandparents, siblings, teachers, principals, bus drivers, friends, older youth, police, community workers, neighbors, and anyone else who touches that adolescent’s life can help provide a web of support that can be monumental to that adolescent’s success in life. It is paramount that youth receive this positive support. It is also important that programs are developed to help the adolescent and his or her family, school, and community establish and maintain these supporting relationships. Community
organizations can be an important part of an adolescent’s environment. By joining youth development organizations adolescents can receive additional support for their development.

Several models related to understanding positive youth development have been described here. Overall, similar themes are repeated throughout these models of what positive youth development needs to accomplish such as the importance of youths’ outside supports to their positive development. These models are useful in helping to determine what is needed for a positive youth development experience. Understanding and utilizing the models is helpful for youth development organization program planning. However, for any of these organizations to accomplish their goal of positive youth development, a youth must be reached.

**Youth Development Organizations**

A youth development organization is an organization that meets the needs of young people by offering programs with a variety of active program options, emphasizing social group experiences, and providing individual attention and counsel (Walker, Dunham, & Snyder, 1998). There are many different youth organizations that serve teens. For example, 4-H, Scouts, religious youth groups, Boys and Girls Clubs, Girls Incorporated, and the YMCA and YWCA were all developed to serve youth. While all of these groups may have different programming methods, one thing remains the same -- they all provide youth with an opportunity to develop life skills and provide youth with developmental supports. Clubs, drop-in programs, and after-school programs are examples of
youth development programs that are providing opportunities for youth. For the purpose of this research after-school programs will be examined in greater detail.

**After-School Programs**

In recent years, interest in after-school programs has been on the rise (Ferrari, 2002; Halpern, 1999; Miller, 2001). Interest in after-school programs is increasing for a number of reasons. Many American families have a need for after-school care. In addition to private sector funding, local, state, and federal governments are responding to the need with more funding than ever before (Miller, 2001). Three different approaches to after-school programming include: school age child-care, youth development, or educational programs. As described by Miller (2001), these after-school programs can have different major goals, accountability, staffing, and funding sources depending on their approach. While the need for after-school programming has been established, the kind of programming that should be occurring is still up for debate.

While the kind of programs being offered varies, attracting youth to these programs, engaging them, and retaining the youth are issues that every program faces. Membership in these organizations is voluntary. Finding and developing programming youth want to participate in and need for positive youth development is necessary for organizations to reach their intended audiences. Research to help identify these issues is necessary for programs to serve youth. One youth development organization that has entered the field of after-school programming is 4-H Youth Development.
4-H Youth Development

One hundred years ago 4-H began with the goal of developing youth into productive citizens in the field of agriculture. Today 4-H Youth Development’s goal is still to help develop successful young adults with the life skills they will need. Developing adolescent’s head, heart, hands, and health has taken many turns over the years (Van Horn, Flanagan, & Thomson, 1998). As one way to accomplish this goal, 4-H is currently undertaking after-school programming. This is being accomplished in a number of ways such as providing training and materials to other after-school programs that are already established, providing educational and technical support to community programs that want to start a program, and after-school 4-H Youth Development programs that are managed by the Extension staff (Ferrari, 2002).

While 4-H is establishing some after-school programs the general public does not recognize it as an after-school programmer. Recently at the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents Annual Conference Towards Building a Stronger 4-H “Brand” was presented (Clancy, 2001). This study examined the perceptions of 4-H today and where 4-H needs to go tomorrow. The study revealed that while 4-H was a recognized brand in rural and urban areas, it had higher recognition in rural areas. The study also revealed that while 4-H is associated with agriculture, it is “perceived as being similar to other youth development organizations in our country” (2001, p. 41). While 4-H was recognized as a youth development organization, its presence as an after-school program body was not, thus identifying a need to further explore youths'
experiences in 4-H after-school programs. After-school programs are a relatively new program delivery model for 4-H. Research examining these programs will allow 4-H to raise public perceptions of 4-H after-school programs.

To utilize 4-H Youth Development as a model for after-school programs, a basic understanding of what 4-H programming is trying to accomplish is necessary. Participating youth in the National 4-H Impact Impact (2001) identified the following 10 outcomes as important: knowledge and skill, self/well-being, friends, self-responsibility, activity, other relationships, engagement, community service, and leadership. The 4-H Youth Development model of the eight critical elements is a way to address the outcomes. The elements include a positive relationship with a caring adult, a safe environment (physically and emotionally), an inclusive environment, an opportunity for mastery, the opportunity to value and practice service to others, an opportunity for self-determination, an opportunity to see one-self as an active participant in the future, and engagement in learning (National 4-H Impact Study, 2001). Overall, the study revealed that youth in 4-H programs shared a strong sense of belonging to the organization. In addition, they also believed that adults in the program cared about them. 4-H members in clubs and school enrichment programs responded more positively to the concepts than the after-school group. The researchers believed this may be because after-school programs may have multiple activities that are not all 4-H based. Further research is needed to better define the relationship of 4-H and after-school programs. In addition, further study of youth experiences in an after-school setting in relation to the
eight critical elements is needed. Ohio 4-H is currently undertaking the
development of a tool to measure presence of these elements in programming

Beyond national and state research, a 15-state study researching
Extension after-school programs has been conducted. The researchers
interviewed adults who interact with the participating children, including school
teachers, principals, and program staff members. The adults reported improved
social behavior in the children, reduced problem behaviors, improved academic
behaviors, and increased interest in activities (Riley, Steinberg, Todd, Junge, &
McClain, 1994). This research relied on the perceptions of adults working with
the participating children. Further research could examine the youth’s views
about an after-school program. Overall, more research needs to be done to
further understand the experiences leading to outcomes of 4-H after-school
programming.

**Barriers to Participation in Youth Development Organizations**

Creating and maintaining a successful youth development program
depends on how the program’s leadership is able to fruitfully culture an
environment of acceptance and belonging. Even the most effective youth
development program staff must recognize possible barriers to participation in
their program and plan accordingly. Compared with younger children,
adolescents have a possibility of a larger selection of choices they can make
about their activities. If they do not find what they want in a situation they will
“vote with their feet” (Quinn, 1999) and move on to something else. Youth
program leaders need to be familiar with the potential organizational barriers that may inhibit youth participation.

One major barrier influencing a program’s success is lack of participation. A program cannot induce change in a system if no one attends. Lack of participation can be due to a variety of reasons, and these barriers can exist in two general forms: (a) a structural barrier or (b) an internal barrier. A structural barrier can either be a problem with an activity or a external problem outside of the youth. Planning activities that do not interest the adolescent audience, poor quality programs, the time the activity is offered, lack of community interest, lack of transportation, cost, and competing activities are among the reasons that a youth may not choose to or is unable to participate (Hobbs, 1999).

Internal barriers exist in people or in their perception of a program. One of these barriers can be ineffective adult leadership. Astroth (1996) observed the leadership styles of various adult teen group leaders. He found the effective group leader was firm but flexible in his or her leadership style. Astroth quotes one leader about an effective meeting:

> A really good meeting is one where the business gets done, but anyone who wanted to say something had that chance. There can be fun, giggling, joking, but the meeting gets done. It’s not so strict by Robert’s Rules that no one has fun, but not so loose that it’s chaos. (p. 3)

Adult leadership that is unchallenging, overcontrolling, and disempowering is an ineffective style for adolescents. Adult leadership styles are similar to the parenting styles researched by Maccoby and Martin and discussed by Steinberg (1990). Authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and indifferent parenting styles
encourage different responses in youth. These styles differed on two dimensions. Parents using the authoritative style make demands on the youth but are also responsive to what the youth thinks and says. The authoritarian style is demanding but not responsive to the youth. The indulgent style is not demanding but is responsive, while the indifferent style is neither demanding nor responsive to youth needs. Astroth’s (1996) study revealed that authoritarian, indulgent, and indifferent leadership styles would lead to disinterest in adolescent participants. This disinterest could become a barrier to the youth continuing to participate in a program.

Elements of Community Programs

Belonging, caring relationships with adults, and a sense of mattering all interweave with each other in a positive youth development environment. If one of these elements is missing, the other two may not occur to their full potential. Below each element is examined individually then discussed in relation to how the three work together.

Belonging

The need to belong is a theory discussed by Baumeister and Leary (1995). The authors examined the historical perspectives of the need to belong and recent related empirical studies. From this review, they developed a hypothesis related to the need to belong: “Human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497). Furthermore, two criteria were determined for successful belonging: (a) the
interactions with people must be frequent and pleasant, and (b) the interactions must be stable and enduring.

Beyond establishing relationships with individuals, relationships and a sense of belonging with organizations or a community may also be established. Indicators of the need to belong to organizations and community also follow Baumeister & Leary’s (1995) criteria. That is, the interactions must still be (a) frequent and pleasant, and (b) stable and enduring. The difference is the sense of belonging is established with the environment of the program or community as a whole rather than with just an individual. Following an ecological perspective, the environment would include the physical environment, as well as the activities, interactions, and relationships that occur within it.

A sense of belonging can be fostered with youth via the symbols of an organization. These symbols, or the organization’s brand, show the world that the youth has a connection with a specific organization. Membership cards, pledges, t-shirts, and mottos are all examples of organizational symbols that connect the youth to the organization. Youth may also develop a sense of belonging to an organization if they have met a specific requirement to belong. All of these symbols help create an identity for the organization and an identity for the youth participant (Anderson-Butcher & Fink, 2001). Developing organizational identity, or brand, is a way organizations can draw youth and volunteers to a program and then to help keep them there (Clancy, 2001). Youth must understand and relate to an organization in order to develop a bond with it.
The term community is sometimes defined as “a group of people whose members experience feelings of belonging, trust in others, and safety” (Osterman, 2000, p. 323). Osterman’s (2000) review of empirical research pertaining to the sense of belonging or sense of community in schools revealed common themes in much of the research. One of the most dominant themes was the role of the teacher in creating a sense of belonging. In most of the studies that Osterman (2000) reviewed, when students believed their teacher cared for them they did better in the area that was being examined. A parallel can be drawn between teachers helping to develop a sense of community in an environment to adult leaders in youth organizations helping create the same sense of community (Astroth, 1996). In this instance, a sense of belonging is related to a caring relationship with an adult.

**Caring Relationships with Adults**

Establishing a caring relationship with an adult is a common goal for many youth organizations. Osterman (2000) cited a relationship with a caring adult as a support for youth success. Mentoring studies have shown similar outcomes especially with youth in a mentoring relationship for a year or longer (Rhodes, 1999). Astroth’s (1996) study observed that youth who thought the adults cared about them and what they thought believed the adults were more effective leaders. Mentoring activities, camps, sport teams, academic enrichment programs, and internships are all examples of youth development programs where the partnership between youth and adult are essential to the program (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Eccles and Gootman (2002) maintain that
appropriate adult supervision and supportive relationships are essential to
developing a positive youth development program. Adults also are instrumental
in helping a youth feel like they matter to a program.

