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ABSTRACT

SPORT, EXERCISE AND HEALTH SCIENCES

Doctor of Philosophy

TOWARDS THE MEASUREMENT OF SOCIAL SELF-ESTEEM  
IN THE ADVENTURE ENVIRONMENT

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This thesis has been completed as a requirement for a higher degree of the  
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Adventure facilitators 'at a common sense level' generally accept that participation in adventurous activities has the potential to result in personal growth (Hopkins and Putnam, 1993). In the absence of conclusive technically sound empirical support this acceptance has been largely based on anecdotal evidence. In light of this, Neill (1997) argues that it has become increasingly necessary for the adventure industry to justify its position, to move beyond idiosyncratic practice, and for it to be able to substantiate the value claims that it makes.

The main aim of this thesis was to develop a measure of social self-esteem that is contextually valid in the adventure environment, and as such provide a vehicle through which adventure practitioners and those involved in academic research can evaluate both the construction and outcomes of their facilitations. To achieve this four studies were undertaken.

In the initial study adventure practitioners, members of an Internet adventure research discussion group, and adventure participants were surveyed by questionnaire. Using inductive techniques (Scanlan, Stein and Ravizza, 1989), four higher order concepts were constructed that contextualised their representation of the term social. Contextualisation of the responses took place through definitions of the adventure environment, social development and the outcome orientations of the respondents. During the second study, factor analysis failed to recognize the four higher order concepts based on the responses of undergraduate students. Subsequently a two-factor model representing 'positive' and 'negative' aspects of social self-esteem was taken to explain the variance in the responses. Utilising confirmatory factor analysis techniques the two-factor model was confirmed as a 'reasonable' (MacCallum, Browne and Sugawara, 1996) representation of the derived Social Self Perception-1 questionnaire in study three, where construct validity and internal consistency were also confirmed. Field-testing of the final questionnaire in an adventure residential setting took place in study four where it was demonstrated to be sensitive to change and internally consistent.

Overall the thesis achieved its intended outcome in providing the adventure industry with a context specific measure of social self-esteem.