Mattering

Successful adolescent programs consider the need for mattering in youth.
Mattering is “the opportunity to be efficacious and to make a difference in their
social worlds” (Eccles & Gootman, 2002, p.103). If youth feel they do not matter
in a program they are not going to continue to participate (Quinn, 1999). In some
organizations including adolescents in the leadership of the group is one way to
address mattering. Adolescents need encouragement to help direct their
program. Eccles & Gootman (2002) discussed one of the features of positive
developmental settings as support for mattering. Youth need opportunities to
feel like they matter to a program. They need to have say or contribute to the
experience. Long-term programs such as 4-H and Scouts provide additional
challenges through changes in programming for their adolescent members. By
doing this the youth are still being challenged for continued development (Eccles
& Gootman, 2002). For example, a participation study revealed that youth
perceived their continued participation in the 4-H program was because they felt
they had opportunities for responsibility in the program and they worked with
younger members (Norland & Bennett, 1993). These opportunities provided the
adolescents with a sense of mattering to their program.

The concepts of belonging, a caring relationship with an adult, and
mattering are related to each other. For example, a youth who feels a sense of
belonging to a program has had experiences that have encouraged the feeling. This may be because the youth has a caring relationship with an adult at the program. It could also be the youth feels a sense of mattering because he or she is included in making decisions about the program, or it could be a combination of both. Similar examples can be given about developing a sense of mattering or a caring relationship with an adult with their connection to belonging. These concepts also play significant roles in why adolescents chose to join, participate in, and commit to organizations.

Motivation, Participation, and Commitment
Youth organizations must have youth in the program to begin to accomplish their goals. A discussion of what adolescents need to join, participate, and commit to programs follows.

Motivation
Motivation has been defined as a driving force in making a decision to do something (Lechner, 1992). What the driving force is determines whether the motivation is extrinsically or intrinsically based. Extrinsic motivators are “performed not of interest but because they are believed to be instrumental to some separable consequence,” while intrinsic motivators are described as Those that are “for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from their performance” (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991, p. 328). Self-determination theory helps to understand why people decide to join activities. “Choice, acknowledgement of feelings, and opportunities for self-direction were found to enhance intrinsic motivation because they allow people a greater feeling of autonomy” (Ryan &
Deci, 2000, p. 70). It is important to adolescents to make choices about what activities they chose to do. Autonomy is a recognized aspect of self-determination theory. Relatedness is another aspect of self-determination theory. “Relatedness, the need to feel belongingness and connectedness with others, is centrally important for internalization,” according to Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 73). Aspects of autonomy are related to gaining a sense of mattering. Youths who are allowed to make choices for themselves may feel they have a say in their world, thus fostering a sense of mattering. In addition, relatedness has ties to belonging and relationships. Viewing the concept of relatedness this way connects the concept to a sense of belonging and forming relationships (in the case of adolescents relationships with adults). Therefore, concepts from self-determination theory can be used to understanding youths’ motivations to join an organization.

Youth may join a program for various reasons. What draws the adolescent through the door is referred to as a magnet. Magnets are the recruitment resources and dynamics, including incentives and perceived rewards, which attract or motivate children and youth to join a particular program (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, Fallara, & Furano, in press). These magnets may be either intrinsic or extrinsic motivators. Youth may be interested in a specific activity the program offers, there may be a tangible reward for joining, or the youth may feel relatedness to some aspect of the program. Whatever the magnet is, it encourages the youth to initially attend the program. Whether or not
a youth chooses to continue to participate in a program is in part related to the hooks of the program.

**Participation**

For the benefits of a youth development program to take effect youth must participate in the program. Participation is defined in Lechner (1992) as being active in an activity. One way to describe what maintains a youth's participation in a program is referred to as a *hook*. Hooks are the program resources (e.g., a caring youth leader and advocate) and dynamics (e.g., having fun) that serve as incentives and rewards and are responsible for participation and retention of youth in a program (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, et al, in press). Research shows that for youth development to occur, understanding what youth do while they attend programs is necessary (Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Ferrari, in press). Sustained participation is needed to assure that youth are benefiting from the program (Quinn, 1995). Different factors affect the adolescent’s desire to participate in a program. Unstructured recreational activities described the common mode of participation at a Boys & Girls Club (Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Ferrari, in press). Participation in youth organizations has also been attributed to decreasing risky behaviors and increasing positive ones (Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Ferrari, in press; Quinn, 1995). Another study suggested that a sense of belonging to a program was important for participation (Anderson-Butcher & Fink, 2001). Youth with a higher sense of belonging to a program were more likely to continue to participate. Overall, determining what
youth want and forging a connection with them are important factors in contributing to youths’ participation in a program.

**Commitment**

Program commitment is defined as "the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular program" (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979, p. 226). The concepts of belonging and participation play a crucial role in the development of commitment. This is recognized in Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, Fallara, and Furano's (in press) concept of *glue*. Glue is the social bonding mechanisms provided by the program and the organizational setting to build commitment in the group's participants.

Commitment in adolescents has been examined best in the sports literature. The sports commitment model is an evolving process reviewed by Weiss and Ferrer-Caja (2000). The model was created to examine what elements are needed to commit a youth to a sports program. Five concepts were examined in various studies: sports enjoyment, involvement alternatives, personal investments, social constraints, and involvement opportunities. In these different studies, youth who reported high sports enjoyment, personal investments, and involvement opportunities also reported high commitment to the sport program. This work provides some insights into what needs to be included in a program to build a sense of commitment in youth. Further, Schilling’s (2001) study examined commitment in an extended day program for youth that used an athletics format. In this study, using a relatively small number of participants, Schilling’s (2001) analysis used interviews and focus groups to uncover what
elements were needed to foster a sense of commitment in the program's youth. Schilling (2001) revealed that program organization, personal characteristics, relationships in the program, and the program environment all had a role in the development of youth's commitment to the program.

Commitment is also being recognized as an element for continued participation in other youth development organizations. Norland and Bennett (1993) reported commitment to an organization was a reason youth continue to participate in 4-H programs. While the idea of commitment is being raised by youth when asked about their program experience, the research about this topic needs to be strengthened. The concepts of participation and commitment research in 4-H programs are at an early stage of development and has not been examined from a theoretical perspective. A large gap exists in the literature about commitment in 4-H, especially related to after-school programs.

The concepts of hooks, magnets, and glue have been proposed as one way to examine if an organization is providing adequate motivation for membership, participation, and commitment to stay with a program (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, et al., in press). In examining the literature, specific themes have stood out throughout the review of the concepts of motivation, participation, and commitment. The concepts of a sense of belonging, a caring relationship with an adult, and a sense of mattering have been connected as reasons youth join, participate in, and commit to programs.
Adventure Central is an after-school program developed in partnership between the Ohio State University Extension 4-H Youth Development and Five Rivers MetroPark. The program was established in October 2000 to provide youth ages five to eighteen a positive youth development setting within an after-school facility in. The program serves approximately 50 youth, most of whom are African-American youth. There is a cap set on the number of children in the program, in order to maintain program quality and keep the adult/child ratio low. The youth are organized into five different groups, based on age and maturity level, ranging from a kindergarten class to the teen group. Adventure Central directors utilize both paid staff and community volunteers to operate the program daily. The structure of the program provides the youth with social time, a snack, homework assistance, and activity programming. The Adventure Central program currently serves the youth members from 2:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday during the school year.

For the older youth, the program has established leadership opportunities. During the summer adolescents may participate as teen assistants for the summer camp at Adventure Central. They assist with the planning and implementing of the different activities that occur during the program. Another leadership opportunity is the Youth Board. The Youth Board is a philanthropy group, which distributes funding to other youth development organizations in the community. These youth attend special meetings outside of the regular program time. The youth must apply to participate in both of these activities.
Summary

In conclusion, positive youth development is a driving force in youth programming today. Utilizing youth development models and strategies is a way to begin developing programs for youth. However, programs need to be able to attract youth to the program and engage their interests. These are the first steps of establishing bonds with the youth. A youth development program can only be successful if it is serving youth. Potential barriers must be considered and addressed. In addition, youth interests must be considered in program development.

The increased interest in after-school programs has led to an increase of programs and availability of funding for these programs. Developing after-school programs that will best meet the youths’ wants and needs is important. 4-H Youth Development is one of the organizations developing after-school programs. Research involving these programs needs to be strengthened. Early research largely categorized descriptive elements of after-school programs (Ferrari, 2002). It is also important to begin to identify why the youth are there. Understanding why the youth are choosing to attend a program will help program leaders use this information in their program planning. In addition, Schilling’s (2001) study relates how a sense of commitment to a program can also maintain membership. Schilling’s study provides a foundation for examining commitment in an extended day program with a youth development framework. Research related to the concept commitment has not occurred in 4-H programs nor in 4-H after-school programs.
Understanding how in general the magnets, hooks, and glue of a program work will enable support for successful future in after-school program development.
CHAPTER 3
METHODS

Design and Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to characterize the reasons adolescents joined, participated, and became committed to Adventure Central. In the study, what Adventure Central adolescents want in an ideal youth development program and what barriers are posed to adolescents in participating in youth development programs were also explored. Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (2002) discuss the differences between qualitative and quantitative research, and how to best chose a method of study. Qualitative and quantitative research design both have strong and weak points. At the foundation of the study the researcher must decide what type of methods will best address the research questions (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). Because the participants’ perceptions were fundamental, a descriptive study design was chosen. Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (2002) note that the perceptions of the participants are best reported in words so a qualitative approach was necessary. Determining descriptors for the population was also important in the study design. Therefore, quantitative methods were utilized to provide empirical strength to the findings.
Survey information could provide initial descriptors of the adolescents, but would not be able to capture what the youth were thinking and feeling about the different concepts, nor would it allow for clarification of their perceptions. Therefore, the primary method selected for this study was individual interviews. An individual interview technique would provide an opportunity to probe deeper into what the youth thought and felt about Adventure Central. By utilizing Patton's (1990) standardized open-ended interview technique, I was able to develop a systematic set of questions to better understand youth's membership experience at Adventure Central. A standardized open-ended interview technique assures that each participant is asked the same questions, but the opportunity for the youth to discuss what they think and feel about the program in their own words is also assured.

In order to design a credible and reliable study triangulation methodology was used. A portion of a quantitative survey was used; qualitative interviews and focus groups were also utilized. The convergence of the three methods added strength to the study by providing a multiple method triangulation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000), demonstrated in Figure 3.1. In addition, to assure reasonable data analysis of the interview and focus group data peer reviewers were used. Peer reviewers are second parties who have a general knowledge of the topic. After the data are sorted into themes, the peer reviewers examine the same information. They determine whether the way the data were coded was reasonable (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002).
Participants

Fourteen adolescents participating at Adventure Central in November 2001 composed the initial population of this study. In the literature there were no definitive criteria that determine when a child becomes an adolescent. Physical, emotional, and psychological factors all play a role in a youth’s development, but development proceeds at different rates in different domains. A youth may not achieve development in every domain at once (e.g., he or she may be physically mature, but lagging behind in social development). For the purposes of this study the youth were at least 11 years old in November 2001 to be considered an adolescent. At time of the initial data collection there were eight 11-year-olds,
one 12-year-old, and five 13-year-olds ($M = 11.79$) participating at Adventure Central. Seven of the adolescents were female and seven were male.

The participant group was modified in May 2002 for the second phase of data collection. Five youth older than 11 withdrew from the program prior to this collection point. In addition, when reviewing the adolescents who were still participating in the program it was decided in a committee meeting that only the members of Group 5 would be interviewed; this eliminated two additional adolescents. Participants in Group 5 are the oldest at Adventure Central. However, maturity is a greater deciding factor than age to be a member of this group. The adult staff has to feel that a youth is ready to cope with the extra responsibility and freedom the group has. Limiting the participants to those in Group 5 insured that the study participants had taken part in similar experiences in the program.

Applying these three criteria -- that youth (a) were still in the program, (b) had completed the survey in November, and (c) were a member of Group 5 at Adventure Central -- seven youth qualified as participants. There were five girls and two boys ranging in age from 11 to 13 years old. The mean age of the group was 12.42 years. The youth were African American and in the sixth, seventh, or eighth grade in school. Each participant had been attending Adventure Central for at least one year.
Instrumentation

Interviews

The primary method of data collection used in this study was a one-on-one interview with the adolescent participants in the program. Open-ended questions were modified from Schilling's (1999) study of an extended day program. The interview schedule included questions about why adolescents joined, why they still participated, if they felt committed, what they wanted in a youth development program, and what barriers existed to their participation at Adventure Central. These questions are included in Appendix A.

To assess commitment, the adolescents were asked to indicate their level of commitment to Adventure Central and their perception of overall commitment of the other members of Group 5. They were shown a 10-inch line drawn on a piece of paper with one end representing high commitment to the program and the other end representing no commitment. They were asked to mark their own and Group 5's commitment on this line. To compare relative placement, the line was evenly divided into 1-inch increments and the closest numerical value was assigned to each mark.

A field test was conducted to identify possible problems with the interview questions. Two members of Adventure Central’s Group 5, who had not completed the survey and therefore were ineligible to participate, were interviewed. Confusion in wording of the questions, the order of the questions, and words in the questions that the youth did not know were identified and appropriate changes were made to the interview script.
**Focus Groups**

The secondary method of the data collection was a focus group. Following Krueger's (1998) recommendations the focus group was designed to assure the participants' comfort and understanding of the process. A copy of the introduction script is included in Appendix B. The seven youth who were interviewed were brought together for a focus group discussion. Similar to the interviews the adolescents were asked open-ended questions (Patton, 1990). The open-ended questions were used to provide the adolescents an open platform to begin the discussion. This encouraged the youth to discuss whatever they thought was important. These questions were either follow-up questions to the interviews or were member check questions (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). The follow-up questions were used to explore further statements made by the participants during the interviews. The member check questions were used to examine the creditability of the researcher's analysis and to look for other insights that a group discussion may provide. A complete list of interview questions is provided in Appendix C.

**Survey**

The secondary method of instrumentation was the selection of specific items from a larger, close-ended survey. The selected items from the survey were chosen because of their relationship to the research questions. The items concerned belonging, sense of mattering, caring adult relationships, and motivation to join the program (Appendix D). These items reflected important themes from the youth development literature. All items were reported on a 4-
point scale (NO, no, yes, YES) replicated from Arthur, Pollard, Hawkins, & Catalano (1997).

**Belonging and commitment.** The adolescents were questioned about their sense of belonging to Adventure Central. A five-item scale developed by Anderson-Butcher and Conroy (in press) was modified slightly to describe the adolescent's sense of belonging at Adventure Central. For example, the adolescents responded to items such as “I feel comfortable at Adventure Central” and “I am supported at Adventure Central.” This belonging scale has been shown to be valid (Anderson-Butcher & Conroy, in press). The Cronbach's alpha for this scale for the entire group of Adventure Central sample (n= 43) was $\alpha = .74$.

A specific question on the belonging scale asked simply if the adolescents were committed to Adventure Central. This question was examined separately to help describe the youths' commitment to Adventure Central in combination with the qualitative data.

**Caring adult relationship.** Adolescents were questioned about their attitudes of having a positive relationship with a caring adult at Adventure Central. Six items were used to form the scale for this concept (Anderson-Butcher, 2001; Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996). Example questions from the scale include “I am with adults that care about me at Adventure Central”, and “I trust the staff here at Adventure Central.” The scale reliability for the overall Adventure Central sample (n=43) was $\alpha = .76$. 

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**Mattering.** A specific scale to measure an adolescent’s sense of mattering was not included in the original survey. However, among items included in the original survey, it was possible to construct a conceptual scale to examine this concept. A review of the literature suggested that mattering included opportunities for mastery and engagement in learning. Five items were selected to represent the conceptual mattering scale (Anderson-Butcher, 2001; Gambone & Arbreton, 1997; National 4-H Impact Study, 2001; Ohio 4-H Youth Development, 2002). Examples included “I get to explore my own interests at Adventure Central” and “I have been recognized for learning or achieving at Adventure Central.” This scale was only used with the seven participants so no alpha was calculated.

**Reasons for joining.** Adolescents were questioned about their reasons for attending Adventure Central. They could check multiple responses, which provided an opportunity for them to give a variety of possible reasons for why they joined the program. From a total of 12 responses including: “parents made me,” “tutoring,” “fun things to do,” “friends at Adventure Central,” and “like it at Adventure Central.”

**Data Collection**

Approval for the study was obtained from The Ohio State University’s Institutional Review Board. Written permission was obtained from the parents of all of the participants for all parts of the research using the forms provided in Appendix E. Adventure Central staff assisted in obtaining parental permission by including the permission packet as part of the quarterly membership drive.
information. In addition, at the time of each collection date the participants also gave verbal assent. The assent scripts for the survey, interview, and focus group are available in Appendices F, A, and B.

**Individual Interviews**

The individual interviews were conducted in May 2002 over a two-week period. During the regular program time adolescents who meet the criteria for inclusion in the study were interviewed individually in a separate room at Adventure Central. I asked each adolescent a series of questions related to their participation in Adventure Central. I also asked additional questions concerning kinds of commitment to Adventure Central and barriers to participation that might be present. The interviews were tape recorded for accuracy. Each interview was approximately 20 minutes in length. Interviews were conducted until all seven adolescents had been questioned.

**Focus Group**

Following the interviews, the focus group was conducted in May 2002. All seven youth that I had interviewed were members of this group. The group was convened at Adventure Central during the regular programming time. I asked questions regarding accuracy of the initial interview analysis at this point to assure validity. Additional follow up questions from the interviews were also asked at this time. The focus group lasted approximately 45 minutes. The process was tape recorded and an assistant took notes for accuracy.
Survey

The survey data were collected as part of a larger study of the program. In November 2001 a three-part survey was distributed to all the youth participating at Adventure Central. The survey was given during the youth’s group program time at the facility on three separate days over a three-week period. The adult staff in each group assisted the youth in completing the surveys. In cases were the youth did not understand words in the survey or could not read well an adult assisted the youth with the reading. It took each youth approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete each section of the survey. See Table 3.1 for a summary of the data collection process.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Date Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Obtain quantitative data about motivation to join and commitment to membership items: Part 1, 2, &amp; 3</td>
<td>November 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Obtain adolescents perceptions about Adventure Central: general program, special programs, and the adults.</td>
<td>May 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obtain adolescents thoughts on why they joined Adventure Central.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obtain adolescents thoughts on why they remain at Adventure Central.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obtain member's definition and descriptions of commitment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obtain adolescents thoughts on possible barriers to attending Adventure Central.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obtain adolescents views on what an ideal youth development program should include.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Reliability check of the interviews.</td>
<td>May 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow up on information gained in the interviews.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Schilling, 1999
Data Analysis

*Interviews and Focus Groups*

The qualitative interviews and the focus group interview tapes were individually transcribed. From the individual interviews, repeated themes were examined. The transcripts were analyzed using a process called open coding discussed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The open coding technique allows the researcher to place similar themes into categories utilizing the properties and the dimensions of the themes. Themes were searched for in an inductive manner. The raw data for each question were reviewed on a line-by-line basis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Two individuals knowledgeable about youth development were enlisted as peer reviewers and were provided with the raw data along with the my interpretation or explanation of its meaning. The reviewers were asked if, given the evidence presented, they consider the interpretation to be a reasonable one (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). My graduate advisor addressed any disagreements in the coding process. One point of clarification was requested from a peer reviewer this was addressed by clarifying the distinction on between why the youth said they joined versus what they perceived as reasons adults encouraged them to join the program.
Survey

Scales of belonging, caring relationships with adults, and mattering were created and examined. Item means and scale means for the scales were calculated. This information was used to describe the adolescents of Group 5 at Adventure Central.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Analysis of the data from the surveys, interviews, and focus group is presented in this chapter. First, when the information was available quantitative survey data frequencies were used to provide a background of the adolescents' experiences at Adventure Central in relation to the research questions. The interviews and focus group data were used to describe the adolescents' perceptions of Adventure Central for each research question. The research questions addressing why adolescents joined, why they continued to participate, and what their ideal youth development program would include were compared together. Survey data were available for research questions pertaining to why the youth joined the program, why they continued to participate, and what was the extent of their commitment to the program. Finally, barriers to participation and factors contributing and detracting from commitment were addressed. To protect the participants' identity each youth was given a pseudonym that is used in the reporting of the data.
Research Question 1: Motivational Factors Contributing to Joining

*Interviews and Focus Group*

The data from the interviews revealed two major themes for the reasons youth originally joined Adventure Central: adult encouragement and program opportunities. The focus group data supported the data from the interviews, and also exposed methods the adolescents in the program believed would attract adolescents to the program in the future.

**Adult Encouragement**

Five of the seven youth shared that an adult encouraged him or her to join the program. Dana, Henry, and Beth were encouraged to join because relatives believed they should attend. These youth indicated that a place for them to be was important to these family members. The family members believed the youth would be safe at the program and stay out of trouble. An Adventure Central leader recruited Gina and Carla. Carla said that she joined after talking to the leader because it was a way to get away from home.

**Program Opportunities**

Program opportunities were another draw to Adventure Central. Alex joined because of a specific program; he wanted to participate in Adventure Central’s summer camp. Eve joined the program for academic support. This youth shared that she needed a place to do homework and Adventure Central supplied that. Furthermore, the program offered homework assistance, and she joined the program because she wanted to improve her academics.
**Recruitment**

As a group, the youth were asked what other ways might encourage other youth to join Adventure Central. The youth currently attending believed that word of mouth was one way other youth may hear about the program and join. The other method of recruitment the adolescents suggested was peer recruitment. They believed more youth would join if Adventure Central youth were doing the recruiting.

**Survey**

Youth indicated multiple reasons for joining the Adventure Central program, which are summarized in Table 4.1. Four of the seven youth indicated that they attended because they like being at Adventure Central, there are fun things to do, they learn new things, and there is an opportunity for service projects. Both the presence of friends at Adventure Central and the lack of other options were given as reasons by three youth. Two youth chose parents and three items related to learning. The snacks and food and the tutoring had the lowest frequency; each item was selected only once.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons Adolescent Joined</th>
<th>Frequency^a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like it at Adventure Central</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun things to do</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn new things</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for Service Projects</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends are at Adventure Central</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing else to do</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents make me</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn Science and Nature</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-H/hands on learning</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers available</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snacks and Food</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^aResponse based on 7 youth. Youth were able to check more than one response.

Research Question 2: Factors Contributing to Continued Participation

*Interviews and Focus Group*

Several themes surfaced from the youths' discussion of their reasons for continuing to participate at Adventure Central. Eight themes emerged as reasons the adolescents stay in the program, which I classified as: (a) the environment of Adventure Central, (b) having fun, (c) a caring relationship with an adult, (d) homework assistance, (e) opportunities available at the program, (f) learning, friends, and (g) character development. The focus group provided confirmation of these themes, and provided further insight to the reasons why the youth believe they continued to participate at Adventure Central.

*Physical and Psychosocial Environment*

Five of the seven youth discussed some form of the environment as reasons why they continue to participate at Adventure Central. Characteristics
of the physical environment of Adventure Central and its psychosocial environment were important to the youth for their continued participation in the program. The important physical element of the program was that it recognized as a safe, quiet place. A sense of belonging contributed to the psychosocial element of the environment.

**Safe place.** Eve, Dana, and Carla discussed qualities of Adventure Central that I classified as the sub-theme safe place. Eve reported that Adventure Central provided the adolescents with an alternative place to be and people to be with. The alternative place than Adventure Central for these youth may be the streets. Dana perceived Adventure Central as something that will help them stay out of trouble. She stated, “It keeps us away from the streets. So you wouldn’t be caught up in anything.”

**Sense of belonging.** Henry, Eve, and Beth discussed some element of belonging as a reason they continue to participate in the program. Beth felt a family connection to the program because of other family members who were also participating at Adventure Central. Affection for the people at the program was perceived by Eve as a reason she continued to participate. Henry perceived a level of comfort at the program, and liked things at the program. This youth’s sense of belonging encouraged him to feel as part of the program. “We [people at the program] are important to the fun,” stated Henry. The fun he discussed was another theme of why adolescents stayed in the program.
Fun

Henry, Gina, and Carla cited “fun” as a reason why they stayed in the program. The contribution of the activity segment of the program was part of what made the program fun according to these youth. Activities such as going to the computer lab or playing kickball were important to the adolescents. The theme of fun was confirmed as important by the rest of the group during the focus group. Further discussion revealed that while fun was important to the program, the adolescents did not perceive it happening every day. Rather, they discussed it as something that was earned. The adolescents’ felt that fun happens at Adventure Central but only after the “work” is done. Work included homework, extra worksheets, or activities the youth did not perceive as fun.

Caring Relationship with an Adult

The adolescents at Adventure Central perceived the adults of the program as having a deep caring for the youth. In the focus group discussion Dana stated simply, “Oh, they love us.” The entire group agreed with this sentiment. In the interviews Alex, Beth, and Eve discussed the adults as reasons they stay in the program. The adults were perceived as “helpful,” “respectful,” and “nice,” according to the adolescents. However, in the focus group youth expressed varying feelings about the adults. The youth discussed that they thought sometimes the adults were “mean”, but not all of the time. Even if the youth did not particularly care for an adult one day, overall, the adolescents firmly believed the adults cared for and liked them.
Homework Assistance

The adolescents noted homework assistance as an important role of the adults at Adventure Central. Alex and Eve discussed the importance of homework assistance in the interviews. The adults helped with the homework and “make it understandable” was Alex’s perception. He discussed the difficulties he had understanding homework and how the adults had helped him. Eve viewed the adults as helpers towards the goal of improving her grades. She said that the adults helped her stay on task when she is doing her work. Besides homework assistance Adventure Central offers other opportunities cited as additional reasons why youth stay in the program.

Opportunities

Adventure Central offers opportunities that are available only to the older youth. Beth, Alex, and Dana discussed these opportunities in the interviews as reasons why they continued to participate. Beth and Alex discussed the teen assistant position for the summer program with anticipation. There were different reasons why the youth wanted to be a part of this program. Alex viewed the program as providing him the opportunity for a first job. He stated that being a teen assistant would be the “beginning of having my first job in my life.” Beth looked at the teen assistant position as a way to use her prior experience because she was good at helping younger siblings. Both youth perceived the position as a way to help others. Alex stated that he wanted to “help kids if they don’t understand things like I didn’t.” Overall, I
classified what the youth were describing as a sense of mattering gained from the program.

Another opportunity at Adventure Central discussed by Beth and Dana was the Youth Board. Based on their descriptions, this program provided the participating adolescents with another opportunity to gain a sense of mattering. In this program the Adventure Central adolescents work with adults to make important decisions. The youth board provides a philanthropy service, that is, the youth review proposals and make decisions about which other youth organizations will receive grant money from them. Beth described the Youth Board as “we give grants to different youth organizations. . . [and we] work with older kids and adults.” Dana stated the program made her feel like “not just a youth talking, but I feel like I’m an important business woman.” In the focus group discussion opportunities like the Youth Board and the teen assistant positions were confirmed as reasons why youth stay in the program.

Learning

Alex and Carla talked about the importance of learning to their continued participation in the program. Carla stated, “We learn stuff about nature.” The focus group discussion confirmed this theme.

Friends

Having friends at the program was another theme I classified as why youth continued to participate at Adventure Central. During the interviews Beth and Carla discussed friendships as a reason they stay in the program. Beth
discussed that her friends at the program “respected her” and that was important.

**Character Development**

Eve discussed how since attending the program she has increased in maturity. I classified maturity as a character development theme. Her character development was a reason she stayed in the program. She wanted to continue to work on improving herself, and perceived that her participation would help her accomplish that goal.

**Survey**

Factors contributing to continued participation were reported. Due to the small number of participants in the study, only the frequency of responses and their means were examined.

The mean scores of the belonging scale are summarized in Table 4.2. The mean scores form the scale were positive, ranging from 2.42 to 3, with 3 being the maximum score.

**Table 4.2**
Mean Scores and Item Frequencies for Belonging Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NO (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable at Adventure Central.</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I am a part of Adventure Central.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am committed to Adventure Central.</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am supported at Adventure Central.</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am accepted at Adventure Central.</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Scale</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mean scores for the youths' relationship with adults at Adventure Central are reported in Table 4.3. The mean scores form the scale were positive ranging from 1.57 to 2.82, with 3 being the maximum score.

Table 4.3
Mean Score and Item Frequencies of Relationship with an Adult

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>NO (0)</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>YES (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am with adults that care about me at Adventure Central.</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can tell the adults here at Adventure Central about my problems if I need to.</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust the staff here at Adventure Central.</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The adults at Adventure Central encourage me to do my best.</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults at Adventure Central care about me</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Scale</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Items related to mattering are reported in Table 4.4. The mean scores form the scale were positive, ranging from 2.14 to 2.71, with 3 being the maximum score.
Table 4.4
Mean Scores and Item Frequencies for Mattering Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NO (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>YES (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At A. C. I have learned it is OK to make mistakes</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get to explore my own interests at A.C.</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activities here at A.C. really get me interested.</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At A.C. I get to do activities that help me with my learning.</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been recognized for learning or achieving at A.C.</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Scale</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 3: Adolescents' Description of an Ideal After-School Program

*Interviews and Focus Group*

What adolescents want in an after-school program was discussed in general in the interviews. Themes emerged from the discussion that I classified as (a) the physical environment of the program, (b) having fun, (c) providing academic support, and (d) teaching life skills. The youth were very clear about what they wanted to see in an after-school program. In the focus group discussion the accuracy of these themes was confirmed. When asked if anything else was important, the youth felt that youth members’ opinions should be listened to because those thoughts are important to a good after-school program.

*Physical Environment*

I identified three sub-themes from the interviews with the adolescents about what kind of physical environment they want in a program. The youth
shared that the kind of space available, a safe place, and the basic supplies the environment would need were important. All seven youth shared some aspect of environment in the interviews.

**Space.** Henry, Carla, Beth, and Alex discussed the kind of space they would want in an after-school environment. Henry and Carla requested a large building (e.g., church or recreation center). This facility would include classrooms in its set up. The youth also believed an outdoor area was important. Beth and Alex suggested a park as part of the program space.

**Safe place.** Eve, Gina, and Dana discussed elements of a safe place. Gina believed her house would be a safe place to have an after-school program. Eve wanted a place that was free from violence to keep children safe. While Dana discussed that the program should be within a distance that youth can walk to. This was to promote accessibility to the youth in a community. All three of these suggestions addressed the safety of the youth attending a program.

**Basic supplies.** Five of the seven youth recognized basic supplies would be necessary to the environment they wanted to create. A most basic need of food was discussed. Carla, Alex, Gina, and Eve believed an after-school program should provide a snack. Alex stated, “Cause some people if they haven’t eaten since lunch at school, they will need a little snack.” The other youth shared the feeling that food was important to a program. Another basic supply Beth and Carla reported would be important to a program was
suitable furniture such as “tables and chairs.” All of these elements together established the physical environment theme.

**Academic Support**

All seven youth discussed some form of academic support for a program. On a basic level having school supplies was important to the youth. In addition to basic supplies discussed earlier, academic supplies such as pencils, paper, computers, and radios were all cited as needed supplies for the program. Henry and Alex discussed homework assistance as a needed element to an after-school program. Who would assist with homework was also addressed. Alex also suggested that utilizing teens to assist with homework tutoring is important. I had previously coded the teen assistant position as a way youth could believe they matter to a program. Beyond the actual doing of homework, Dana, Gina, and Carla felt academic support would encourage an outcome of success for the adolescents. Gina and Carla discussed shorter-term outcomes of academic improvement. Both believed the program would help them improve and succeed in their schooling. Dana believed strong academic support could help a youth even further in life. She stated that academic support at an after-school program was important,

And it really is important to have good grades now. So when you go to high school you can maintain those good grades. Only be better and go to college. So people can't say Dayton, Ohio where is that, I've never heard of that. Successful people will give us a good name.
Fun

After establishing the physical environment, the youth believed that a program they created must be fun. Six of the seven youth discussed some aspect of fun. Elaborating on the concept of the physical environment the youth gave reasons why having sufficient space was important to having fun at the program. Beth stated, “Kids like the outside, having fun, being free.” Henry added that there must be “room for kids to run around.” After the environment for fun is established, the youth recognized there must be activities. Areas the youth suggested for activities included athletics, recreation, academic games, and social events. Henry and Gina also talked about the kind of equipment the program may need to help establish a fun program. Sports equipment was important to these youth.

Life Skills

Eve and Beth discussed that teaching life skills is important to a program. Eve stated that a good program would teach the youth respect for themselves and others.

Patterns of Themes in Research Questions 1, 2, and 3

Table 4.5 displays major themes revealed in the previous discussion of research questions 1, 2, and 3. The table allows comparisons of the themes across the research questions. The academic support theme was reported across all three research questions. The physical environment, program opportunities, caring adult, and fun themes were represented in two of the three
research questions. Finally, learning, friends, character development, and life skills were represented in only one of the research questions.

Table 4.5
Patterns of themes from the interviews and focus group in Research Questions 1, 2, and 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>RQ 1: Joining</th>
<th>RQ 2: Continued Participation</th>
<th>RQ3: Ideal Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Environment</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosocial Environment</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Opportunities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring Adult</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Development</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Skills</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> - theme not mentioned by adolescents in interviews and focus group

Research Question 4: Perceived Barriers to Participation at Adventure Central

*Interviews and Focus Group*

The youth discussed several different kinds of barriers to a youth continuing to participate at Adventure Central. Three main themes emerged from the conversations both in the interviews and in the focus group: (a) the individual's program perception of the program was the first theme I classified (b) other activities the youth may chose instead of attending Adventure Central
was the next theme classified, and (c) personal responsibilities made up the third theme. Not all of the barriers were negative for development, and for some of the barriers the context of the situation would determine whether the barrier would be a negative or positive influence on a youth’s development.

**Individual's Program Perception**

An individual’s program perception was identified as a possible barrier to participation in the program. Dana, Henry, and Alex believed that other youth might not attend Adventure Central because they find the program boring. Carla and Gina believed that the discipline used at the program might be a barrier. They discussed that other members did not like it when the adults disciplined them and had left the program because of it. Eve suggested it was because the youth themselves “did not sit down and pay attention.” She went on to relate that the discipline at Adventure Central was similar to what she had at home. She followed the rules at home so it was not a problem to follow similar rules at Adventure Central, but some youth did not want the rules.

A third aspect of the program that might become a barrier to the participating youth was revealed in the focus group discussion. The homework assistance, which had been identified as a reason adolescents continued to attend Adventure Central, was brought into the discussion. The youth shared that if they did not have homework or had finished their schoolwork they were given additional work at the program. The additional work was perceived as busy work (e.g., reading a book and summarizing it). One youth talked about that it would be better if the assignments were in line with what they were doing
in school so the work would help them. Furthermore, the way they talked about it indicated that the assignments were not presented in a fun manner. One adolescent stated, “Sometimes it’s stressful because we have our homework from school then we get even more here.” This seemed to indicate that the adolescents felt the program was a continuation of their school day.

**Availability of Other Activities**

Other activities outside of Adventure Central were also perceived as potential barriers to continued participation to the program. These activities could become possible threats to youth development, or may be possible opportunities for youth development.

**Threats to development.** I classified many activities that were mentioned as unsupervised activities that, based on the literature, are considered threats to development (Miller, O’Connor, Sirignano, & Joshi, 1996; Steinberg, 1986). The youth discussed other activities they could be doing. Beth, Henry, and Carla talked about being at home watching TV or talking on the phone. Beth, Eve, and Gina also talked about hanging out with friends. Those same youth stated that they would be outside on the streets. The activities varied but included driving around, shopping, walking around, and getting into trouble. Beth talked about detention at school keeping her from coming to the program.

**Opportunities for development.** Dana, Gina, Henry, and Carla talked about supervised opportunities that might be a barrier to attending Adventure Central. Educational opportunities were available to Dana. She was going to
attend special classes at a college. Another barrier to the program was athletics. Dana, Gina, and Beth had school activities that had prevented them from attending the program and might potentially affect others in the future in the same way. These activities were at the same time as Adventure Central, so youth had to make choices. Gina also believed she might switch to another after-school program that served primarily older youth, instead of the mixed age group Adventure Central serves.

**Personal Responsibilities**

The third theme of other responsibilities could not be coded as either a positive or negative experience. The effect of the activity would depend on the context of the situation. Dana talked about family commitments as a barrier to her attending the program. Gina and Carla discussed finding jobs as barriers to their continued participation in the program.

**Research Question 5: Contributions and Detractions to Extent of Commitment**

*Interviews and Focus Group*

To describe the adolescent’s extent of commitment, first a definition of commitment had to be determined. A definition emerged from the youths’ statements. Adventure Central adolescents stated the following as elements of commitment to the program: commitment is a promise, spending time, belonging, attending, and staying dedicated to the program. Dana stated that commitment “is making a promise, and doing it even if you don’t want to,” and Carla reported that commitment was “being connected to everyone.” The
adolescents discussed what factors contributed to the extent of their commitment and what factors detracted from the extent of their commitment.

**Factors Contributing to Commitment**

In the interviews, youth discussed attendance at the program was discussed with the highest frequency by the youth as an important factor to commitment. Five of the seven youth perceived attendance playing a role in the extent of commitment a member makes to the program. Henry said “wanting to be here” was significant to a youth’s commitment. Carla, Eve, and Alex viewed outcomes from participating in the program affecting the extent of their commitment. Carla linked her commitment to the program to the sense of belonging she felt to Adventure Central. She reported that she was “very [committed to Adventure Central] because I’m connected to everybody here.” Eve noted her commitment to the program was because the homework assistance she received at the program had helped her improve her grades. She stated, “I’m committed to Adventure Central because I think that since I have been coming here my grades have been coming up, [and] that I should keep coming here because my grades keep coming up so I can succeed and try to get a scholarship to college.” Alex stated, “I have a commitment to Adventure Central for helping me [with academics].” In the focus group discussion, youth described a committed member as coming every day, getting along with people, being a leader, and joining in activities.
Factors Detracting from Commitment

Lack of attendance was discussed as a reason that may prevent commitment. This lack of attendance contributed to several areas. Dana reported that there might be other opportunities for a person somewhere else. Dana and Eve also reported that friends not at the program might be an influence to lack of commitment. The friends convince and influence members to do other “stuff” than attend the program. Henry cited boredom as another reason that could prevent commitment to Adventure Central. Henry, Beth, Alex, and Eve discussed the members' attitudes as deterrents to committing to the program. The youth may not want to be at the program, or the youth may not be doing the work or paying attention to the adults. In the focus group, a non-committed member was described as a person who may come, but does not participate in program activities. The non-committed member may also not attend regularly or behave appropriately when at the program.

Commitment Continuum

The youth were shown a line and asked to place themselves and the other members of the group on this commitment continuum. One end of the continuum represented no commitment (1) and the other represented high commitment (10). The adolescents’ scores for their own commitment ranged from 4.8 to 8.6, with a mean score of 6.8 out of a possible score of 10. Individually they scored their group from 4.5 to 8.4, with a mean of 5.9, again out of a possible score of 10. Appendix G shows the continuum with all of the individual scores. Alex, Henry, and Gina rated their personal commitment to
Adventure Central higher than the group as a whole. On the other hand, Beth, Dana, and Eve rated their personal commitment equal to the groups' commitment to the program. Finally, Carla rated her commitment as less than the rest of the groups to Adventure Central.

Survey

On the survey the adolescents were asked if they were committed to Adventure Central on a four-point scale. All youth indicated that they were committed to the program. Five ranked their commitment as a yes (coded as 2), and two rated their commitment as a YES (coded as 3). The mean of the responses was 2.29.

Summary of Results

Figure 4.1 represents the main themes the emerged from research questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. The magnet box represented research question 1. The hook column represented research question 2, and the wanted hooks represented research question 3. Barriers were represented by research question 4. Finally, glue and its possible deterrents were represented by research question 5.
Magnets
- Adult Encouragement
- Program Opportunities
  - Academic Support

Hooks
- Academic Support
- Adult Relationships
- Program Environment
- Fun
- Learning Friends

Glue
- High Attendance
- Sense of Belonging
- Future Success
- Leadership Participation

Deterrents
- Poor Attendance
- Other Opportunities
- Outside Influence
- Boredom
- Members' Attitudes

Wanted Hooks
- Academic Support
- Program Environment
- Fun
- Life Skills

Barriers
- Individual's Program Perception
- Threats to Development
- Opportunities to Development
- Personal Responsibilities

*Figure 4.1*
Research Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 applied to Magnets, Hooks and Glue. Adapted from (Lawson, Barkdull, & Anderson-Butcher, 2002).
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to capture adolescents’ perceptions of their membership experience at Adventure Central. First, themes that emerged from their reasons for joining and continuing to participate are discussed along with their descriptions of their ideal after-school program. The examination of the adolescents’ hypothetical ideal after-school program allowed comparisons to be made between the ideal and the program the youth were currently attending. Next, existing or potential barriers and how adolescents described the extent of their commitment are explored. How these themes correspond with different youth development models is considered. Finally, limitations of the study are reviewed, followed by suggestions for future research and practice, and conclusions of the study.

Research Question 1, 2, & 3: Themes of Joining and Participation

Factors that influenced why youth join a program were also similar to why they continued to participate in a program. Why youth join and participate in a program is not a dichotomous decision but rather a process of experiences. By examining participation models it has become apparent that while joining and participating is a sequential process, it is also a dynamic process (Lock &
Costello, 2001). Due to this dynamic process, it is beneficial to examine the themes that emerged from first three research questions together. Analysis of the data presented in Table 4.5 revealed that common themes are occurring in why youth join and continue to participate at Adventure Central.

Another model to describe participation experiences is hook, magnets and glue (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson et al, in press). Later in this chapter a figure is provided that displays the representation of themes that emerged from the research questions in relation to the concepts of hooks, magnets, glue, barriers, and deterrents to commitment. By presenting the data in this manner, this model will allow all five research questions to be examined together.

From the study's data important themes emerged such as the environment (physical and psychosocial), program opportunities, caring adult, academic support, fun, friends, learning, character development, and life skills. Each one of these themes or sub-themes played a role in why at least one of the seven youth joined, continued to participate, as well as describing what is wanted in the program by the seven youth.

Youth indicated a variety of reasons why they joined Adventure Central. Survey responses with the greatest frequency indicated that fun and learning were important. The youth liked being at Adventure Central, they thought there were fun things to do, they learned new things, and they had an opportunity for service projects. Lower frequency items included parents made them and the availability of tutoring. While the original question asked why they joined
Adventure Central, some of the available responses referred more to why they continued to participate in the program.

**Adults: Providing Encouragement and Caring Relationships**

In the interviews a major theme emerged from the analysis: an adult had encouraged them to join the program. Five of the seven youth discussed how an adult (either a family member or a staff member at Adventure Central) encouraged them to join Adventure Central. This differs from the survey information, where only two youth responded that parents had encouraged them to join. This response rate most likely differs from the survey responses because of the different wording of the questions. The survey specifically asked if parents were a reason the youth joined, while the interview question just stated, “Why did you join Adventure Central?” In their own words, the youth described parents, grandparents, and Adventure Central staff members as people who encouraged them to join the program. Thus, the overall theme of adult encouragement to join Adventure Central emerged. In the literature of other youth development programs, adult encouragement, particularly that of parents, was noted as a reason youth joined programs (Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Ferrari, in press; Lock & Costello, 2001). The current research extends these findings by indicating that other adults may be an important source of encouragement. However the findings, may be situation specific because other studies did not indicate that parents played a major role in attendance (Gambone & Arbreton, 1997).
Additionally, adults played a role in why youth also continued to participate. High mean scores on the adult relationship scale revealed that caring relationships were present between Adventure Central adults and youth. The interview data further supported that a caring relationship with the adults at the program was important to the youth. In the interviews, three of the seven youth reported that the adults were a reason they continued to participate in the program. The ongoing and supportive experiences the youth shared with an adult after joining the program, such as assisting with homework, would be instrumental in forming a relationship. Furthermore, in the focus group all seven youth agreed that the adults at the program cared for them.

Research supports that adult relationships with youth are associated with very positive outcomes if the quality of these relationships is high. Duration of the relationship and some structured activities seems to be key factors that enable youth to get the most benefit from the experience (Gambone & Arbreton, 1997; Herrera, Sipe, McClanhan, Arbreton, & Pepper, 2000; Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002; Paisley, 2002; Sipe, 2000; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). One of the structured activities discussed in the literature is academic assistance. Mentoring studies have shown that adult relationships with youth are related to more positive academic behaviors (Sipe, 2000). Therefore, it is not surprising that the academic assistance provided at Adventure Central was an additional theme related to joining and continued participation.
**Academic Assistance**

One youth stated that the reason she joined Adventure Central was for homework assistance. The theme of academic assistance continued to emerge as important to the youth as they discussed why they continued to participate in the program and what they wanted in an after-school program. Homework assistance from the adults at Adventure Central was reported by two youth as reasons they continued to participate at the program. The homework sessions at the program had helped the youth improve their academic performance at school.

When asked to describe their ideal youth development program, all seven youth reported some sort of academic support as a necessary part. The youth reported a need for school supplies and homework support. Possible outcomes of academic support were also reported. Some of the youth discussed how academic supports in an after-school program could one day lead to attending college and being a successful person. For these particular youth academic support was important to them in an after-school program.

The research concerning schools and outside activities varies. One study examined a specific academic support program within a larger youth development program and found that youth participating in this specific program were doing better in school (Savage, 1999). Other research claims that adolescents do better academically by just participating in an extracurricular activity (Gerber, 1996). Overall, it was clear that academic support at Adventure Central was an important part of the program to the youth. It is suggested by
Magdol (1994) that poor grades in school and a low socioeconomic status are reasons for potentially dropping out of school. If this is true, academic support for these youth would be very important.

**Environment**

Characteristics of the environment -- both psychosocial and physical -- were reported as reasons the adolescents participated at Adventure Central and what they wanted in general in an after-school program. For the psychosocial environment, a sense of belonging was important to the youth. Important physical elements of the environment included a safe place, adequate space, and basic supplies the program would need.

**Psychosocial environment.** Data from all sources indicated that youth experienced a sense of belonging in the Adventure Central environment. The high mean scores on the belonging scale provided one indication. In addition, in the interviews three of the seven youth discussed some aspect of belonging as reasons they continued to participate at Adventure Central. Previous research has suggested that youth development organizations need to develop a sense of belonging to encourage youths' continued participation in programs (Anderson-Butcher & Fink, in press; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Gambone & Arbreton, 1997; Osterman, 2000). For example, Anderson-Butcher & Fink (2001, p. 22) found that enhanced belonging leads to positive outcomes in youth and suggested that programs need to develop more “strategic interventions” utilizing belonging to recruit and retain adolescents in youth development programs.
**Physical environment.** Three of the seven youth discussed aspects of Adventure Central's physical environment as a reason they continue to participate at the program. The important aspect of the program was that it was a safe place. Adventure Central was an alternative to the streets for these youth. Other literature acknowledges the importance of a program's environment being safe for youth to want to attend (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Gambone & Arbereton, 1997). Furthermore, research suggests that unsupervised youth who are hanging out in unstructured settings may be placed at greater risk (Steinberg, 1986).

In addition, the importance of the physical environment was reported as necessary in an ideal program. Three sub-themes of the environment emerged from the interview and focus group data. The youth reported they wanted a large space to house the program. They also wanted the environment to be a safe place. The youth also reported that basic supplies would be needed for an ideal program such as food and suitable furniture. The adolescents were very specific about what they would want in their environment. This points out the importance of soliciting adolescents' input into programming.

**Program Opportunities**

Program opportunities were another theme that emerged from the data as a reason youth joined and continued to participate at Adventure Central. Academic support discussed earlier was one program opportunity that encouraged one youth to join the program. Attending Adventure Central's summer camp was another opportunity that brought another youth to the
program. This opportunity developed into a reason that the youth also continues to participate at Adventure Central. After participating as a camper at the summer camp last year, this youth was anticipating the opportunity to expand the experience by being a teen assistant in the upcoming summer. This opportunity was viewed by the youth as a chance at “having a first job” and to “help kids if they don’t understand things like I didn’t.” Another youth described participating on the Youth Board as an opportunity to “feel like a businesswoman.” These opportunities appear to foster a sense of what Eccles and Gootman (2002) have described as mattering. The youth have an opportunity to have a say in their community. The survey information supplements the statements with the mattering scale. The mean of the scale items was high, indicating an elevated sense of mattering in the adolescents.

Fun

Fun was another theme that emerged from the data as a reason youth participated at Adventure Central, and what is needed in an ideal program. Three of the seven youth cited fun as a reason they continued to participate. When probed regarding what they thought fun meant, each youth listed different activities at the program. Arts and crafts, social games, and recreational sport games all were reported as activities the youth believed were fun.

Exploring the theme of what youth find fun and how fun can be embedded in youth development programming seems to be a necessary step for future programming. When describing an ideal program, six of the seven youth reported fun as important to their ideal program. Similar to the activities they
reported as reasons they continued to participate, the youth described athletic, social, and educational games as ways to have fun. For each person different things are fun. As all people are different, a variety of activities are needed to maintain youths’ interest (Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996).

**Friends**

Two youth reported the friends they have made at Adventure Central were the reason they continued to participate in the program. Similar research revealed that peers and friends play a role in the kind of activities youth choose or choose not to participate in (Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Ferrari, in press; Gambone & Arbreton, 1997, Lock & Costello, 2001).

**Learning**

Another theme that emerged from the interview data was learning as a reason youth continued to participate at Adventure Central. Specific lessons regarding nature were discussed. Learning as a whole is a key concept in several different youth development models, such as the 4-H eight critical elements (National 4-H Impact Study, 2001) and Public/Private Venture’s “critical organizational features and program practices” (Gambone & Arbereton, 1997).

**Life Skills**

The theme of life skills emerged from the comments of two youth as important program element in an after-school program. One youth discussed life skills in general, while the other stated that learning respect for others was important. Though the specific name changes, life skills were cited in much of the youth development literature as a basic element of a youth development
program. Leadership, community service, and skill building are examples of teaching life skills in a youth development setting (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Gambone & Arbereton, 1997).

**Character Development**

Character development emerged as a theme in the study, with one youth discussing how the program had helped her become more mature. The youth did not specify what about the program helped her accomplish this maturity, but did report that she stayed in the program because of the development.

Overall themes of academic support, adult interaction, the environment of the program, and fun were reported in at least two of the research questions. These ideas should be important in program design at Adventure Central, but also could be considered for other after-school programs for teens. Similar themes have been reported in other research. McLaughlin's (2000) study reported that academic support, adult relationships, having fun, program opportunities, program environment, and life skills were all important to effective youth development programs.

**Research Question 4: Perceived Barriers to Participation at Adventure Central**

Many of the barriers to participation identified in the literature are considered structural in nature, including the cost of the program, transportation, and hours of service (Hobbs, 1999). In the case of Adventure Central these structural barriers have been addressed. For example, the program is available free of charge and transportation is provided. The themes that emerged from the
interviews and focus group related to barriers that were problems with the youth's perception of the program and competition from other opportunities or responsibilities.

**Individual's Program Perception**

Some of the youth reported that a barrier to the program was that it was sometimes "boring." Similarly, Hobbs (1999) addressed that low program quality was a barrier to participation in a youth development program. The program discipline was also reported as a barrier to some of the youth. Two of the adolescents interviewed spoke of a former member of Adventure Central, who had left the program due to the discipline. This is an example of an interpersonal barrier (Lock & Costello, 2001); the youth who left most likely felt the benefits of the program were not worth tolerating the discipline.

Another barrier discussed in the focus group concerned the academic portion of the programming at Adventure Central. While the youth believed that academic support is important to the program, there were also problems with it. The barrier concerned extra assignments the youth received at Adventure Central. The youth were of two opinions on the extra work. Overall the work was considered stressful. Some of the youth considered the work a continuation of their school day, while other youth would not mind the work as much if it helped them in their schoolwork. In either case, when the youth perceived the extra work as not helpful (either not interesting or not connected to school), they viewed it as busy work. Some research has suggested that academics in an after-school program were beneficial (Savage, 1999). Other authors have
questioned the need for a continuation of the school day (Heckman & Sanger, 2001; Miller, 2001). Rather, the research suggested that structured learning activities that are embedded in fun, interesting to the youth are more beneficial (Heckman & Sanger, 2001; Alexander, 2000). The manner in which the activities are conducted appears crucial.

**Availability of Other Activities**

Another barrier theme that emerged from the data was other activities. The overall theme was that competition from other activities might prevent youth from future participation at Adventure Central. The different activities were, for the most part, either a threat to development or an opportunity for development. The activities that could be threats were unsupervised and unstructured. The literature supported that such activities can undermine positive youth development (Miller, O’Connor, Sirignano, & Joshi, 1996; Steinberg, 1986).

Competition with Adventure Central was also identified in personal responsibilities such as family commitments and jobs. Without the context of the situation for these barriers, it is not possible to determine if they are opportunities or threats to development. For example, youth employment has been studied with conflicting results. Some research supports it as a necessary part of healthy development (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1994; Skorikov & Vondracek, 1997), while other research qualifies the benefits of youth employment by the quality of the job (Mortimer & Shanahan, 1994).
Research Question 5: Contributions and Detractions to Extent of Commitment

Overall, this research revealed that the youth at Adventure Central perceived themselves as committed to the program. Youth rated their commitment as high, both when asked on the survey and in the interviews. Adventure Central adolescents stated the following as elements of commitment to the program: making a promise, spending time, belonging, attending, and staying dedicated to the program. The youth viewed attendance, participation, a sense of belonging to the program, and a sense of duty to contribute back to the program as contributing factors to their commitment. These contributing factors to the extent of commitment were similar to some of the “antecedents to commitment” recognized in Schilling’s (2001, p. 359) study.

As for deterrents to commitment, many of the same ideas for barriers to participation were reported by the youth. The other common deterrents were the opposite actions of what the youth described commitment as, such as not attending the program or not participating fully while there. This differed from Schilling’s (2001) study, where lack of enjoyment and burnout were reported as barriers. This could be due to the different lengths of participation of the youth in the two studies. For the current study, the maximum length of participation was less than two years, while in Schilling’s (2001) study the youth had been in the program for at least four years. This supports the idea that participation is a dynamic process.
Youth Development Models

4-H Youth Development’s programming is based on eight critical elements. Adventure Central is a 4-H program and its programming reflects these critical elements. As well, these elements were reflected in the different themes that emerged from the youths’ responses. One theme that emerged from the study that is not reflected in the critical elements is fun. The lack of including fun in programming might help explain why youth have left youth development programs. While there might be other pulls, if the youth were not enjoying themselves in a program or having fun they may “vote with their feet” and leave (Quinn, 1999). Youth development programs need to walk the line of providing structured activities that assist positive outcomes and also provide the youth with what they want. If the critical elements are used properly, youth having fun should be an outcome of self-determination and engagement, but this can only happen if youth development programmers listen to what youth want.

The model of magnets, hooks, and glue (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, et al., in press) was another way to examine the data. Table 5.1 describes the magnets, hooks, glue, barriers, and deterrents to commitment identified in this study. In a dynamic process, the youths’ experiences at Adventure Central enabled them to identify the supports they were receiving. They also formed connections within the program that drew them back and committed them to Adventure Central. The themes of glue that emerged included a sense of belonging to the program as a reason the youth was there. The youth also
viewed their commitment to Adventure Central as a promise or dedication. Another aspect of the glue is then supporting the program no matter what.
Wanted Hooks

Academic Support
Program
Environment
Fun
Life Skills

Glue

High Attendance
Sense of Belonging
Future Success
Leadership
Participation

Barriers

Individual’s Program Perception
Threats to Development
Opportunities to Development
Personal Responsibilities

Deterrents

Poor Attendance
Other Opportunities
Outside Influence
Boredom
Members’ Attitudes

Magnets

Adult Encouragement
Program Opportunities
• Academic Support

Hooks

Academic Support
Adult Relationships
Program Environment
Fun
Learning Friends

Research Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 applied to Magnets, Hooks and Glue Adapted from (Lawson, Barkdoll, & Anderson-Butcher, 2002).
Limitations of the Study

Several limitations for this study were identified in Chapter 1 that affect how the results of this study should be interpreted. This study focused solely on the adolescents in the program, which limited the sample size. Further limiting the sample size was the decision to include only those adolescents in Group 5 and those for whom survey data were available. Due to the small size of the sample the quantitative data were used only as descriptive data. Instead, interviews and a focus group were used as the primary data collection method. This provided the study with the richness of information needed to describe the members' experiences at Adventure Central (Patton, 1990).

To assure that the results were more credible, multiple methods of triangulation were used to design the study. By utilizing the survey, interview, and focus group data a more complete perception of the participants' beliefs was obtained. In addition, the interviews and focus group allowed the collection of a richer set of participants' thoughts and feelings as data.

Another recognized limitation was that this study was just one point in time at the program. Additional collection points, in a longitudinal study, would help this limitation in future research.

The lapse of time between the data collection points is another limitation. There was a possibility in a turnover of participants between the start of the study and the last data collection date. The experiences and increase age of the youth may have changed the youths' views from November to May. Collection points closer together would relieve this limitation.
Another limitation was that the survey did not include a mattering scale. While it was possible to create the mattering scale from available survey items, from the outset a mattering scale could be included in a survey to further examine the concept of mattering.

**Implications**

Several implications have been noted for future research and practice.

**Implications for Future Research**

Multiple methods research is highly recommend in future study. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research provides rich descriptive data. A continuation of this study is also recommended. This would enable a description of changes in the members’ experiences as they continue in the program. Other future research should include a comparison group from another youth development program. This would allow comparisons to be made between youth in different programs. To further examine barriers to the program, a study of former Adventure Central adolescents would be beneficial. Comparisons between the current participants and former participants could be made. It would also provide a researcher with the opportunity to identify definitive barriers to participation in the program. Future questionnaires should be altered to differentiate reasons adolescents join Adventure Central and why they continue to participate. This study also suggests that it might be important to differentiate between variables of belonging and commitment. In addition as suggested by Astroth (1996), future research, that compares two programs should include variables that account for program quality such as quality of adult relationships.
and program experiences. In general, reasons youth are motivated to join, participate, and commitment to 4-H programs should be farther researched.

**Implications for Future Practice**

Through the data collected via interviews and focus group, it became apparent that the adolescents at Adventure Central should have more say in their programming. This might help with the barrier of boredom, or encourage a sense of mattering in the adolescents. It appears that the youth need to have a higher sense of ownership of the program. Gaining adolescents input on future programming is highly recommended for adolescent groups. It is particularly important to attend to such issues because participation in youth organizations tends to drop off in early adolescence (Quinn, 1999).

Fun needs to play a bigger role in the programming for adolescents. While structured activities and adult relationships with youth are important, if the adolescents are not having fun during some of the activities they will find some place else to be. For positive youth development to occur sufficient duration is needed – caring relationships, belonging, and commitment develop over time. Thus, programming needs to capture the interests of its participants so they will continue to participate and experience these benefits. McLaughlin (2000) made similar recommendations that fun is important to a youth development program was made by other researchers. Making the academic portion of the program more in line with youths' interests is also recommended (Alexander, 2000). Quinn (1995, p. 290) suggested that programs “tailor content and process to needs and interests of young adolescents.” Making a connection to the school
day (not the duplication of it), to ensure that the academic activities are congruent, would be one way to help the youth feel they are not doing busy work (Quinn, 1999). By capitalizing on youth interests academic lessons can be embedded in learning activities. Youth can learn much more from activities that stimulate their minds versus handouts that only ask for repetitive information.

In my future professional work listening to what the youth want in a program will be a priority. Making the connections to why they joined in the first place and what experiences are keeping them in the program will also be important. I will try to help youth establish programs that meet their wants and needs. By doing all this I hope to create a sense of commitment in the youth to the programs they participate in.

Conclusion

Overall, there were many reasons why adolescents joined, continued to participate, and had a sense of commitment to Adventure Central. These youth had a sense of belonging to the program, were receiving the academic support they wanted and needed, and were having fun. They also had developed relationships with adults and a sense of mattering from their participation in the program. Overall, the youth perceived themselves to have a high sense of commitment to the program. There were also several potential reasons adolescents may choose to leave the program. One way to address these barriers is to utilize the youths’ thoughts and ideas in designing programming. Listening and implementing ideas of youth gives them a sense of ownership and belonging to the program. If they feel they are a needed part of the program they
are less likely to leave. In comparison to the 4-H eight critical elements, youth at Adventure Central perceived themselves to be in a positive youth development environment.

Adventure Central staff and other youth development leaders should utilize the information revealed in this study to strengthen their programs. Listening to what the youth are saying and what they want may provide insight in how to retain their membership. Fun activities including academics stimulates learning and encourages growth in the youth. If these elements are not part of a program youth may chose not to participate. A youth development program can only be successful when it is reaching its audience.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Individual Interviews

A. Introduction Script

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Your input will help make Adventure Central be the best it can be. Please answer the questions to the best of your knowledge. You do not have to answer any question you are not comfortable with, and we can stop at any time. Remember all of your answers will be confidential, and there are no right or wrong answers. We just want to know what you think and feel. Do you have any questions? Great, let's begin.

B. Interview Questions

1. You have a friend who is thinking about joining Adventure Central.
   a. How would you describe the program?
   b. What would they need to know before they come to the program?

2. Why did you start coming to Adventure Central?

3. Why do you keep coming back?

4. Do you plan on attending Adventure Central in the future? Why

5. Why do you think some people your age stop coming to Adventure Central?

6. To you what is the most important thing at Adventure Central?

7. I'm interested in looking at the idea of commitment. What does commitment mean to you?* Do you or your friends use different words to talk about that?
*If they don't know what commitment is give this definition: Some people would say commitment is being obligated or emotionally connected to something.

8. How committed are you to Adventure Central? What makes you say that?

9. If we drew a line with one end standing for no commitment and one end standing for full commitment, where would most of the teens in Adventure Central be? Where would you be?

(Draw an actual line and have them mark where they and most of the teens fit.)

10. What things might prevent you from becoming committed to Adventure Central?

11. You are given some money to design an after-school program for kids in your school. The program would help them become better people. You don’t have to use anything that Adventure Central does, but you can if you want to.
   a. Where would your program be? (university, school, YMCA, park, etc.)?
   b. What kinds of activities would your program include?
   c. What would you spend your money on?
   d. What would be the most important stuff that goes on in your program?

12. What activities, organizations are you in at school? Outside of school?
   a. Why did you join them?
   b. What do you do in them?
   c. Are they different than Adventure Central? If so in what ways?

   Note: If they are not involved in any other activities, ask them: From what you know about other clubs and programs, do you think Adventure Central is different? If so, in what ways?

13. Is your commitment to Adventure Central different than your commitment to other activities?

14. Have you heard of 4-H?
   a. What does 4-H mean to you?
   b. How does 4-H relate to Adventure Central?
15. If you weren’t at Adventure Central during the week, where would you be? What would you be doing?

16. What things may get in the way of your coming to Adventure Central?
Hello everyone, I'm Cassie Turner. I'm a student at Ohio State University. I have talked to all of you before during one of my previous visits to Adventure Central. I want to thank you for participation in this discussion. You're a very important group of people. What we discuss today will help improve Adventure Central for the older youth in the future. You are also helping me. What you say today will play an important role in helping me earn my degree. I have a variety of topics I would like to get your feedback on. Some of it is directly related to things we talked about in the interviews. Other items were mentioned in the interviews and I would like to explore them further. Your insights in the program are special and unique. By helping with this evaluation you are having a direct say in what works with the program and what doesn’t.

I want you all to know that your thoughts and feelings are very important. Please feel free to share your opinions even if they differ from what the others are saying. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions, and your individual responses will not be shared with anyone else. If you do not understand a question, please ask and I will clarify. Also remember everyone will have a turn to give his or her opinion. Keep in mind that we’re just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are the most helpful. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to, and you may leave at any time. Remember all of your responses will help make Adventure Central a better place for you.

Before we begin let me suggest some things that will make our discussion more productive. Please speak up, and only one person should talk at a time. We're tape recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. We'll be on a first name basis, and in our later reports there will not be any names attached to comments. You may be assured of confidentiality.
My role in this discussion is to guide the discussion and ask questions. Feel free to talk to each other about what you are thinking. What you think is the most important part of this activity. I'm really excited that you are here today, and very interested in what you have to say. Are there any questions before we start? Okay let's begin.....

(Adapted from Krueger, 1998)
Focus Group

1. When asked about why you joined Adventure Central the following were given as reasons for joining..... Are these accurate? What do you think are ways to get people your age to join Adventure Central? Are the ways listed the best?

2. In the interviews we talked about why you stayed in the program. The following were given as reasons..... Are these accurate? Is there anything else you want to add?

3. In the interviews academic support (homework time) was mentioned frequently. How important do you think this part of the program is? Have your ideas about homework changed since you started attending the program?

4. What is the adults’ role during homework time?

5. How can you have fun and include academics in Adventure Central? Help me understand how this happens.

6. Some of you said you come to Adventure Central because your friends are here. Is that an accurate statement? What about your friends being at Adventure Central makes you want to come to the program?

7. How do you feel about the adults at Adventure Central? How do you think they feel about you?

8. The activities you do at Adventure Central were mentioned in the interviews -- how are they important to the program?
9. Some of you mentioned that helping with the younger kids was important to you. When you get to be a teen assistant how does that make you feel?

10. What kinds of opportunities are available to you by attending Adventure Central? Are any of these opportunities available at other places or are they directly related to attending Adventure Central? Will the opportunities at Adventure Central help you as you get older? How?

11. Individually we discussed ..... as reasons why people have stopped coming to Adventure Central. Are there other reasons? If so, what? What do you think can help maintain membership?

12. The program is boring was a reason given as to why some youth leave Adventure Central. Why do you think people lose their interest in the program? What could help make Adventure Central not boring sometimes?

13. What makes you feel like a member at Adventure Central?

14. In the individual interviews commitment was described as....... Is this accurate? What would you add? What would you change?

15. How would you describe a committed Adventure Central member? What characteristics does he or she have?

16. Do you think someone could come to Adventure Central regularly but not be committed to the program? How would this be? How can you tell that some kids don't want to be at Adventure Central? Tell me what to look for.

17. In the individual interviews I asked you to design your own after-school program. Important characteristics of the programs were listed as...... Is this accurate? What else would be important?
APPENDIX D

SELECTED SURVEY QUESTIONS

Table D.1
Selected Survey Questions for Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why do you come to Adventure Central? -My friends are here; I like to be here; There are fun things to do; My parents make me; To learn new things; Science &amp; nature activities; For the snacks and food; Service projects-helping others; Tutoring and after-school help; 4-H activities/hands-on learning; To use computers; I don't have anything else to do; Adults here care about me; It's safe here; Other.</td>
<td>Ferrari, Paisley, &amp; Turner Created for study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table D.2
Scale Items for Belonging

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable at Adventure Central.</td>
<td>Anderson-Butcher &amp; Conroy, in press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I am a part of Adventure Central.</td>
<td>Anderson-Butcher &amp; Conroy, in press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am committed to Adventure Central.</td>
<td>Anderson-Butcher &amp; Conroy, in press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am supported at Adventure Central.</td>
<td>Anderson-Butcher &amp; Conroy, in press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am accepted at Adventure Central.</td>
<td>Anderson-Butcher &amp; Conroy, in press</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table D.3  
Scale Items for Mattering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At Adventure Central I have learned that it is OK to make mistakes.</td>
<td>Ohio 4-H critical element survey, (adapted), 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get to explore my own interests at Adventure Central.</td>
<td>National 4-H Impact Study, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activities here at Adventure Central really get me interested.</td>
<td>Gambone &amp; Arbreton, 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Adventure Central I get to do activities that help me with my learning.</td>
<td>Anderson-Butcher, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been recognized for learning or achieving at Adventure Central.</td>
<td>Ohio 4-H critical element survey, (adapted), 2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table D.4  
Scale Questions for Adult Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am with adults that care about me at Adventure Central.</td>
<td>Anderson-Butcher, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can tell the adults here at Adventure Central about my problems if I need to.</td>
<td>Rosenthal &amp; Vandell, 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust the staff here at Adventure Central.</td>
<td>Rosenthal &amp; Vandell, 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The adults at Adventure Central encourage me to do my best.</td>
<td>School Success Profile (adapted) (Bowen &amp; Richman, 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults at Adventure Central talk with me about the future</td>
<td>School Success Profile (adapted) (Bowen &amp; Richman, 1997)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

STUDY PERMISSION LETTERS

Phone (614) 292-9606
E-mail: tferrari@ag.ohio-state.edu

August 14, 2001

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I work for the Ohio State University Extension, 4-H Youth Development, conducting research on positive environments for children. More specifically, I will be looking at how Adventure Central provides your child with the eight critical elements of the 4-H experience, which have been shown to positively impact the development of youth. The results of this study may help determine if any changes are needed in Adventure Central programming. These results may not directly benefit your child today, but may benefit future participants in the program.

With the cooperation of the Adventure Central staff, I will give a survey to small groups of children during the program time. The survey will take approximately 40 minutes to complete. With your permission, your child will take the survey during this time. Whether your child participates or not will not affect their involvement with the program. The children will be asked to answer the survey questions, but they will not have to answer any question they do not wish to answer. Questions may ask about personal feelings, involvement at Adventure Central, possible risky behaviors (such as fighting, smoking, drinking), and school-related topics. You have the right to withdraw consent for your child's participation at any time without consequence. Your child will also be able to decide not to participate. Any child without permission to participate will be able to return to the program with the center staff.

Only my research assistants and I will be able to see the completed surveys. Your child will be asked to write his or her name on the survey; however, his or her identity will be kept confidential. We will replace their names with code numbers. Only information about the whole group will be used when we report
results. We may also interview some children after the survey so we can learn more about their time in the program.

For the benefit of the study, I would like permission to use your child’s academic records that are currently kept by Adventure Central. This is because improving academic behaviors is a goal of the program. I would also like permission to record the interview with a tape recorder. This is so we can know exactly what your child said and so we do not have to write down every word during the interview. Photographs of the program setting and activities may be shown at conferences and presentations for other people who work with after-school programs. Please complete the attached consent form to let me know that I have your permission. Please return the form to the staff at Adventure Central.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at (614) 292-9606 or the center director, Graham Cochran at (937) 268-1037. Questions or concerns about research participant’s rights may be directed to the Office of Research Risks Protection at (614) 688-4792. Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Theresa M. Ferrari
Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development and Assistant Professor
Consent for Participation

Study Title: Critical Elements and Impact of 4-H Youth Development Programs in Out-of-School Time
Study Number: 01B0134
Principal Researcher: Theresa M. Ferrari, Ph.D.

Consent to Participate:
I consent to my child's participation in research being conducted by Theresa Ferrari of the Ohio State University Extension, 4-H Youth Development, and her assistants and associates.

The researcher has explained the purpose of the study, the steps that will be followed, and the amount of time it will take. I understand the possible benefits of my child's participation.

I know that my child can choose not to participate without any consequence to him or her. Even if I agree for my child to participate, my child can decide not to take part in the study at any time, and there will be no consequence. My child will still be able to participate in the Adventure Central program.

In addition, I provide consent for the following (Please check all that you wish to give consent for):

_____ I consent to the use of audiotapes. I understand how the tapes will be used for the study.

_____ I consent to the use of information from my child's academic records that are maintained by the program, including grades, attendance, and conduct information.

_____ I consent to the use of photographs. I understand how the photographs will be used in the study.

I have had a chance to ask and get answers to my questions. I can contact Graham Cochran, Adventure Central Center Director, at 937-268-1037 or Theresa Ferrari at 614-292-9606. If I have questions about my child's rights as a research participant, I can call the Office of Research Risks Protection at 614-688-4792.

I have read this form or I have had it read to me. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.
Print the name of the child:

________________________________________

Date: _______________  Signed: ____________________________

To be completed when the study begins:

Date: _______________  Signed: ____________________________

(Written assent from child participant) (for youth ages 14-17)

Date: _______________  Check here it to indicate child has given verbal assent, for youth ages 5-13

Date: _______________  Signed: ____________________________

(researcher or assistant)
Assent Script

Hello everyone, my name is ____ (researcher) ____ and I work at The Ohio State University with 4-H Youth Development. Are any of you Buckeye fans? How many of you are involved with 4-H here at Adventure Central?

(Introduce any assisting researchers.) I came here today to see if you could help me with a project I am working on. I am interested in what kids your age gain from after-school programs and I am trying to learn from you. We want to help (center staff) make this the best place to be after-school.

The survey has some questions about school, the program (at Adventure Central) and your feelings about things at the program and school, and what you do when you’re not at the program. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. This survey is about you and your ideas, so your answers may be different from other kids in the program. That’s OK, you don’t have to have the same answers.

If there is any question or word you don’t understand or are confused about, just raise your hand and I (or an assistant) will come by and try to answer your question. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you don’t want to. No one else will know how you answered these questions. Whether you fill out the survey or not, you will still be able to be in the program. Please return the survey even if you choose to not fill it out. If you do not wish to participate, (center director/staff person) ____ will take you to another room.

This survey should take about 40 minutes. (Make appropriate changes if survey is to be read or administered in two sessions.) After you are finished with the survey, please place it in your envelope and seal it. I (or an assistant) will come around to collect the envelopes as you finish. Please remain in your seat when you are done.

If you want to take the survey raise your hand. (Pass out surveys)
First I want everyone to write your name on the first page and answer the other questions that are there.

Now let's do an example...

(At the end thank them for helping you, how their feedback is going to help you do a better job, etc.)
APPENDIX G

INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENT CONTINUUM

Low Commitment 5 High Commitment
REFERENCES


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Roth, J. (2000). What we know and what we need to know about youth development programs. *Evaluations of Youth Development Programs*. Symposium conducted at the biannual meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence, Chicago, IL.


